**IFSW Europe Poverty Watch Report 2022** 

THEMATIC FOCUS 2022:

* IFSW THEMATIC FOCUS 2022 will be a follow-up on the IMPACT OF COVID-19 on access to social services.
* EPSR Principle in Chapter III & Government Action on people facing poverty in time of crisis
* Climate changes, the impact on poverty and the Role of Social Workers in Advancing a New Eco-Social World

Birthe Povlsen , IFSW Europe Representative to EAPN

**Introduction**

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Europe is a European organization member of EAPN. The Federation represents Social Work Associations from 50 countries including all EU member countries.

IFSW has been involved in various pieces of research to look at the impact of Covid19 from a social work perspective:

• IFSW Europe was part of the project “Beyond the Pandemic: Exploring Social Work Ethics and Values as a Contribution to a New Eco-social World’.[[1]](#footnote-1) This project, undertaken between March and July 2022, is a follow-on from an earlier online survey on ethical challenges for social workers during Covid-19 conducted in May 2020. That survey showed social workers rethinking their values and ethics in a time of crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The rationale of this second phase of research was to review the learnings from two years of practice during the pandemic and consider its relevance to other global crises, particularly climate change, political conflict as well as various types of natural disasters.

* IFSW Europe focus in EPSR Principle about social protection and access to universal affordable, quality services and minimum income.

• IFSW Europe sent the EAPN Poverty Watch survey to members to collect information from social workers to do an impact assessment for EAPN on Covid-19, EU and national policies on people in poverty and vulnerability in Europe, as data for this report. 13 country members have replied – Austria, France, Malta, Denmark, Hungary, Spain, Turkey, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, Portugal, Italy, and Ireland.

The information in this report is a summary of what members have said in the Poverty Watch survey with specific examples. There is much more detailed information available in each report which it has not been possible to include. We also include information collected in different project which IFSW Europe was part off.

IFSW Europe has a focus on the role of social work and social care. Human rights and social justice are critical in any social workers thinking and actions. Social workers often advocate on behalf people requiring social protection and assistance and see first-hand the impact of Covid-19 on access to social services and people facing poverty and inequality. Social workers work in communities with people to find positive ways forward in the challenges they face in their lives. There are variations in the roles and statutory responsibilities but generally in Europe, the task of social workers is to identify and protect vulnerable children and adults and provide preventative, care and support services alongside health and other service providers (in public, private and charitable/non-governmental sectors) and to ensure effective co-ordination and joint working.

**IFSW Europe’s main messages are that:**

**Europe must move away from an incorrect focus on individual responsibility for poverty and rather, move to a focus on the structural issues that give rise to poverty in societies. As the EAPN says, ‘Poverty is the result of poor policy development and implementation, and the absence of the political will to address issues in an in-depth and long-term manner.’**

**Social work, traditionally a white and middle class profession, needs to put poverty back at the centre of our work and engagement with economically marginalized communities.**

**Provide more and better public services across all policy areas, particularly housing, rather than relying on the private sector to resolve the crises, such as, for example, the housing crisis.**

**The Russian invasion of the Ukraine has drastically changed the economic and social landscape across Europe because of the energy crisis and the serious rise in inflation it has generated which affects all in society, but particularly those in, or at risk of poverty. The only positive out of this catastrophic war is the possibility that attempts to reduce fossil fuel consumption will be expedited which will in the long run support the climate.**

**1. The Impact of COVID-19 on social services and government policy on people experiencing poverty.**

Holism – people and planet.

The importance of seeing people as whole beings – some participants commented that initially Covid-19 was primarily seen as creating a health care or medical emergency, and the social implications (isolation, unemployment, etc) were ignored or not prioritised. As this Nigerian social worker commented: Even those who were treated for Covid, they still couldn’t get the psycho-social support to give them a wholeness of wellness … and we were pained as social workers … we need social workers to give the completeness that is required. )

Holism – working with communities

There were frequent reflections about how the pandemic repositioned social work within local communities. Participants shared different ways they had harnessed their deep knowledge of communities and social infrastructures to respond to issues exacerbated by the emergency such as poverty, abuse, violence and addiction, alongside new forms of social distress and isolation. The impact of the pandemic made some social workers more aware of their dual identities as individuals within their own communities, who also practice as social workers.

The People’s Global Summit (2022) outlines a vision a new eco-social world, The values that lie at the heart of this vision are those social workers should be able to sign up to, as they resonate strongly with the stated values of the profession, including those based on practices of care, community, respect, equity and social justice.

However, the discussions in our social work webinars suggest that some of these values need re-stating, re-invigorating and extending in the context of eco-social thinking and action in social work. Building on the experience of the pandemic and looking to the future, it will be important to continue to contest the bureaucratic and controlling features of social work, strengthen the capacity of social workers their organizations to care, recognize and build interconnections between people and planet and extend the concept and practice of social justice - reemphasizing cultural and contributory justice and integrating ecological justice. This would entail committing to the value of eco-social justice, working on understanding what this means in theory and practice and changing attitudes and actions to live out this value in social work.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**1.1 . Is there a lack of adequate minimum income and social protection**

If you look at the responses from IFSW members, most report major problems with having a minimum income that can cover basic needs. This has become significantly worse due to inflation and rising prices.

“There are three main problems in Spain: There has only been a state minimum income for 2 years and it is complemented by minimum income from the autonomous communities. The amount is low to cover basic needs throughout the country, so it depends on the complementary nature of the benefits of the autonomous communities. Finally, the administrative process is long, complicated and not adjusted to reality (for example, they use income from the previous year without taking into account the changes that can happen in 1 year).

Another example are some pensions, which are extremely shameful when we talk about elderly people who has been working for years but without receiving a high salary and, for example, its pension supposes a total amount of 400€/month and with this quantity, they have to face the renting payment, gas, water, light and basic goods as it’s the most basic one: food”.

Although the state stipulates that all employees should have a minimum wage, this is not always adhered to and the national minimum wages are not always sufficient to allow employees basic necessities. With regards to social protection Malta has a strong welfare state but it is usually involves a lot of Red tape..

Most of the IFSW Europe respondents described difficulties for all groups of people receiving benefits to cope with the energy crisis and housing situations.

In Austria Grants that are provided for PEP are not meeting the rising living costs. Additional payments (most one - time only) are planned by the government. However, there are worries that people who are not employed or do not pay taxes (because their income is too low) will benefit less than families and the middle class.

And in Iceland people who are living on social benefits and people with low income are not making ends meet, the rent is getting higher, the payments for own house and food is getting higher because of the inflation rate

Some also described more specific problems.

In Ireland a social worker describe : “I work with older people and on state pension they can often struggle to meet all bills they have as well as having a good quality of life”.

Another state “I dont think income itself is the main issue, but the precarious nature of it. Housing and its cost, which are a direct result of irish government policy are significant. Housing situation in ireland is a major drive to anxiety, stress, mental health and is leading to irish children being traumatised and coming into care. "

In Hungary, the income divide is too large between the poor and the rich, and the latter have obtained their wealth through intensive government corruption. And in Switzerland, “There is no Unconditional Basis Income, which should be a reality in this rich country. Some categories of people are not protected enough, especially women, and spec. celibate womens, with and without children, jobless women and facing different discriminations, girls and young women, esp. from single parents, mental handicapped children and adults, female workers, (including social workers), women in general, working poor people.”

**1.2. Are there problems with low quality, precarious jobs, in-work poverty?**

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) states that adequate minimum wages shall be ensured, in a way that provide for the satisfaction of the needs of the worker and his/her family in the light of national economic and social conditions, while safeguarding access to employment and incentives to seek work. In-work poverty shall be prevented.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The risk of falling below the poverty line is greatest for families where no one has a job, but the rising number of low-paid jobs in the economy now means around half of all families in poverty have at least one person in employment. Part-time work and low hourly pay are both associated with an increased chance of living in poverty, while employment in a precarious job with little or no job security increases the risk of recurrent and persistent poverty.[[4]](#footnote-4)

These are some of the same responses, which we had in our survey, Poor wages, high cost of living. Zero hours contracts ; In France "The precariousness of employment contracts combined with the deregulation of work leads to an increase in involuntary part-time work (often for single women with children), wages below the basic income, and wages sometimes below the poverty line”.

In Austria, many people living on or below the line of poverty are in employment. Often earning their incomes by a poor paid job and social protection systems. Moreover there are many children who are living in families experiencing these consequences every day.

We also really see problems with particularly vulnerable groups such as undocumented refugees. In Sweden they have experiences that “there are also problems with work life balance, and the criminal abuse of people, especially those without residence visas. Another issue is the lack of rights due to lack of agreements and collective agreements.

In Switzerland for a few years now, low quality and precarious jobs have appeared, which was not the case before. There is no minimum income salary in the law and no protection against discriminations of any kind, nor equality in those jobs.

In Denmark, "There is a growing problem with precarious jobs the affected employees to a greater extent stand faced with unsafe working conditions in the form of loose employment such as zero hours contracts, fixed-term contracts, temporary positions, freelance jobs etc. "We also see an ever-growing group of employees who secures parts of their income base via the type of work tasks and which not on in the same way are covered by the rules and benefits that apply in the traditional Danish labor market covered by collective agreements.” [[5]](#footnote-5)

**1.3. Is there shrinking access to universal affordable, quality services (housing, health, education). Are there particular services that are more problematic.**

Public services in many countries have seen successive cuts in funding over the last ten years under austerity policies. This has increased with the pandemic, with no solution found to date. In the survey almost all countries highlighted Housing as the main problem.

“In Sweden there is a lack of housing almost all over the country and the apartments being built are very expensive”

Since the financial crash in 2008,across Europe, it is becoming more difficult to assess housing, this is worse for poorer people. There is a serious housing problem in Ireland that is affecting everyone but mostly the poor. There is a huge increase in homelessness. At one stage the Irish government was housing children and families in hotels.

"Housing: The social rental housing sector has essentially ceased to exist in Hungary, which makes it practically impossible for e.g. enforcement of the 'Housing First' principle for the homeless. Every winter, more and more people freeze in their cold homes.

In Spain, the public housing system (social rental) is very weak and does not cover all needs. In addition, there is no regulation that protects tenants.

There is a lack of Social housing when compared to high demand for Social housing in view of the rapid increase of the property market in Malta over the past few years.

In France " Despite the laws, many people do not have access to social housing, for which the waiting lists are still very long (sometimes up to 7 years). In addition, many dwellings are unhealthy and poorly insulated, generating very high energy costs that are totally incompatible with current environmental concerns.

There is a lack of affordable housing in Denmark, which together with saving on housing support within the social security system is a problem for people who get social benefits

The loss of trained staff to inform, guide and support people's requests and procedures. . A number of reception and information centres have been closed.

The dematerialization of access to rights increases the number of people who do not use them and discourages people and professionals.

Another serious problem is access to health system.

Although health services are free, in Denmark there is an inequality in access to health services among vulnerable citizens. There is a lack of quality and access within psychiatry. This is similar in Ireland.

The health system (especially for children and youth) is not capable of meeting the demands. In many countries, services that should be affordable for all due to social insurance have waiting lists that exclude people, who can't afford to pay privately for health services.

**1.4. Remote areas where public services are diminished.**

In many countries there are challenges to have the same services as in the cities. In Sweden many municipalities in the countryside see that the younger population move leaving a mostly elderly population. These municipalities have difficulties offering all public services. Poor suburbs also suffer from lack of access to public and private services. A development which is known in all the European countries.

There is a significant drop in the number of health practitioners, leading to a decrease in health care facilities and the need to travel many kilometers (sometimes more than 80km) to access care.

Child and Youth Welfare services (provided by Austrian provinces) are breaking down in nearly all provinces because of a lack of qualified personal and infrastructure for the beneficiaries - most of it being the outcome of structural problems and low investments in previous decades.

In Spain there are a large number of municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants and there is a major problem of depopulation which is the cause and effect of the low level of public and private services. Equal minimum care should be guaranteed for all citizens regardless of where they live.

In Turkey accessibility problems of public services throughout the country continue. Problems and discrimination in access to public services are common, especially in rural areas and provinces where Kurds live heavily.

In a long and diverse country as Norway there are some issues regarding universal and similar services in smaller rural areas compared to cities. Some of the smaller areas have problems with recruiting competent health- and social workers.

**1.5. Are there discriminations faced by PEP (People Experiencing Poverty) in accessing goods and services, disaggregated by gender, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic identity, religion, disability, age, housing status, migration status and nationality when data are available.**

In many countries there are problems with discriminations in many different ways.

Poor people are always more at risk when it comes to discriminations. Sweden has a strong anti-discrimination law, but the authority auditing it is weak. The labour market is not accessible for people with disabilities in the same way as people without disabilities. The attitudes towards Muslims have grown more negative there.

"In Spain It's related to jobs. Immigrants have more precarious works than nationals and they're paid less. Most of them don't have a contract nor a Social Security insurance. Women have more precarious jobs and they gain less than men for working the same hours and doing the same or more. I match this point with the previous ones.

Discrimination against the elderly is on the rise. Violence based on gender inequality and discrimination and hate crimes against LGBTI people are very common. The discriminatory and exclusionary discourses, reaching the level of racism, especially towards Syrian refugees, are increasing In Tyrkey.

The lack of access to housing seriously impacts PEP and older people can face ageism when trying to access private rented accommodation. In Ireland, this is particularly the case for refugees in direct provision and groups such as the indigeneous Travellers. Racism towards settled Travellers is common.

Malta has had a lot of immigration both legal and irregular leading to a lot of foreign workers not being able to access full employment rights and experiencing exploitation. The Covid -19 pandemic has also impacted employment for European citizens living on Malta leading them to experience poverty while still living on the island.

In Austria, there are groups of people, who do not meet the criteria for receiving minimum income or other transfers of the social welfare state. Most of these people have not been born in Austria and d also meet restrictions on the labour market which as well hinders the possibility to earn money for themselves. Many of those persons have children or are minors themselves.

In Hungary, the Orbán administration has already launched an attack against all of those listed in the question, then strengthened its own position rejecting these scapegoated minorities with a negative campaign and finally with parliamentary legislation.

In Denmark, "The special low benefits for immigrants and others who have not resided in the country within the last 8 years, as well as the special youth benefit, which is so low that it is very difficult to get a home and have what is necessary to live for particularly vulnerable young people , homeless and disabled people who are not entitled to a pension in Denmark. From the surveyed answers of 1200 social workers, just under 80 percent says that the low level of some services stands in the way of social work with citizens. A little more, just under 85 percent, answer that some low benefits push citizens into poverty.

Of the 1,200 social workers who answered the Danish Social Workers' Association's survey, just over 600 work in the employment field. Here, the social workers assess that three benefits in particular are problematic, namely the resource course benefit, the self-sufficiency and repatriation benefit and the education aid. A social worker writes:

""It is difficult to get already very vulnerable citizens to work with long-term goals when they have to put in a lot of effort every day to have enough money for ordinary expenses such as necessary medicine. When they can't save up for things they can look forward to. Citizens are not motivated by being poor and seeing that others live completely different lives than them. All mental excess and energy is used to survive from day to day.”

**1.6. Other more specific issues arising in your country?**

In Switzerland, there are more and more gaps between rich people and poor people, based on the social status, family background and sex, as this country has a sexist cultural basis. To give advantages to some categories of people and not to others, is also a very big issue in Switzerland. Utilising division between people to dominate them is a big problem too.

Inequalities are increasing more and more over the years in Spain.

In Turkey, poverty, unemployment and job insecurity are on the rise. Racist and discriminatory discourses against refugees and violence against healthcare workers are among the most important issues on the country's agenda.

In Ireland lack of staff retention and lack of public services a huge discrepancy between public and private services ,Lack of equality in access to health care services, lack of investments over the years in the area of disability, lack of support in helping working mothers remain in the workplace, extremely high child care costs, not enough childcare places

Cost of living, government policy emphasis on protecting multinational companies and their profits which create tax returns

See Draft of ESN report, especially regarding health and youth welfare system.

In Hungary, the illiberal Orbán administration does not recognize the principle of secularization and even equality, and specifically prevents clients from enforcing their rights.

"As a follow-up to the UN's sustainability goals (SDG no. 1) to reduce poverty, Statistics Denmark has developed a measure for relative poverty. The goal is a further development of the official poverty line, which was adopted in 2013 on the basis of the expert committee on poverty recommendations and later abolished by the Liberal government in 2015.

Although the onset of the corona crisis in 2020 led to large rounds of layoffs and more public welfare, the Danish social model has clearly shown its strength to be able to hold a hand under us all in times of crisis with a solid economic safety net, tripartite agreements - which held the hand under thousands of workplaces - and not least a decrease in the number of relatively poor people. Thus, the number of relatively poor people fell from approximately 250,100 in 2019 to 241,700 in 2020 – of which 56,500 are children. Historically, the level of the relative poverty line has been in fairly close agreement with calculated minimum budgets in order to be able to maintain a necessary but modest consumption. However, there are special circumstances that may have affected the minimum budget in 2020 (and also 2021).

In 2021, there were around 69,000 children living in households that were Economically Vulnerable (pdf) - an indicator included in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals on poverty reduction. This corresponds to a decrease of 31,000 compared to the previous year. Two factors in particular contributed to the decline. Firstly, the proportion of children living in households that have not been able to pay bills on time had fallen from 10.7 per cent. to 6.9 per cent. of children in total. Secondly, the proportion of children who live in households that cannot pay an unforeseen expense of DKK 10,000 fell from 25.2 per cent. to 19.4 per cent. Both factors can be linked to the temporary child allowance and the extraordinary payment of holiday funds that took place in the period leading up to the data collection. Together with modest decreases in the three other factors that make up the indicator for economically vulnerable, this leads to an overall decrease in the proportion of economically vulnerable children from 10.1 per cent. in 2020 to 7.0 per cent. in 2021.

The study is part of the joint European study Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, SILC, which is carried out in all EU member states and in, for example, Norway and Switzerland. The purpose is, among other things, to shed light on poverty and social exclusion.

When the Benefits Commission presented their results in June 21, it was repeatedly ""low income"" on the powerpoint. It sounds nicer. But even if they don't want to talk about poverty or the poverty line, it exists.

“As social workers, we see the dark side of society. Some of the darkest shadows are cast by precisely poverty. We meet the parents who apply for support for diapers, the children who stay home from class birthdays, and the young mentally ill man who opts out of medication. Knowing about the shadow sides obliges us to tell about what we see. It requires words. Poverty.” - so a social worker wrote."

"Examples on others issues from Ireland but could be from the most of the European countries:

There is a dearth of General Practitioner (GP) services with many GPs leaving the medical profession due to rising pressures in the system. As a result, there are open waiting lists, so much so that one family had to take three buses from their homeless accommodation to attend their GP, as there was no other local GP service.

The 2020 consistent poverty rate for children aged 0-17 years was 8%, equivalent to 96,000 children. This shows that the national child poverty target (to lift over 70,000 children out of consistent poverty) has not been achieved and a new national child poverty target, based on the consistent poverty measure, is being developed.

Regularly social workers must advocate and email/call daily for up to months to get a resolution of problems. It took one social worker 11 months to get a phone landline reinstated for an older service user. She has to write regularly to the Manager of some services to even get a response for the users of her service. It took a local authority 18 months to complete a maintenance list of six items.

Because of underfunding or poor management of budgets, social workers have to face clients each day, negotiating their way to a positive result, but the hours of repetitive administration to completion is exhausting.

Centralization of public services and providing services through private entities and NGOs has been a feature of developments in the past 20 years. There are now a large number of organizations involved in service provision. This has led to much duplication and in some cases NGOs either competing or being selective in how and who they provide services to. There is also much energy spent on debate between these agencies. It also means that those in poverty have to engage with a multitude of organizations and/or professionals.

**2. Actions taken by IFSW members**

**2.1. How can you react to the rising prizes for food, energy, etc.**

Many of the social workers associations around Europe is trying to influence the political agenda.

We can advocate that economic assistance need to be adjusted to the higher prices.

It is necessary to regulate the markets, the prices of the products rise disproportionately in parallel to the profits of the companies, thus only the people suffer the rise in prices due to the circumstances, the companies do not contribute but rather enrich themselves; the economy must be at the service of the common good and the general interest.

This is an increasing poverty, factor, making bigger the gaps between poor and rich people...

Once again, the politicians have an important role: for instance, in Portugal we don´t have water treatment for salty water and we have now a dry country all over and no way to water the fields! But we made many studies and spend a lot of money to make a new airport in Lisbon....and its not yet done!

If we don't start to produce our own resources and take profit from the natural ones, the situation will go worst and more unsustainable.

Ireland is the most food secure country in Europe, and we need to concentrate on renewable energy using Ireland's wind and wave technology.

Advocate local politicians to take this seriously.

Advocacy and professional associations only have the option to carry out social awareness and participation campaigns.

"It is our duty as a professional association to bring to the attention of public authorities the reality of the difficulties faced by the people we support”.

There is a great deal of insecurity with the arrival of new groups of people to the social services"

In Norway, the government gives households electricity support with a consumption of up to 5,000 kWh per month. If the spot price of electricity is over 70 øre per kWh ex VAT (87.50 øre per kWh incl VAT), the state will compensate for 80 per cent of this.

The trade union in Denmark constantly draws the attention of the government and parliament to the fact that the poor have massive problems with price increases and that action should be taken

I think it needs a wider cross border international solution to deal with multinational corporations.

People are struggling to keep up with daily expenditures. As social workers we have made efforts in increasing accessibility to food banks, subsidised housing and assisted living. Social workers in Malta also support the vulnerable in seeking better opportunities to improve their social standing.

"In open letters, the Hungarian Association of Social Workers (SZMME) drew the attention of the government and the general public to the difficult situation of social service providers, institutions, non-governmental organizations, foster parents, people with disabilities, homeless people and people living in extreme poverty, to the fact that due to the significant increase in energy prices, the provision of services to clients may be at a risk, that people living in poverty are particularly affected by this. It is a specifically Hungarian problem that until now the Hungarian government has used universal state prices for all, and at the cost of an astonishing amount of government communication costs, it has convinced the Hungarian population that we are independent of price changes of the world market and that the government is the master of the national situation. (While it is obvious that the government's statistical data releases are completely unreliable. The data release dimensions have been changed one after the other, and because of this the actual social movements - e.g. the rapid increase in poverty - cannot be detected with public data.)

In Hungary, social and child protection institutions do not have an independent budget to finance subsidies. In this circle of activities, the only activity that can provide real and immediate help is the acquisition, distribution and coordination of donations. In addition, where the maintainers use their own resources, they can provide debt management advice service. In the area of services, the needy can receive hot meal once a day (even with delivery) and life counseling free of charge.

**2.2. What do we need to secure a just transition**

The role of social workers as skilled experts in social protection and sustainable development refers to the need for social workers to be more visible as key workers in times of crisis and more generally. If they can adopt a more holistic worldview and set of practices, then they can identify, cultivate and make visible their vital role in working alongside citizens, other professionals and agencies for positive social change.[[6]](#footnote-6)

How can social workers put their expertise into practice, with others, to co-build an eco-social world?

There are several different responds to the questions.

We need to offer accessible eco-friendly alternatives for everyone. Ensure that those most vulnerable in society are protected as a priority. Efforts must be sustainable over the long term. Ensure that fossil fuel producing industries take the major share of responsibility for effectively dealing with the unfolding crisis. The emphasis on ‘individual responsibility’ takes the spotlight off those agencies that are most to blame.

One social worker stated- ‘For the users of my service, if an affordable, reasonable plan is in place that they can understand and that does not further negatively impact their lives, they will engage.’

Ensure that there is adequate and effective high quality skills training to reskill people for new work opportunities. The public should be educated about the effects of climate change.

Climate change has not had a great impact on poor people yet. This is something that needs to be researched.

A greater decision on the part of governments and the European Commission to intervene in the markets and regulate those strategic aspects. Creating public companies in strategic sectors (electricity, gasoline, banking services...) could be a counterpoint to private companies and their action without limits.

Currently Malta is prioritizing economic growth, this has limited the work that can be done to support the community into becoming more ecologically sustainable.

Provision of social services and basic income for all people in all states of the EU.

Creation of a central EU fund from which advocacy and professional organizations can receive financial and methodological support for their awareness-raising and campaigning activities. Furthermore, in the case of natural disasters or emergency situations, effective help can be provided to the people living there, through the local social care system, or even directly.

There are many things to consider. One of them is to make sure that people with less money won't get poorer because of green change. In Norway and globally that persons with higher income get the benefits from the green transition (for instance state subsidies for electric cars, but they are still more expensive than cars using petrol/diesel - such cars are much more expensive to use than electric cars).

The green transition requires that the trade unions constantly pays attention to ensuring that the poorest in society are not lost, both in terms of price development but also in terms of participation.

**2.3. How do you see the involvement of grass root level?** **In the words of social workers:-**

At grass roots level, it is the community leaders, the NGO’s who have the pulse of the people to drive this. A fully funded, reasonable timeline to fully engage the work is required. Political action including using peaceful protests is needed at the grass roots level, as well as encouraging people to join local environmental groups, such as those mentioned below.

Many social workers are worried about climate change but don't see how the social work that they do connects to sustainability.

People are tired and demobilized; The years of the covid-19 pandemic have generated fatigue and also a certain individualism. In Spain, the lack of support from the political opposition and its obstructionist attitude have helped create an individualistic discourse. It is necessary to change the discourse, improve the link between administrations and the population.

More political will and awareness from the authorities.

I think it´s very important that they are involved in the social intervention

In Spain It's living in worse conditions than previous years. We have to pay lots of taxes without good salaries. Those who are freelance, have to pay each year a bigger amount than the previous one without any state financing, nor taking into account the profits.

Support our clients and advocate with policy makers and the government to introduce schemes that are sustainable in the long term. As an association we can strive to involve service users across the various services to advocate for the changes needed.

Would be necessary, I feel that most people (no matter if workforce or those who receive social protection) are worn out and exhausted - and therefore are not capable of standing up for their own rights having not enough energy to do so.”

"In the Hungarian practice, the ""bottom-up initiative"" accepted by the government does not work. On paper, of course it does. There is no public list of the organizations with which the Hungarian government cooperates on specific issues. If there is one in some places, it can only be government-friendly NGO or a representative of the state-recognized and supported churches.

"Supporting people to express their realities and difficulties to politicians.

Develop group actions"

In Norway the younger generations are very involved in trying to change the politics. There has for instance been student and pupil strikes, and they are very often in media and debates about climate change.

It is important that the trade union gets both the members and the citizens they work with to get involved by providing access and offers to various opportunities for involvement.

**2.4. How can poor people or poor communities take a stand?**

Citizen involvement is about listening to the citizens, and the roles of the public actors are subsequently to design relevant efforts and initiatives. Involving citizens is about inviting citizens to get involved in the design and development of relevant efforts and initiatives - and getting involved is often the way to innovation, co-creation and satisfied citizens.

In Spain there is little organizational capacity of people in vulnerable situations. Many of the existing organizations speak on their behalf, but rarely involve them directly. A first step would be to incorporate these people into organizations to respond to the general situation and also to particular situations.

Difficult, as there are very different situations, ways of life, and people. The best would be to assure them all a social income, provided for every citizen.

If you give them the voice to speak and the time to make their own changes or participate in the social community action.

Community and social groups that engage people – using a community development approach. By creating support networks e.g. local cycling groups – that are in addition to appropriate resourcing of building cycle lanes by local government.

If we talk and help people to be more visible. If we abandon them, making them live apart from us, without treating them as humans, in dignified, fair and equal conditions, without providing them resources and tools as a way to helping them live their lives in their own way, what kind of society are we waiting to have and live in?

See projct "Sichtbar werden" from EAPN member "Armutskonferenz".

"A serious problem in Hungary is that the representation and advocacy of those living in poverty is very weak, and community development and empowerment have not spread. As an organization of social workers, we consider it important that we draw attention to the problems of clients living in extreme poverty, formulate professional proposals to improve their situation, therefore we regularly consult with the social workers in the sector, publish resolutions, announcements, contact state bodies, appear in the media, etc.

We are pleased to see that the essence of IFSW's professional assistance in Ukraine is also based on community social work. This is completely contradicted by the dominant Hungarian practice and government expectations, which prefer the function of social bureaucrat and social police instead of real social work.

I guess we can't expect that poor people/communities or persons that have many other issues to take a lead in the green transition. Maslow's hierarchy of needs sets some ground rules on what we need before we can act. But a good way to take a stand is to vocalize and demonstrate. Use the help from user and patient organizations.

In Denmark we have strong traditions for voluntary associations also among homeless and disabled people and other groups who are dependent on help from the public services. The organization are also part of regional and national state councils such as the disability and elderly council and the vulnerable council whose task is to advise the government and the parliament.

**3. Examples of promising practices. Do Government actions help? What’s missing?**

**3.1. What good/promising practices are there? What results? Any quotes from people involved Particularly people experiencing poverty? Any photos?**

When it comes to climate change we, as a trade union advocate for sustainability in tendering processes both for the work force and the environment. We have managed to get some wording in the central collective agreements about the SDG:s that has led to the start of a project group with representatives from trade unions and the employer association. In Sweden we also have international projects to support trade unions in other parts of the world to educate and work to prevent climate change. Climate change is an important issue for us as a trade union since there are no jobs on a dead planet.

There are good practices, for example in the field of homeless people (Barcelona, Lleida) where people in this situation are given greater prominence so that they can be supported to improve their situation. But, in general, there is a great assistance pressure and little space for experiences of empowerment of people.

Social help, special reinsertion income, programmes for young people and immigrants, anti-sexism laws, equality women-men law, anti-racist laws.

One of the good practices was the local social cabinet that attend every people in need. Every day and with no hour booked: people come and they have always a social worker to attend them.

Support of local agencies in providing financial support, access to social protection

There are community garden projects in areas as well as Men's Sheds which supports mental and physical well being

A drop-in centre in one city that is open to all has proved to be a very good model of practice.

If attitudes to Ukrainian refugees become universal it could make a big difference.

The various employment and housing schemes including co-ownership of Social.housing. Increased awareness through educational programmes and schemes for children coming from families low-income to benefit from programmes like breakfast clubs.

In Hungary, we know of programs aimed at the eradication of Roma settlements, which were more or less well thought out professionally, but the applicants live in another part of the country, and contrary to their plans, they did not find a local community organizer to undertake this task, so the promising project will come only on paper.

The Hungarian Association of Social Workers (SZMME) was previously an active member of the Hungarian Anti-Poverty Network for several years - as a member of the 3SZ (Hungarian Alliance of Social Professionals), which operated as part of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN).

We also participated in 4 EAPN conferences in Brussels, each time with 4-5 people living in poverty. Countless memorable phrases were associated with the names of the Hungarian participants. Such as these:

= ""Why is it that a GLORY above a certain social class level, and a SHAME below a certain social stratum to have many children?” (Ágnes Pletser)

= ""I'm poor if I can't give myself and others hope!"" (János Baranyecz)

= ""Poverty is not a shame, but a condition. Poverty is not the same as stupidity."" (Daniella Orobej)

- There are electrical appliances, but no electricity. There is, however, a card-based electric meter.

- There is a bathroom with a gas heater and running water, but it lacks gas.

- There is a yard with a large garden that can be cultivated. There are also garden tools. It is true that you have to buy the hoe first, because the iron teeth of time have taken the nail out of it.

- There is water, which the watermen took - with a narrower - to the faucet.

- There is an automatic washing machine, but since there is no electricity, you can wash the clothes in the washing tub by your hands.

- You can poop in the tub, although it is appropriate to carry the water out of the tub afterwards (!), because the digester is full...

- ... and you can collect wood from the neighborhood if someone wants to keep warm.

The PEP association in Iceland has made some initiative to support people experiencing poverty with community centre where people come together and now the latest effort is to provide children with meals after school. They are getting money from the authorities

**"Housing First”**

5,789 people in Denmark live on the streets, in hostels or spend the night on friends' sofas. Three years ago, the number was 6,431 people. Thus, the number of people living in homelessness has fallen by 10 percent in the past three years.

It is especially the number of street sleepers and young people in homelessness that has fallen. Because while 732 street sleepers were registered in 2019, the number has dropped to 535 street sleepers. Likewise, the number of 18-24-year-olds in homelessness has fallen from 1,023 people in 2019 to 744 people in 2022.

""In recent years, there has been a strategic focus on alleviating homelessness, and it is most likely the results of that work, which is reflected in the decreasing homelessness,""

If these citizens are to be helped out of homelessness, it requires both suitable housing and support for social problems. The municipalities are now well aware of this, and a significant reason why it has started to succeed in reducing homelessness is probably that more and more municipalities have adopted the 'Housing First' method, which precisely combines housing and support solution

It may well be possible to help street sleepers and other particularly vulnerable, homeless citizens to a different and better life. In project UDENFOR, they have done this for many years.

Based on the street sleepers' own wishes for where and how they want to live, and with a massive social effort, we have helped them move into a caravan, apartment or houses that they themselves have helped to build. Most recently they have offered hotel accommodation as a way off the streets.

It is basically about giving people a worthy offer. Homeless people are in crisis and you don't help them by institutionalizing them in a shelter or leaving them to fend for themselves on the streets.

You must offer them a place to live according to their wishes and which they can call their own, whether it is in an apartment, houseboat or in a social psychiatric housing community. You need to help them find their way out of homelessness, and you need to be ready if they stumble along the way and need more attempts.

It is documented that the Housing First approach is suitable for helping people with high support needs out of homelessness. A new homeless strategy must therefore commit to helping even the most vulnerable street sleepers into their own home and not just prioritizing those citizens who have a relatively quick way out of homelessness.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**3.2. Particularly interesting to highlight integrated anti-poverty strategies**

Ireland has signed up to a range of anti-poverty commitments including the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as a Roadmap for Social Inclusion, which aims to reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less by 2025. This is alongside aims within the Implementation plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights, including Ireland’s contribution to reducing the number of people at- risk- of -poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030, (5 million of these should be children.) In order for Ireland to meet these commitments it will take significant investment in a range of anti-poverty measures including adequate and accessible public services such as housing, health, child-care, and education, in addition to decent work and income adequacy. Much of this is also reflected in the EU Country Specific Recommendations to Ireland over a number of year (EAPN Ireland, National Reform Programme Submission 2022). However, it appears that the Government’s level of ambition is unfortunately low!

The most important thing would be the integration of policies. In Spain, fragmentation is the norm; It is necessary to generate policies that put the person and their needs at the center, in which the administrative procedure is less relevant than the professional process. We should arrive at a model of "professional social prescription" for the care of poverty that guarantees the comprehensiveness of its care.

There are strategies for young people, immigrants, handicapped people, which is good, but not for some others categories in Switzerland.

The new policy: the social workers offices ( for social intervention) are now going to be transferred to the municipalities temporarily in Portugal .

In Malta the state has strengthened the possibility for employment by introducing free childcare for working parents, in-work benefits for low income households and tapering off benefits for people returning to employment.

"Call from the trade unions in Denmark: This is how we solve the corona and climate crisis socially justly.

The corona crisis has been a remarkable boost to the welfare narrative. During the corona crisis, it dawned on many Danes that the private and public sectors are 100 percent dependent on each other. That we need all subject groups. That the Danish labor market model can do something unique. And that the special universal welfare model with free and equal access to welfare again proved to be superior to other social models.

It is on this basis that we build our optimism. This is also the basis for our proposal on how to deal with the corona, climate and welfare crisis in a socially just way.

Cut to the bone, time is screaming for us to invest ambitiously and for us to think new and original.

In the following, we present our seven most important socially just responses to the corona, climate and welfare crisis, which we have developed together with experts and politicians at the Inequality Summit.

1. We must get going in the 20s with active fiscal policy

2. We must retrain and rehabilitation

3. We must strengthen social security

4. We must invest massively in climate change

5. We must have socially fair climate taxes

6. We must invest in people and welfare

7. We must develop new and original grips

A more detailed description of the individual points[[8]](#footnote-8) see[[9]](#footnote-9)

**3.3. Again, PEP (People Experiencing Poverty) voices should be central to assess and appreciate the impact of the practices**

One of the tasks of a social worker is to draw attention to the need for action and to provide help and the opportunity to influence the local community of which you are a part.

PEPs should have a relevant role in the processes of policy design and evaluation; currently they are not taken into account at that level and the results are negative, very basic aspects could be improved, such as procedures, for example, if we listened to people.

It´s essential to a successful social intervention, but sometimes the obvious is forgotten, as highlighted before client involvement is central to the work done to create awareness and policy making.

"We agree with this statement, of course the opinion of the stakeholders is particularly important feedback when evaluating an intervention or program. What matters is what they experience, whether a real positive change occurs in their lives.

PEP can play a role not only in the ""evaluation"" asked in the question.

We have identified 20 (!) different activities where PEP can play a role!

See 3.1. as our answer to the question! 75 Hungarian people living in poverty received professional training in 5 courses lasting 8 months, with the aim of becoming practical implementers of the state-recognized ""Certified Experts by Experience"" (CEE) occupation. The knowledge that is accumulated by their personal life-experiences is a real treasure, and they know it today. However, it was not possible to register this occupation as a new one. However, many people have put a lot of work into these CEEs coming out from poverty, into the social public, which harbors white-middle-class-Christian-male values, and exceeding its expectations, not to be ashamed of their poverty, but to build a bridge in public discourse between the poor and the rich, the needy and among the middle class.

According to our definition, an CEE is a person who has experienced poverty in his own life, who fights with this bitter experience in a training process and, strengthened by the attitudes, skills and methods acquired during the training, understands the individual and social elements of his personal experience, all this in the fight against poverty can be applied at one or more points of the struggle, utilizing it for the benefit of others."

The PEP association in Iceland has a voice and are central to assess and appreciate the impact of practices

Christina Strauss, chairman of SAND - the national organization of the homeless" Denmark have made this statement as the national counting 2022 was published :

"""We haven't solved the problems with homelessness. There are still over 5,000 people in Denmark who have nowhere to live.

It's great that the sofa surfers have been given the push they needed. Given them a home, so they don't get stuck in homelessness and become really hard to help. But now I experience the most burdened people on the street, and it is therefore somewhat more extensive help and support that is needed to help them. I hope you also have the will to do so.

There is no doubt that focus helps - you have focused on the young people, you have had a strong will to do something about the problem and it has borne fruit. Now the experiences will benefit the rest of the homeless group.

We also have to remember that it was Corona. Here you thought differently and did things you don't normally do. It was faster from thought to action and less bureaucracy. It has probably also had an effect and I hope this will be carried forward.

Psychiatry is lagging behind. And when almost every second homeless woman says that it is because of the mental health difficulties that she has become homeless, then something needs to be done here. Also with regard to dual diagnoses, which is a huge problem for some of the most vulnerable"".

**6. Recommendations**

Making sure that the EPSR and the goals set in there are implemented in member states - including all PEP and especially children who are deprived from their futures. The European Child Guarantee has to be implemented soon and it is crucial that it trickles down to decision makers not only on state but also on provincial and city levels.

Fight against the harms of political populism in the social sector, in cooperation with similarly hindered organizations and colleagues in supporting co-sectors.

We know that poverty is socially inherited. This means that we need to work as hard as we can to help poorer families and children growing up in poorer families to get the help they need to change the situation. In Norway the government has appointed an expert group that will propose measures that give children who grow up in poverty better living conditions and that prevent poverty being inherited. They will come with their suggestions next autumn. Social workers are represented in this expert group.

As an association we are supporting NGOs that aim to combat poverty in Malta by targeting vulnerable communities withing society. We have also joined a Forum made up of several organisation aiming to promote change and support the vulnerable. Our association believes that togetherness is essential to bring about the change needed to ensure a safe and prosperous future. Social issues are inevitable in any society, keeping up the work in the best interests of our clients and community at large should be the forefront of the efforts made in bringing about change.

Climate change needs to be addressed but this is internationally, meaning meaningful change and accountability for the 100 corporations causing 70% of emissions. "

Social Work has a role of accompanying people and, also, in the design and evaluation of policies. Social Work must be creative, initiatives must be promoted." A solution would be the Unconditional Basis Income for all, and Minimum Salary Income for workers.

Please listen to the people! They know best! And if we all participate, we have a better World "Poverty is the result of an economic and political system, not an individual responsibility. Responses to poverty must be systemic, not partial.

PEPs must participate in the design and evaluation of policies.

More social perspective in power areas such as the political one. If we don't raise our voices and we don't force the politicians to make steps without our supervision, we won't take a step forward

- As a profession, social work needs to radically up-skill in poverty knowledge and poverty informed practice, regardless of role or field of practice.

- Social work needs to advocate for the inclusion of people from economically marginalized communities on all forums.

- IFSW Europe member organizations should continue to promote and advocate for equality and social inclusion via the full and ambitious implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at a European level, but particularly at the national level- the ambitious implementation of the post-Covid-19 National Recovery and Resilience Plans and the Sustainable Development Goals

We must retrain and rehabilitation: One of the crown jewels of our social model was the active labor market policy, where you help him or her who is affected by or is threatened by unemployment to train and rehabilitation for the job of the future. The previously active labor market policy should have a renaissance. And it has only become more important in a time of crisis.

We must strengthen social security,: The active labor market policy is one leg of our very special flexicurity model. If there is anything that employees need in a time of crisis with the coronavirus and climate change, it is precisely security. People who are secure have better lives, greater resources and better opportunities to adapt to new jobs in a changing world. The compensation rate for unemployment benefits must be increased, and the erosion must be stopped. Other benefits must be looked at carefully so that we counteract poverty and inequality. And then we must abolish child poverty in Denmark

We must invest in people and welfare: After the financial crisis, savings were made on public welfare: daycare centers, schools, the social sector and the elderly. This has resulted in declining welfare and increased insecurity, and we have therefore seen a creeping privatization haunt the Danish social model. This applies, for example, to private day care facilities, schools, health services, nursing homes, services for the elderly and unemployment insurance. There are several obvious reasons to invest in the common welfare now and in the years to come. We must get going in the 20s with an active fiscal policy. Politically, it is about protecting the special Nordic welfare model. It is about giving people security and good lives and opportunities for social mobility. But there are also strong socio-economic arguments for investing in people. Investing in children, daycare centers, schools, health, education, social policy, etc. is an investment in the lives of children and adults here and now. We must strengthen the public sector and have the calculation models redone so that they also count on the benefits of public investment in people. We must invest in people and welfare now. As a society, we cannot afford not to

**7. Conclusion**

For too many, income from employment does not support individuals and families to meet the cost of living. This has a knock on effect for many essential services as the employment pay and conditions are too low to attract and retain staff, creating turnover, instability and constricted services (e.g. homecare in some rural areas not available as not profitable). The most of Europe states, it’s institutions and policies fail to provide basic supports and services for its citizens (e.g., withdrawal of public health nurse routine infant checks).

In particular, successive government policies of recent decades have viewed housing as investment rather than as homes and have engaged in very little state led construction of public housing. Europe has record numbers of people experiencing homelessness. The current availability of housing can best be described as a trickle, with scant access to affordable housing for most.

Privatization of many essentials supports and services (e.g. homecare, nursing homes) has led to the development of services that generate profit for stakeholders and investment funds rather than services designed to respond the needs of those who use them.

Social welfare thresholds and criteria create obstacles for many who need them as well as creating excessive administration for those seeking support.

Rapidly rising food and energy prices for households mean many families will make choices about whether to eat or heat their homes in winter 2022.

All the above create unpredictable, precarious and anxiety-ridden lives for the steadily increasing number of people living in Europe who cannot access housing, employment that covers the cost of living, general practitioner services, health services, childcare or education that meets the needs of their children. If an individual or family member has a disability, a health issue or any kind of other additional needs, they have many more struggles and barriers to access essential supports and services, to vindicate their rights and to participate fully in society.

Social workers reported that they spent a disproportionate amount of time and energy advocating for vital basics (housing, health services, income support) and essential supports and services on behalf of service users. Promising practice examples provided by respondents were heartening to read, particularly those led by state funded organizations. However, one emerging theme was that the neoliberal emphasis on individual rights and responsibilities shifts the focus on the individual instead of focusing on the organizations and structures that create and reinforce the poverty, unnecessary suffering and inequalities.

How do we handle corona, climate and welfare at the same time? And how do we make it socially just, so that those who have the least and the employees suffering poor working conditions are all fully protected and not burdened with the Bill for the pandemic and financial crisis.

The corona crisis has been a remarkable boost to the welfare narrative. During the corona crisis, it dawned on many that the private and public sectors are 100 percent dependent on each other. That we need all subject groups. That the Nordic labor market model can do something unique. And that the special Nordic universal welfare model with free and equal access to welfare showed that it had something to offer to other social models of welfare.

It is on this basis that we build our optimism. We must get going in the 2020s with an active fiscal policy. Politically, it is about advocating across Europe for models of welfare similar to the Nordic welfare model. It is about giving people security and good lives and opportunities for social mobility. But there are also strong socio-economic arguments for investing in people. Investing in children, daycare centers, schools, health, education, social policy, etc. is an investment in the lives of children and adults here and now. We must strengthen the public sector and have the calculation models redone so that they also count on the benefits of public investment in people. We must invest in people and welfare now. As a society, we cannot afford not to

Cutting to the bone, time is screaming for us to invest ambitiously and for us to think in new and original ways.

1. <https://www.ifsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2022-08-18-Ethics-Webinars-Report.pdf>

   Users of this document are free to quote from it in other publications and to reproduce sections for teaching and learning, provided the source is cited as follows:

   Banks, S. & Cairns, L. with Bertotti, T., Shears, J., Shum, M., Sobočan, A. M., Strom,

   K., Úriz, M. J. (2022) Beyond the pandemic: Exploring social work ethics and values

   as a contribution to a new eco-social world. Report of a webinar series and global

   summit, March-July 2022, Rheinfelden, Switzerland: International Federation of

   Social Worker [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Banks, S. & Cairns, L. with Bertotti, T., Shears, J., Shum, M., Sobočan, A. M., Strom,

   K., Úriz, M. J. (2022) Beyond the pandemic: Exploring social work ethics and values

   as a contribution to a new eco-social world. Report of a webinar series and global

   summit, March-July 2022, Rheinfelden, Switzerland: International Federation of

   Social Worker [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. (European Commission 2017, Chapter II: Article 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Paul Sissons, Senior Research Fellow, Coventry University [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. (Ilsøe2017; Madsen and Rasmussen 2017)" [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Banks, S. & Cairns, L. with Bertotti, T., Shears, J., Shum, M., Sobočan, A. M., Strom,

   K., Úriz, M. J. (2022) Beyond the pandemic: Exploring social work ethics and values

   as a contribution to a new eco-social world. Report of a webinar series and global

   summit, March-July 2022, Rheinfelden, Switzerland: International Federation of

   Social Worker [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://udenfor.dk/2021/08/24/projekt-udenfor-starter-nyt-projekt-om-lgbthjemloeshed/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://socialraadgiverne.dk/debatindlaeg/opraab-fra-fagforeningerne-saadan-loeser-vi-corona-og-klimakrisen-socialt-retfaerdigt/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.wunsch.dk/reports/call-from-the-trade-unions.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)