

# FEANTSA's POSITION ON THE FUTURE OF THE EU STRATEGY AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

## The common outline for the next round of NAPsIncl needs urgent improvement

Following the Informal Council of the Ministers of Employment and Social Affairs in Kolding in July 2002, the Social Protection Committee (SPC) started working on the revision of the common objectives and on a common outline for the next round of NAPsIncl. A few weeks ago the SPC finalised these two documents, which will be submitted for adoption to the European Council in December 2002. FEANTSA has studied them carefully and would like to make the following comments.

FEANTSA believes that the first NAPsIncl need to be improved considerably in order to become valuable tools in the fight against homelessness. Most Member States either did not, or only partially, address homelessness in their NAPsIncl. As a consequence, the NAPsIncl are not considered to be of any value by the different actors involved in the fight against homelessness on the ground.

FEANTSA wants to underline the crucial importance of the common outline for strengthening the next NAPsIncl. The common outline should encourage Member States to develop comprehensive policies against homelessness as part of their next NAPsIncl.

### Targeting

In the common outline the SPC calls for better targeting of policy measures to the most marginalized. FEANTSA believes this is a step in the right direction. We want however the common outline to be clearer and more directive on this issue. It is not sufficient to simply mention the homeless as a possible target group.

The fight against homelessness and severe housing exclusion are an integral part of the common objectives of the EU strategy. The homeless must therefore be addressed as a key target group in the next NAPsIncl.

Homelessness is the most severe manifestation of poverty and social exclusion in Europe. It is a very serious and often growing problem in all of the fifteen Member States. Nevertheless, several Member States still ignore the gravity and the scope of homelessness in their territory. It is very naïve to take for granted that Member States will address the problems of the most marginalized such as the homeless without any pressure from above.

The lack of determination to promote the issue of homelessness in the common outline is very surprising. The European Commission and the Council highlighted already in the Joint Report on Social Inclusion that the fight against homelessness was one of the weaker areas of the first NAPsIncl. We believe that the important conclusions of this Report must be taken into account in the common outline.

## **Integrative approach**

The SPC rightly calls for an integrated and strategic approach to key issues that cut across the common objectives of the EU strategy in the next NAPsIncl. Homelessness is an obvious cross-cutting poverty issue, but is surprisingly not mentioned in the common outline.

Homelessness is usually the result of an accumulation of experiences of exclusion in areas such as housing, employment, education, and health. The multi-dimensional nature of homelessness requires a carefully developed approach in several policy areas.

In the current NAPsIncl homelessness is too often only partially addressed under only one of the common objectives. We believe however that homelessness can only be tackled effectively when it is addressed comprehensively under each of the common objectives. We therefore want the common outline to include homelessness as a key cross-cutting issue and to urge Member States to address it in an integrated and strategic way.

## **Importance of housing**

Access to decent and sanitary housing is one of the common objectives adopted by the Council of Nice in 2000. FEANTSA's detailed evaluation of the first NAPsIncl proved that housing policies were not included as an important tool to fight and prevent poverty.

The importance of access to housing for social integration cannot be underestimated. For many poor people, the lack of (decent) housing is often a key determinant in their pathways in and out of poverty and exclusion. Research has sufficiently proven that a direct link exists between inadequate housing policies and homelessness.

The organisers of the European Round Table on Social Inclusion in October 2002 - a key event for the preparation of the next round of NAPsIncl - acknowledged the importance of housing for combating poverty and devoted a workshop to the theme. The message of the workshop was very clear: housing policies need to have a much more prominent position in the next NAPsIncl. FEANTSA believes that the common outline must take account of the common understanding on the importance of housing among NGOs, researchers and policy-makers at the Round Table.

At their meeting in Charleroi in November 2001, the Ministers of Housing of all EU Member States called upon the relevant EU institutions to strengthen the housing dimension of the EU strategy against poverty and social exclusion. FEANTSA believes that the Council cannot ignore this unanimous call coming from fellow Ministers and wants the common outline to call for more and stronger housing measures in the next NAPsIncl.

## Housing Indicators

The Laeken Council agreed in December 2002 that indicators in the area of housing needed to be developed. Almost one year later the SPC has not managed to agree on any housing indicators.

The indicators are of crucial importance for the strength of the EU strategy and the NAPsIncl. Indicators can help to measure and monitor the efficiency of policy measures to attain specific targets. It is obvious that without any housing indicators, there will be little pressure on the Member States to tackle severe housing exclusion and homelessness.

Therefore FEANTSA wants the common outline to reiterate the concern of the Laeken Council and to call for the development of housing indicators at both EU and national levels.

## Conclusion

The common outline is an important instrument for strengthening the second NAPsIncl. In its current form the common outline does not adequately address the obvious shortcomings of the first NAPsIncl - such as the incoherent approach to homelessness and the lack of policy measures to promote access to housing.

FEANTSA calls upon the Council to take the necessary actions to ensure that the most marginalized such as the homeless are included in the EU strategy and the NAPsIncl. It is be totally unacceptable to exclude the most marginalized from any anti-poverty strategy.

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