



Thriving, not just surviving

Shaping effective minimum income systems in Europe

The EU's Anti-Poverty Strategy:
An evaluation and next steps
IEP@BU, 20 October 2025

Introduction to Caritas Europa and Caritas Germany

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- Caritas Europa has 49 member organisations in 46 countries across the European continent, including in all member states of the European Union and the vast majority of Council of Europe member countries
- Very diverse membership, some very big (i.e. Caritas Germany with 750 000 staff members) others very small (i.e. Caritas Finland with less than 10 staff members)
- Active in many different social policy fields, but all relevant in the fight against poverty, i.e. old-age care, children & youth, migrant integration, work among single parents, social counselling, work against homelessness

Why a Focus on Minimum Income Schemes?

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- Minimum income schemes are supposed to be a last safety net, when all other benefits have run out
- “Poor-by-law”: You need to be poor to get access to minimum income, and you will stay poor while on minimum income benefits
- Largely inadequate, strict eligibility conditions, non-take-up
- Toxic narratives, blame and shame
 - “Deservingness”-considerations are dangerous and contrary to human rights law
 - “Root causes” of poverty are structural

Push for a Framework Directive on Minimum Income

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- Council Recommendation (2023) has had little effect so far
- Very weak monitoring mechanism: “take stock of actions (...) and report to the Council by 2030”
- Power inequality even in soft law instruments, i.e. EU MS much more likely to implement European Semester recommendations (mostly recommending cutting social expenditures) than Council Recommendation
- We need a legally binding instrument
 - An ambitious anti-poverty strategy should include the announcement of a Directive on minimum income

Caritas Experience with Minimum Income

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- Caritas has lots of experience with counselling services and is confronted daily with the very practical problems of minimum income schemes
 - Inadequacy → as a recipient of minimum income you are made poor “by law”
 - In-work poverty, care responsibilities and the complexities of moving between low-wage jobs and minimum income
 - Strict eligibility conditions which often completely exclude large segments of the population
 - Shame, stigma and non-take-up

What affects minimum income that the EU should change?

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- The power of statistics: AROPE Indicator & FRA expertise
- “Better Regulation” Guidelines and EU impact assessments, especially distributional impact assessments
- “Poverty-proofing” the fiscal policy framework
- Ensure that non-working mobile EU citizens in vulnerable situations can access emergency shelters, emergency healthcare, education for children and participation in low-threshold measures for integration into the labour market
- Better recognition of providers of social services in EU state aid law

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Thank you for your attention!

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