

FEANTSA Zaragoza Conference:

“Multiple Barriers, Multiple Solutions: Inclusion Into and Through Employment for People who are Homeless”

Friday 19th of October

Morning Plenary Discussion Notes

Robert Aldridge, President of FEANTSA, opened the conference and thanked the partners for their work and input.

He invited Maria Isabel Lopez to take the floor on behalf of the Council for Social Action of the City of Zaragoza.

Silke Paasche then presented the European report on FEANTSA’s Annual Theme 2007. Her presentation is available [here](#).

Antonio Rodriguez presented the Spanish national report on the Annual Theme 2007. His presentation is available in Spanish [here](#). Some of the main points are highlighted below:

Antonio Rodriguez:

- It was a useful exercise doing the report and gathering in the differing experience and it is key to getting an overview of the situation;
- “The Spanish Wonder”: there has been strong growth in Spain for the past few years and jobs have increased too. The former chronic unemployment has decreased and is now more or less in line with Europe. In the last years it has meant more people who are homeless have had a chance in the employment market: there has been greater demand for low-skilled workers. Of course this is not true for all.
- Labour market reintegration demands a joined-up and holistic approach focusing on all needs. There have to be additional efforts to support people who are homeless if they are to benefit from the employment growth.
- The social economy can be a good option – but it is very underdeveloped in Spain and that message must come strongly from this conference;
- Young people in Spain have particular difficulties in getting access to their first job. Economic independence is later and later (now about 33 to move out of the parental home). Women are more strongly represented in the labour market.
- Spain has a dramatically increased migrant population in the last few years. The presence of immigrants from all over the world has brought changes and challenges.
- The precarity of jobs is very high – about 34% of jobs are temporary, which is one of the highest figures in Europe. Is it possible to reach full employment? It can be

problematic to think only in terms of growth, as where there is a decline in growth, the most vulnerable will drop out of the labour market and severe poverty re-emerges.

- The aim must be not just to create services, but rather to develop a new vision.
- The services now offered are quite minimal. Only 22% get employment support and only 15% benefit from labour market insertion programmes. This is clearly inadequate. There are few services that really address employability.
- There are interesting models and pilots – also coming from Europe. There is a need to learn from this experience and break away from an emergency shelter based approach to homelessness, that does not see the wider picture or take account of the employment dimension. There is a lack of knowledge about the needs of people who are homeless in terms of employment.
- Homeless people in work are often held accountable for their own situation and there is little flexibility. The focus on reducing employment should not focus only on work in the mainstream labour market without more tailored solutions. There is scope for learning from the disability sector, where there was a need to tailor services to prevent loss of benefits for example.
- Equal, Horizon etc. have created a lot of learning at European level. The problem is when projects end after two or three years, often they are lost and there is little continuity.
- **Conclusions:** motivation of the person is key. Employment is not the only issue at stake – the person must be actively involved and at the centre of the whole reintegration process. Coordination is vital for employment projects etc; and it works. There is little cooperation around the needs of migrants however. Financing is vital for employment and training services to develop and take forward this underdeveloped sector. There has to be some prioritisation of people who are homeless in employment policies. There has to be a change in perceptions, as it is not true that they are not ready to be economically active, but services for them are purely seen in terms of emergency accommodation etc. and do not take account of their wider support needs. Supported employment is needed. People have the right to be active – for their social integration and development and for their economic stability.

Robert Aldridge thanked the speakers and highlighted where the reports are available on the FEANTSA website. He opened the floor for discussion.

Debate with the floor:

Henrique Pinto from Cais in Portugal opened the discussion by observing that it seems that there is nothing new in the debate and in the reports. The challenge is to come to the

solution. How can the social sector relate more to businesses and how can it challenge the state? How can it innovate to accommodate the people it works for and with? There is a need to be more creative and business-oriented. There is a need to move on from highlighting the same barriers again and again.

Participant from Off the Streets and into Work (OSW) in the UK: began by thanking the conference organizers. In the presentation of the European report it was clear that moving to work is a journey. But there is a need also to be able to show the soft outcomes of what it means in terms of achievement etc. for the person - not just the hard outcome of employment. How can such outcomes be highlighted?

Jeremy Swain from Thames Reach in the UK: asked what is coming out in terms of how NGOs can and should try to improve their own work in this area? What can agencies do? Also what about feedback from service users? Was this gathered in in the report?

Reponses from the Panel:

Silke Paasche: highlighted that the aim of the FEANTSA European Report is mainly stocktaking. It gives a mandate to FEANTSA to take forward the different issues. It is important now to draw the political conclusions. However, FEANTSA would not agree that there is nothing new in the report and what is more, in itself it is a new resource - the first report of its kind at European level. This is important in itself and is an important function.

In relation to soft indicators: at European level FEANTSA will look at the European indicators on employment that have been developed to evaluate the employment programmes of Member States. FEANTSA will apply the knowledge to these.

In regard to what agencies can do: well there are areas where there is potential for improvement: for example involvement of service users is one.

Antonio Rodriguez: The situation in Spain is what it is - but there are interesting examples and projects that emerged in the report and it was useful to identify these and the report will be at the centre of a strategy going forward to improve efforts in this area - both in terms of work in the sector and supported employment structures and also in terms of feeding in to policy making.

Debate with the floor:

A Spanish participant observed that while he supports the conclusions of the Spanish report, it is important not to be obsessed with the hard outcome of employment. There is a need to develop better understanding of the range of activities that may be relevant in terms of employability. It is useful to look to the disability sector for examples. We may be missing the boat on this in Spain in the homeless sector.

Reponses from the Panel:

Antonio Rodriguez : adapting to people's rhythms and having an individualized approaches is vital but the legal framework on creating employment does not seem to take account of it. I

fear in that law it is really very hard to take account of social needs and may not offer a lot of possibility for the homeless sector.

Debate with the floor:

Preben Brandt, Projekt Udenfor, Denmark: Thank you for the report – it is useful and will be useful in Denmark. But there is not enough precision in relation to health and employment. The health benefits are an important aspect of income for many people who are homeless and there must be recognition that mainstream labour is not a meaningful option for them.

Luigi Leonori, SMES, Belgium: stated that he would like to echo Preben to some degree: there are many different groups and histories among people who are homeless and one must take account of them in order to understand what work is and can mean. Someone who gathers rubbish or collects cars is working. So we have to think about what we mean by work and by activity. And what about “illegal work” – what’s that? There is a need to reflect on the meaning.

Peter Olech, Pomeranian Forum, Poland: began by saying that his organization is happy with the report – but there is one remark to be made: there is a lack of information about the issue of debt. This is a major barrier in Poland and the Czech Republic. If you have debt and you enter legal work, you lose a proportion of your salary, which is deducted for repayment. The report has a particular value in the new EU member countries, where many of the recommendations are quite new.

Reponses from the Panel:

Antonio Rodriguez: It is nteresting to debate what we mean by employment and by work and of course it is a key element in transnational exchange. In spite of differences, in fact the problems are similar. There is a need to reinvent the definitions and the concepts and readapt services to this. There is a challenge in helping people to achieve an income and independence.

Silke Paasche: Regarding the health section – I am aware it is not so developed – probably because it was so thoroughly developed in last year’s report. In the European report there is a discussion in the report on employment and what it means. In the report inclusion into employment also takes in the idea of developing employability, and not simply moving to mainstream labour market. There are ‘occupational activities’ which help people to move closer to employment, but these are a bit of a grey zone - not all activities develop skills (begging, picking rubbish) so occupational activities are positive where they help development and are in line with the needs and aspirations of the person. As regards debt, it is not very developed in the presentation, but does feature in the European report.

Morning Session - Part 2

Round Table Chaired by Robert Aldridge:

The aim of the Round Table was to discuss and explore the findings of the report with people representing three different perspectives: an NGO representative, a social enterprise representative and an employment services representative. The three participants then briefly introduced themselves:

- **Ludo Lowouters from Belgium** outlined the work of the social enterprise with which he works. To qualify, one must be five years unemployed and low skilled. It is a social enterprise and costs about 1 million a year and must generate income from selling organic food from the farm.
- **Ana Bermudez from Spain** described the work and approaches for employment of excluded groups of her organization.
- **Linda Butcher from the UK** outlined the work of OSW in funding employment projects and involvement in the government "Spend to Save" programme.

Robert Aldridge highlighted that the aim of the Round Table was as much interaction and discussion as possible with the participants of the conference and he invited them to take an active part in the debate. He then launched the debate by asking a first question to the panel.

Question from Robert Aldridge: What are the main challenges in relation to access to employment for people who are homeless?

Ludo Lowouters: one must create an emotional and motivational support, highlighting the value of having a meaningful occupation during the day. One must not use "school" methods, but rather work with people together. You also have to make your organization known to the people who need it, as the official channels don't reach everyone.

Ana Bermudez: The first element is to combat the lack of self esteem and motivation - you have to look at the personal situation to combat this and take account of the full picture. This is a vital first step.

Linda Butcher: Two essential points: policy integration at all levels is vital - a holistic approach is needed and a dispersed policy aspect is important. Secondly, you have to have a fundamental understanding of a person's needs and aspirations and these and the person must be at the centre of the whole process.

Debate with the floor:

Javier Bartoleme, Spain - I have worked in an equal project for the last three years and am glad to see that activation, motivation and self-esteem and aims beyond just employment in the mainstream market but also human development etc. are really part of the dialogue. But I want to ask Ana Bermudez if her discourse, which matches exactly the approach of the

equal project Activa in Madrid, really matches the political approaches and funding in Spain?

Reponses from the Panel:

Ana Bermudez: indeed the opinion which I am presenting is a developed one – as Zaragoza has been involved in 3 equal projects and the approach is drawn from this in terms of employment but also social services. Equal was a different way of working and a source of motivation for the administrations involved, but it is difficult to put in place the structures on the ground. Certainly everything possible is not yet being done.

Linda Butcher: the question of funding is an important one: too many of the resources that are available to work on homelessness and employment are just not allowing the kind of activities for engagement that we have learned are so vital. Equal was wonderful, but this is over now and ESF funding is less and much tighter and there is a lack of recognition for the value of approach towards developing employability.

Debate with the floor:

Andy Shields, St Mungos, UK: Government funding streams are often not joined up – across issues like homelessness, health and employment. They fund different initiatives that are not joined up. St Mungos has started working with government to try and highlight that this is wasteful and loses out on the potential for synergies and more effective working.

Sergio Barciela, Caritas Spain: A question to launch the debate: regarding the EU discourse on employment as the vector for inclusion and integration: does this push people towards precarious bad employment? And another question: which is the greater challenge for homeless people to get, or rather to maintain, a job?

Reponses from the Panel:

Ludo Lowouthers: does everyone who is homeless have to be pushed towards the mainstream labour market? It is a process of constant development and change. For inclusion, to stabilize a situation through supported employment and social economy is perhaps more important and the mainstream labour market does not provide all the answers.

Ana Bermudez: One has to start with a personalized approach with an overall reintegration approach and plan. There are a range of problems and issues that have to be addressed – so there are many elements in working with the person and many of these have to be stabilized in advance. Health and housing are two vital questions. So a holistic and participative approach is the way of working that is most effective to find and to retain work.

Linda Butcher: There is an issue around poverty and ensuring that people have a life in dignity and there has to be a focus on minimum income to give people a decent life. Is it easier to get or to maintain a job? Well, where there is high employment, the problem is not getting a job, but where there is greater competition it is harder. However, across the board it is hard for people to retain a job without support. This is where they can fall out.

Debate with the floor:

Spyros Pyschas, Arsis Greece: How do you deal with the daily problems of the people that have multiple needs in every day life, as part of your work in your projects?

Reponses from the Panel:

Ludo Lowouthers: We do organize things outside of work: participate in projects etc. People do bring their problems to work and you have to look out for them. The support worker who works with them throughout the day has the opportunity to discuss and help to solve problems, while still staying with the work and ensuring that things get done so the social enterprise is sustainable. Giving people a sense of responsibility for the project is important.

Linda Butcher: it comes down to listening to people and their needs and aspirations. You have to listen to people and not give up on them.

Debate with the floor:

Sergio Barciela, Caritas Spain: if the structural economic system creates poverty, how to try and meet the needs of people without pushing them towards poverty? How to challenge these systems - which create growth but increase social exclusion as well?

Reponses from the Panel:

Ana Bermudez: to consider employment as the solution to poverty is too simplistic. It doesn't work without taking account of the person's situation in advance, as without the support necessary, work is not a realistic option.

Linda Butcher: it is a controversial issue: it comes back to the right to work - and indeed the right not to work and the need not to push people towards employment not tailored to their needs.

Debate with the floor:

Rosa Maria Garcia, St Martin de Porres, Spain: The examples given are useful and this method of working is the one that we use in our services, based on a personalised and holistic approach and to try and adapt the public service offer to the needs in the sector. The issue of work retention is a new one and we are trying to develop a methodology of supported working (taken from the disability sector) to the needs of the users in the homeless sector. We will share the results of this work in the future. It is necessary to support not only the person, but also the employer.

Matt Potts, UK : I have discovered really interesting projects in the Netherlands, which were exciting and really used the skills of homeless people. And this excitement is vital: there is a need for new ideas and innovation to make the sector more dynamic and attractive to both staff and people who are homeless. This is vital to give people a chance to make a new start and be part of something they really want to be part of.

Mafalda, Portugal: Is inclusion “working” – or can there be inclusion without working? What about the right not to work:

Reponses from the Panel:

Ludo Lowouthers: does everyone need to work? Well it comes back to the discussion of what work means. I think it is important for everyone to have the right to a meaningful occupation to structure your life. Without it there is isolation and problems. You can include people without work, but they must have meaningful occupation.

Debate with the floor:

Jeremy Swain, UK: I don't believe in the right to work. Homeless people aren't much interested in this kind of theoretical discussion anyway. But homeless services don't put it in practice either: they don't employ homeless people themselves and there is hypocrisy there. Homeless people aren't interested in the right to work, they are interested in real jobs.

Reponses from the Panel:

Ana Bermudez: every citizen has the right and the obligation to work. It is part of how society functions and is vital. Can everyone work?: no there are those that can't and for many, there are moments where this is not possible. Work generates economic and social resources and people will be fulfilled by that. It is a source of equality and participation in social life. And it is vital for all to have these things, which can also come from supported work etc. Benefits fail in providing these things, though they may provide a minimum.

Debate with the floor:

Spanish Participant: It seems that the discourse of the participants highlights the personalized approach to the detriment of looking closely at the societal and structural frameworks that create social exclusion – and it is dangerous as it may create a way of blaming people for their own situations and failures.

Reponses from the Panel:

Linda Butcher: volunteering is a big activity in the UK and it is a vital way of participating in society and for a long time people who are homeless were excluded from this. But this has been a major area of work in Equal and a lot of NGOs have created new possibilities. These have a huge personal benefit – but also generate a lot of value for government, if you put a cost on it.

Debate with the floor:

Spanish Participant: We have to avoid falling into the trap of discourse of responsabilising people and making them responsible for their own situation. It is one increasingly used by policy makers.

Shelter Cymru, Wales: What about engaging with the private sector? This is something emerging in relation to private sector landlords, but is only emerging in relation to

employment. How to access private sector employment and support and this kind of approach?

Reponses from the Panel:

Ludo Lowouthers: In my own project try to convince local firms to take groups in the winter when there is less work, to take on the staff of the farm with their support worker. This has had some success and there are also cases where some workers have got contracts after.

Debate with the floor:

Andy Shields, St Mungos, UK: as part of the renovating hostels programme, we have buying power. When engaging with construction companies, we agree with them that they take on some homeless people as trainees and it has been very successful.

Rene Kneip, Caritas Luxemburg: There is a good network in Luxemburg, which supports homeless people looking for employment in the private sector. It helps to train the person to find work and then follows up with the person and the employer as well. It means that when there are problems, there are three way discussions and it has quite a good success rate.

Colette Kelleher Cork Simon, Ireland: there is a project in Cork with a training programme linked to a placement scheme for permanent jobs in the local authority in the parks and gardens department. It has been very successful and flexibility has been key – but the will has resulted in the creation of very positive results.

Henrique Pinto, Cais, Portugal: How seriously do we take the critique of people who are homeless? – they are the sometimes the voice of the “other side of reason” and often our aim is to make them fit our reality rather than hear from theirs. Often we don’t take it seriously.

Caroline Klein, France – we have been involved in two Equal projects in France. It is high time indeed to work with the employers. Since 2002 my own organization has been working to develop partnerships in the private sector and it is only now that there is real progress. But bit by bit it is working out although it is very slow. There is a need to change the perceptions of employers and society as a whole and recognize homeless people’s capacity to work and engage.

Preben Brandt, Project Udenfor, Denmark: An example from Denmark: 10 years ago 5 or 6 companies came together and now it has expanded to about fifty – and they work together on integrating vulnerable and excluded people. They even compete on this and award prizes for those with the most success in the field.

Concluding remarks from the panel:

Ludo Lowouthers: it was a pleasure to be a part of the debate. The general conclusion for me is that social economy should be a real challenge and priority going forward in Europe. It is a challenge too to work with the mainstream employment sector and we must work to create a win-win situation for everyone involved. Financial support to achieve this is vital.

Ana Bermudez: We have talked about the structural problems in society and there is a need for change. Change must start with oneself and with the recognition that the current situation is not working for everyone. For homeless people, we know how to improve ways of working and administrations must take responsibility for taking it forward. The role of the EU is important too: there must be a clear support for the different tools that work for inclusion in and through employment. Progress has been made and there are many positive models. The dialogue too must continue and projects to continue working in this area.

Linda Butcher: we must rise to the challenge of meeting people's real aspirations. It is true that there are possibilities too to develop further collaboration with the private sector. The FEANTSA report brings together the common issues and common ground and if it is used in the right way, it creates a strong tool to try to influence change.