

FEANTSA and OSW Participation Audit



Involving Homeless People in Decision-making affecting the services that they use:

An overview of participation practices among service providers in Europe

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Executive Summary

Background:

Within the framework of its present TMD London (Tackling Multiple Disadvantage in London by Improving Employability) programme, OSW approached FEANTSA to carry out an audit of participation practices among its members. The aim of this audit was to obtain an overview of participation across Europe; to identify some good or innovative practices in this area, to examine the opinions, approaches and concerns that prevail in relation to participation among homelessness service providers and to identify common barriers to participation. To this end, a participation questionnaire was sent to FEANTSA's member organisations. The questionnaire was deliberately quite general and based on a broad understanding of participation, in order to cater for the wide and differing experience of participation among FEANTSA members. Thirty-six responses were received, from a total of sixteen EU member States, including three of the new member States. A summary of the findings from these responses is below.

Participation across the EU:

Perhaps the most important finding to emerge from the questionnaire is that there is a strong support for, and belief in, the principle of participation of service users among homeless service providers across the EU. With the single exception of a Portuguese service provider working with homeless immigrants from Eastern Europe, all of the organisations that responded try to promote participation within their structures. (In the case of this single organisation, the fact of working with immigrants on a short-term basis, with all that that implies in terms of language and cultural barriers, and faced with a situation of immediate urgency, participation was not really workable. However, even this organisation seeks to closely consult its users in order to respond more effectively to their needs).

Many of the organisations that responded described participation as an inherent and key element in their approach, philosophy and the "culture" of their organisation. Many of these service providers feel that participation is a fundamental element of the social reintegration process and that, as such, it is a central part of their work.

Forms and understandings of participation vary. However, certain frequent and shared approaches have emerged:

- Active participation of homeless people in the design and implementation of their care and reintegration plan is absolutely fundamental to its success. This is a principle that almost all service providers across the EU try to implement.
- Participation in the form of meetings of, and with, service users is present in one form or another in almost all of the organisations that responded. They may take the form of:
 - Residents' meetings in residential projects
 - Periodic assemblies for consultation on a specific matter
 - Informal discussion groups
 - Project working groups
 - Formal meetings between user and administrative representatives.
- Where there is a statutory obligation to apply principles of participation, there is often a more formal structure – like a client council – which is the main focus of the activities in this area. This is the case in France, Denmark, the Netherlands and Hungary. However, the organisations from these countries stated that their support for participation predated the legal obligation and that other more informal practices continue also.
 - Only in the UK and the Netherlands was there any practice of involving service users in recruitment of staff and it was only highlighted by two organisations.
 - Consultation in the form of satisfaction questionnaires and suggestion boxes are quite a widespread way of gathering user opinion in this area.
 - There are some examples of participation of homeless people through involving them in research projects related to the services that they use.
 - Participation through passing responsibility to service users for some of the management and running of the services is something practiced by certain organisations that responded.
 - Participation through organising training and exchanges on this theme was also mentioned by certain organisations. Generally, such exchanges would include contributions from service users.

Benefits:

All of the organisations that responded were very positive about the benefits of participation. Though it had a greater impact on services and ways of working for some than others, all felt that the overall benefits were undeniable.

- Almost all of the organisations that responded said that more effective, targeted and useful services were the result of the participation of users in the conception and organisation of services. (94.4%)
- Staff (13.9%) and user satisfaction (83.3%) are also a result.
- Many services felt that greater confidence, empowerment and personal investment in decision-making processes were some of the positive benefits that resulted for the service users (58.3%).
- Some organisations felt that a “shaking up” of perceptions of users and relationships with them were among the positive benefits for service providers. (19.4%)
- Some felt that participation was a positive and vital step towards social reintegration. (19.44%)

Barriers and Pitfalls

Most of the organisations recognised that putting in place real participation of homeless people within the structures of the organisation can be a difficult task and warned that overly high expectations can be a barrier.

- Many organisations named substance abuse and illness as a barrier to effective participation of homeless people. (22.22%)
- They also highlighted the fact that, given the fragile and vulnerable state of many service users, taking on responsibility and an active role within the service is not really a possibility. (25%)
- Some organisations named frustration and the ‘taking over’ of the running of participation meetings by the staff, as a pitfall to be avoided. Patience and time are needed for participation to work. (13.9%)
- Some organisations felt that practical considerations related to time and money prevented them from doing as much as they would like. (13.9%)

- Many organisations felt that there was a problematic contradiction between close involvement of homeless people in the running of the services on the one hand and wanting them to be able to move on, probably in quite a short period, from that service on the other hand. (22.2%)

Conclusions

The FEANTSA members who responded felt that good participation was a vital facet of their work and one which many (80.6%) are planning to continue to develop and invest in, in the future. For some, it was a relatively new element of their work (16.7%), particularly such forms as user meetings and consultation. However, it is clear that participation is now a clearly established principle and practice among many service providers across the fifteen member states that responded positively to this questionnaire, and thus we must conclude that the benefits far outweigh the difficulties. Participation has even been written into law in Hungary, Denmark, France and the Netherlands.

The failure to respond by FEANTSA members in Austria, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Malta and Slovenia is due in large part to language barriers (the questionnaire was available in French and English and FEANTSA members in Spain and Hungary translated it on their own initiative) and lack of time and resources to devote to such extra work. It should not automatically be assumed to mean that these organisations and countries have no experience of, or interest in, participation, as certain FEANTSA members who did not respond are known to be active in this field. However, this report offers an overview of participation in only those sixteen countries that did respond.

The respondents also expressed interest in the planned report and in finding out more about what is going on in other countries. Some organisations felt that this is useful theme to consider at this time, as a statutory obligation to put in place certain practices in the area of participation is likely in the future in certain countries.

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Background

This report was produced by European NGO FEANTSA, at the request of UK member organisation OSW, on behalf of the OSW-led EQUAL partnership “Tackling Multiple Disadvantage in London by improving Employability” (TMD London). This project covers a variety of issues related to employability and facilitating access and return to the labour market for disadvantaged people. It is funded by **EQUAL** and by the **European Social Fund**.

FEANTSA

FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations Working With the Homeless. It was established in 1989 as a European non-governmental organisation (in French, FEANTSA stands for la Fédération Européenne d’Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri). FEANTSA brings together some ninety member organisations from 24 of the member States of the European Union, with some corresponding members from beyond the EU. Members are non-governmental organisations that provide a wide range of services to homeless people including accommodation and social support. OSW is a member of FEANTSA.

FEANTSA is the only major European network that focuses exclusively on homelessness at European level. It receives financial support from the European Commission for the implementation of its activities. FEANTSA works closely with the EU institutions.

OSW

OSW stands for “Off the Streets and into Work”. It is a national charity, which supports people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to break out of poverty and exclusion. Its aim is to help homeless people move towards employability, by developing the range of skills and competencies which will allow them to connect with the labour market.

OSW functions as a network, based on the relationship between a small central team and a wider group of member agencies, who participate in, and contribute to, the OSW programme in a variety of ways.

Objectives of the Participation Audit

OSW strongly supports a participative approach in service provision, and holds that participation is a key element in overcoming exclusion and building employability. Indeed, support for strong participation practices in service provision is widespread in the UK, and is sometimes viewed by neighbouring countries as something of a leader in this field.* OSW wanted to gain a better idea of what the views and practices in relation to participation in other EU countries are.

Within the framework of the project, this participation audit helps the TMD London Development Partnership (DP) to set a baseline for participation across EU member states. It serves to identify current practice (good or emerging); and to identify barriers, issues, policies or concerns that may inhibit the consideration or implementation of a participative approach amongst agencies. The audit also means that progress made against the baseline can be measured through the final, formal EQUAL programme evaluation to be carried out by independent evaluators in 2007.

FEANTSA also warmly welcomed this initiative to establish an overview of participation practices across Europe. Over the past few years, FEANTSA’s members have increasingly voiced their support for a strong participative approach and have recently called on FEANTSA to focus more closely on this theme within its own structures. Undertaking this audit has proved a valuable first step towards a clear and structured approach to making participation a central element of FEANTSA’s work. It has served to highlight what FEANTSA members believe to be the potential and the strengths of a participative

* Irish NGO Simon Communities of Ireland specified in their response to the participation audit that their progress in this area is greatly influenced by participation practices in the UK.

approach and some successful practices in this area, as well as the barriers and the pitfalls that may hinder good participation.

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Drawing up a questionnaire

It was decided that consultation through a questionnaire would be the most useful way of gathering the information for the participation audit. It was felt that a mixture of open and closed questions would be the best formula, as the common framework of the closed questions enables some degree of comparison, while the open questions leave space for the description of different forms and approaches.

The questionnaire also required that some shared notion of participation be put forward as a basis for responding to the questionnaire. Both FEANTSA and OSW felt that it was important not to furnish a prescriptive definition with the questionnaire, as to do so might mean excluding potentially interesting and relevant approaches and practices. It was decided to suggest the definition of participation as “the involvement of homeless people in the decision-making processes affecting the services they use” to the respondents, without developing it further. In this way respondents could interpret it in line with their own experiences in this area. The final questionnaire contained eight questions and may be found in **Annexe 1** of this report.

Who responded?

The questionnaire was sent to ninety organisations, all of whom are active in the area of service provision for homeless people. There were thirty-six responses from sixteen of the EU member States. If this response rate might, at first glance, seem disappointing, it should be borne in mind that in many countries FEANTSA organisations are represented by an umbrella organisation that is able to give a response that covers the region or country as a whole. Furthermore, in many countries, the large network organisations are accustomed to presenting a broad view of the situation when approached and smaller associate member organisations may choose to

allow themselves to be represented in the response of the networks, rather than answering on an individual basis. This means that the responses may be considered as providing a good and representative overview, despite the response rate not being particularly strong.

Umbrella organisations responded to the questionnaire in the following countries: in Belgium (Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk is a Flemish umbrella organisation); in France (FNARS, FAPIL and Habitat et Humanisme are three national umbrella organisations); in Italy (FIOpsd is the national Italian umbrella organisation); in Germany (BAGW is a national umbrella organisation); and in Luxemburg (Caritas Luxemburg is the network of Caritas organisations in Luxemburg and is FEANTSA's only member in that country).

The sixteen countries are as follows: Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. A full list of the organisations that responded in these countries can be found in **Annexe 2** of this report.

Who didn't?

No responses were received from FEANTSA members in Austria, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Malta and Slovenia.

One of the key factors underlying the relatively low response rate is the language barrier. The questionnaire was made available in French and in English, and through the efforts of FEANTSA members, a Spanish and Hungarian translation were also made. The responses reflect this fact (10 from the UK and Ireland, 3 from large umbrella organisations in France, 3 from Hungary and 4 from Spain.) The advantage of receiving the questionnaire in the language of the country meant that the responses were often more detailed and developed than those forced to answer in a foreign language.

The failure to respond by FEANTSA members in Austria, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Malta and

Slovenia may be largely explained by this fact. FEANTSA members who were approached informally, and asked why they had not responded, highlighted lack of time and resources. They pointed out that it was hard for them to find the time to sit down and work on a document in a foreign language in the face of other pressing concerns in their day to day work. The concentration of the low response rate in the new member countries is also a reflection of the fact that these agencies have only been members of FEANTSA since October 2004 and are only gradually taking on an active rôle within the organisation.

Thus the failure to respond should not automatically be assumed to mean that these organisations and countries have no experience of, or interest in, participation. Certain FEANTSA members who did not respond are known to be active in the area of participation.

In light of lack of responses from these countries however, this report offers an overview of participation in just the sixteen countries that did respond.

Understandings of participation and the aims that underpin them

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Levels of participation

Perhaps the most important finding to emerge from the respondents is that there is strong support for, and belief in, the principle of participation of service users, among homelessness service providers across the EU. The questionnaire served to highlight almost uniformly high levels of participation. With the single exception of a Portuguese service provider working with homeless refugees from Eastern Europe, all of the organisations that responded try to promote participation within their structures. (In the case of this single organisation, the fact of working with refugees on a short-term basis, with all that that implies in terms of language and cultural barriers, and faced with a situation of immediate urgency, participation was not really workable. However, even this organisation seeks to closely consult its users in order to respond more effectively to their needs.) Many of the organisations that responded described participation as an inherent and key element in their approach.

Definitions of participation

In fact, very few of the respondents to the questionnaire actually have an official definition of participation. In the countries where there is a statutory obligation to carry out certain participation practices, the respondents suggested that participation could be defined, in a rigid way, in terms of the observances of these official obligations, but that their own understanding went beyond this framework. Thus in the Netherlands and Hungary for example, participation may be understood as the setting up of client councils or client forums, but in reality the service providers in these countries also generally share the more philosophical and rights-based understandings, as well as the practical views detailed below. These understandings of participation are examined separately below for purposes of clarity; in many cases, however, the respondent organisations espoused both a practical and an ethical view of participation.

An effective way of raising service quality: a practical understanding of participation

The understanding of participation outlined by many of the respondents was underpinned by the belief that close consultation and cooperation with service users results in better service provision. Thus they consider participation in very practical terms as the involvement of service users in the design and organisation of the services. By gaining a better understanding of the needs of users, they can respond better. Many highlighted the fact that homeless people must participate in the planning and implementation of their own development and reintegration plan, in order for it to have any hope of succeeding. Some respondents highlighted the fact that promoting participation improves staff and service user relations and that it is very positive for service users to feel that they have a say in how services are run, as it creates a feeling of involvement and ownership. The organisation Armada Spasy of the Czech Republic explains that participation “is part of the evaluation that the service is of a high standard. It means that the user is able to participate in the development of services at a practical level”.

Certain organisations described their understanding of participation as encompassing not only involvement of service users in the design and organisation of the services, but also in service provision (following training, or within a framework of support). In some ways, this combines both a very practical and necessity-driven approach with a values-driven approach. The provision or running of services by users may improve the quality and smooth running of the services, but it also necessitates substantial work on the part of the staff, who provide the training and the support framework that make this possible. This is justified by the belief that turning over service provision to the service users is the truest and most democratic way of engaging in participation and that it is a vital step towards empowerment. It may take very prac-

tical and mundane forms, however; French organisation Habitat et Humanisme described how the service users in its residential services are involved in cleaning rotas, cooking, manning the night desk etc. - though always within a framework of support.

Promoting democracy, citizenship and development: a moral and rights-based understanding of participation

Certain organisations that responded described participation as a fundamental part of the philosophy and culture of the organisation. Thus the improvement of services through participation might be seen as a very desirable, but secondary, effect; with the main aim being to involve homeless people in decision-making and playing an active role in order to begin to work towards undoing the effects of being marginalised from decision-making and citizenship within society. Thus the organisation "Nuevo Albergó Popolare" in Italy, for example, has organised the entire running of its services starting from this principle and sees its services as embodying a "kind of pro-active citizenship for people who used to be marginalised." This understanding of participation is strongly grounded in rights – the right of homeless people to be democratically involved in the organisation of the services - but also the wish to empower them to exercise their rights as citizens in society. It can be an

attempt to build meaning in relation to this period in the service user's life and to highlight the importance of being present where decisions are taken. Thus participation is a vital part of social reintegration.

This understanding of participation is also a consciously "people-centred" one. In promoting participation, the service providers are seeking to actively shift from a view of service users as people with needs, to a view of service users as a resource and as actors. It is based on the understanding that the service users are the main actors in their situation and that they are the main actors in the solution. The Hungarian Salvation Army explains that participation within its structures grows from its fundamental and Christian belief that the world can only be changed by people who are themselves transformed (by the grace of God), so change must begin from the person. While the organisation Centrum voor Dienstverlening in the Netherlands works on the basis of seeing the service users as a "mirror" (ie: reflecting quality) and as a "counter partner" (ie: a partner of equal weight in all processes relating to the service).

While understandings of participation vary somewhat and the aims which underpin them may be different, the forms taken by participation tend, nonetheless, to be quite similar from country to country, as we will see in the next section.

Forms of participation

Universal Practices:

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Some practices of participation were common to the vast majority of the respondents to the questionnaire. Service providers from all parts of the EU highlighted their experience that active participation of homeless people in the design and implementation of their care and reintegration plan is absolutely fundamental to its success. This is a principle that almost all service providers try to implement as far as possible. In some cases, such as in FILOS in Spain, one-to-one planning meetings with the service user and social worker, and occasionally another staff representative, are also the forum for all general consultation and feedback about the quality of the services and satisfaction with them. Some form or other of participation through meetings of, and with, service users, is present in almost all of the organisations that responded. The forms that these meetings take vary somewhat in accordance with the nature of the project or service and the aims of the meeting. Some widespread examples are examined below.

User meetings in residential projects and day centres

Where service users are residents in a given structure, participation often takes the form of residents' meetings. These are usually organised on a regular and recurring basis. Similar meetings take place in day centres, though participation may be less and there is greater turnover in attendance. The questionnaire responses suggest that such meetings are more frequent in smaller projects, where the residents are very involved in the day to day running. The meetings, which are generally weekly, serve to allow problems to be uncovered and dealt with quickly and are also a good forum for planning the day-to-day running of common tasks and living. This type of meeting was highlighted by such projects as a shelter for homeless women in Hungary, a small user-run recycling project within the organisation Klimaka in Greece, a residential project run by Habitat et

Humanisme in France, and in relation to the running of flats that are managed by Arrels Fundacio in Spain.

In larger projects and shelters, it would seem that meetings are more often monthly or even quarterly. Similarly, these meetings may address practical problems within the service. Often, they also seek to consult and involve service users in developing leisure or cultural projects. Larger shelters and centres in Estonia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark and others described meetings of this kind. One example of such meetings came from France. In most large-scale services within the French national umbrella organisation "FNARS" there is a "Conseil de Vie Sociale" ("Social Life Council). France is one of the respondent countries where creating mechanisms for engaging service users in participation is a statutory obligation. Unusually, the law does not specify a form for participation, but leaves it up to services themselves to elaborate to effective forms. The Social Life Council is quite a widespread practice, though often in combination with other forms of participation. This council is a general assembly of all residents that wish to attend. In practice, about sixty per cent of residents tend to participate, with others being in a state of confusion and vulnerability that would make it impossible for them to take part. This council meets every quarter. The chair and secretary of the council are elected by the residents, in general by secret ballot. The organisation is represented by the director, but social workers, an elected staff representative and a voluntary administrator are also present. The council is not a decision-making structure, however, and does not exercise powers over the functioning of the organisation. It is intended primarily as a forum for debate and exchange. It looks at questions related to the services provided, the building, the service rules and house rules, how people relate within the structures, leisure and cultural activities etc. The council is governed by rules. Attendants must ask for the floor and may not use the council as a forum for settling personal scores or dealing with personal conflicts. The agenda is distributed eight days in advance and all resi-

dents may add items to it. Minutes are also kept. The meetings end with a gathering in the cafeteria. The functioning of the Council is evaluated each year.

Periodic assemblies for consultation on a specific matter

As well as these regular meetings, many organisations have a system whereby a meeting can be called in case of a problem. At the simplest level, many organisations stated that the service users have the option of approaching the director and meeting to resolve specific issues. This is the case in the Kofoed's School in Denmark, for example. More formal procedures for organising meetings following a specific complaint are to be found in countries where participation is a statutory obligation. Thus, in Hungary, the respondents explained that there is a body called an "advocacy forum" that has to be put in place by service providers. It is a representative body with some decision-making powers. It generally meets once a quarter, but there is a procedure whereby a forum meeting must be called within thirty days of a user complaint. The forum consists of two service users, one relative of a service user,

one person from the staff team, and one person to represent the organisation or institution, assigned by the director. This forum can give an opinion on the services provided. It can also discuss complaints and define and initiate the measures to be taken in response.

Formal meetings between user and administrative representatives.

The Hungarian "advocacy forum" described above, is an example of a formal meeting between user and administrative representatives, though it is one that meets in both ordinary and exceptional circumstances. Similar structures exist elsewhere, though without the possibility of being called on an ad hoc basis to deal with complaints. In other countries user representative groups represent service users at administrative meetings within the organisation. In St Mungo's in the UK, service user focus groups on given questions feed into the discussion on these issues within the administrative structure of the organisation. In the Netherlands, organisations have a "Client Board" which looks all year long at issues of user satisfaction, effectiveness of services etc. and meets regularly with the administration.

Informal discussion groups and project working groups

Many organisations described a system of informal meetings that has been put in place for users to share and exchange ideas and discuss whatever issues they wish. Sometimes, when there is a good dynamic, these groups develop and focus on a specific project and develop into a kind of project working group. Some examples included a group in Kofoed's School in Denmark that worked, in cooperation with staff, to set up a street paper. In Habitat et Humanisme in France, a user-led group organised a football tournament between different organisations in the city. Many organisations mentioned that participation groups also often lead to service users interacting directly with the media on issues related to their situation and to services available to them. This was highlighted by organisations in the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain and Greece.

Parallel Participation: Consultation through questionnaires

Consultation in the form of satisfaction questionnaires and suggestion boxes is quite a widespread way of gathering users' opinions. Many of the service providers who responded ask all service users to fill out a questionnaire evaluating the service before leaving it. Other services distribute a questionnaire every so often to the users of the service at the time. These are used as a resource to develop and improve the service. Services in France and in the UK often provide a suggestion box or copybook for service users to communicate suggestions, but also complaints. These may then be discussed in meetings with service users.

Participation through passing over responsibility to service users for some practical aspects of the service

This practice was mentioned in the preceding section on understandings of participation. It is something practiced by certain organisations that responded, where the nature of the services made these practices feasible.

The aim is to create ownership, involvement and empowerment by making the service users actors within the service. Organisations in France, Spain and the UK highlighted their practice of involving service users in practical duties such as cleaning, cooking, transport, bed-making etc., often on a voluntary basis.

Participation by organising training and exchanges on this theme

Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk of Belgium provides training on participation to the organisations of in its network. This has been quite successful and useful exchanges on this theme have resulted. In France too, exchanges at national and regional level of the network organisations of FNARS takes place on the theme of participation. The organisations present successful practices, usually involving the users in the presentation and in the discussion. These exchanges are also considered fruitful by the organisations in the network. In the UK, Groundswell, which promotes and develops self-help initiatives for homeless people, provides training on the theme of effective participation to interested organisations. One of the other organisations that responded, St Mungo's, has benefited from this training and has found it a very good way of moving towards good participation within its structures.

This section has sought to provide an overview of the common and widespread participation practices highlighted by the majority of the respondent organisations. There were also some innovative practices however, that do not fit within this general framework. These included "peer research", which operates on the principles of homeless people researching issues related to homelessness; involvement of homeless people in policy-making at local level through participative structures; training homeless people to become service providers within the service and the creation of a users' network which operates side by side with other service providers. These will be set out in detail in the final section "Innovative practice: a closer look".

Benefits of participation

Participation as a part of the way of working – a step towards social reintegration

All of the organisations that responded were very positive about the impact of participation. Though implementing good participation is not always easy, there was a sense from the questionnaires that it is almost a relief to get participation structures in place, as it responds to a need that service providers have become increasingly aware of. Within the organisations there has long been a strong feeling that users ought to be closely involved in designing and implementing services, and seeing this take shape is very satisfying, even if it is not a smooth process. As St Mungo's from the UK put it: "We have long had the will to be involved in this aspect of our work. The main barrier has always been not knowing how to do it effectively." Similarly in Ireland, the Simon Communities of Ireland are in the process of building expertise in this area, as they feel it is currently lacking in their services and it is something they want to build on. In France, FNARS explained that, though the law passed in 2002 made participation a statutory obligation, many of the practices in this area predated this law because "participation is a part of the aim and the *raison d'être* of the organisation: that is, social reintegration". The same sentiment was echoed by Danish organisation SBS §94 Samarbejdende boformer efter servicelovens, who, when describing why they have become involved in participation, said that: "we find it ethically correct to do so. If we want a sustainable solution it is absolutely necessary to involve the users". The fact that almost all respondents named the influence of their service users as one of the reasons that they have implemented participation within their structures, also points to this underlying conviction that participation is something that should be a part of their way of working. It was strongly felt that participation was a positive step towards social reintegration and that this is its essential value.

Improved services – staff and user satisfaction

Though participation had a greater impact on services and ways of working for some more than others, all felt that the overall benefits were undeniable. Almost all of the organisations that responded said that more effective, targeted and useful services were the result of the participation of users in the conception and organisation of services. The respondents emphasised that participation has given a better understanding of the real needs of the service users and that this enabled them to respond in a focused and realistic way. Caritas in Luxemburg also highlighted the fact that "the view of users about the aims and functioning of the services often diverges quite a bit from the official aim and functioning (that is, the view of the staff and of the organisation as a whole.)"

Staff and user satisfaction are also a result of participation. Service users generally find the services of better quality when they have been involved in shaping them to respond to their needs and priorities. Many service providers felt that greater confidence, empowerment and personal investment in decision-making processes were some of the positive benefits that resulted for the service users. This in turn serves to improve relations between staff and users.

Political legitimacy of the organisation

Service providers in Germany, Italy and the Netherlands particularly highlighted greater political legitimacy of the organisation as one of the positive results of participation. Generally, organisations felt that political advocacy strategies and contact with the media are more successful when based on participation.

Breaking down barriers and “shaking up” perceptions

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Certain respondent organisations described how engaging in participation has forced them to rethink certain perceptions that they may consciously, or subconsciously, have held. At a very simple level, several organisations described the importance of seeing homeless people as adults. Respondent organisations also described how they have shifted their views in order to see homeless people as partners and as actors in their own situation. All felt that this was a very positive shift.

Barriers and Pitfalls

Though all of the organisations warmly welcomed the benefits of participations, there were none for whom promoting participations had been a smooth process without setbacks and problems. In many cases, these problems or barriers may be ongoing.

Overly high expectations

Most of the organisations recognised that putting in place real participation of homeless people within the structures of the organisation can be a difficult task and warned that overly high expectations can be a barrier. Many organisations warned that participation can be a struggle at first and that many service providers can feel that service users don't want to participate and can be disappointed that the meetings are not an immediate success. Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk of Belgium also warned against making the participation procedures too formal and complicated, as this can be intimidating and service users can lose interest. Groundswell in the UK pointed out that "sometimes service users can become disillusioned if gestures offered feel token." Thus it is clear that very high expectations, particularly in the initial stages, can constitute a real pitfall for participation.

Pragmatic considerations: health, substance abuse and short-term stays

Many of the respondent organisations named substance abuse and illness as a barrier to effective participation of homeless people. Mental health problems and behavioural problems related to substance abuse can simply mean that participation is not an option. The fragile and vulnerable state of many service users can mean that taking on responsibility and an active role within the service is beyond their capabilities, for a period at least. Nor may they have the confidence to take on this kind of active role. These factors are a problem in relation to all forms of participation whether meetings, questionnaires or participation in projects or in the running of

the service. The fact that many organisations only offer their services on a short-term basis is also a barrier to certain types of participation. There is hardly time to engage in many of the forms of participation described in this report, and indeed the short-term services that contributed to this audit tend to limit themselves to the system of questionnaires and suggestion boxes and to involvement of homeless people in the development of their own service plan. There is also the fact that service users who will only be present in the service on a short-term basis may not feel any real desire or motivation to get involved in it.

"Taking over" of participation

As was mentioned in the first section above, there is a strong possibility that participation may initially be slow and difficult. Some organisations named frustration and the 'taking over' of the running of participation meetings by the staff, as a pitfall to be avoided. Patience and time are needed for participation to work. On the other hand, there were also organisations that highlighted the pitfalls of certain users taking over the participation process to the extent of alienating others from it. While it is very positive that the participation process can show up the leadership qualities of certain service-users, it is important that dominance of one, or a small number of service users, does not lead to others being excluded.

Practical barriers

Some organisations felt that practical considerations related to time and money prevented them from doing as much as they would like. They felt unable to stretch their resources to encompass new activities, despite being motivated to do so.

Another barrier was highlighted by only one organisation: Armada Spasy from the Czech Republic said that participation within their structures is hindered by a fear among service users that there is a risk attached to crit-

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icising the service. They explained that “the concept of meeting with the director has still to overcome the belief that someone who speaks out against the organisation will be penalised in some way. Even though this is not true, it is still a belief of service users”. This problem would seem to be a legacy of the former communist regime. While it was not mentioned by other respondents, it is certainly possible that this particular barrier exists in certain other new member States.

Problematic contradiction between involvement and moving on

Many organisations highlighted a reservation about participation that had made itself felt over time, namely that there is a problematic contradiction between close involvement of homeless people in the running of the services on the one hand, and wanting them to be able to move on, probably in quite a short period, from that service on the other hand. This can be quite a dilemma, as under no circumstances do they want participation to become something that would cause the service user to stay on in the service, which is, after all, intended to be transitional.

Some innovative practice: a closer look

Spain: Associacio Rauxa – training users to join the staff

The Associació RAUXA is a non-profit homelessness organisation mainly run by volunteers. Its main objective is to alleviate chronic homelessness. It offers services to the chronically homeless, mostly alcoholics, through the offer of treatment for alcohol addiction and addiction to other drugs. The treatment goes through the following phases and generally takes about two and a half years:

- 1) Offer of an outreach resource at street level: Furgoneta Rauxa (Rauxa Van), a van with six berths (started in January 1990).
- 2) Offer of an Urban Therapeutic Community with 18 beds (started in February 1991), where it began as a treatment centre for alcohol addiction.
- 3) Offer of Rauxa Flats (started in December 1992), eight at the moment, where the social rehabilitation is carried on.
- 4) Offer of Labour Rehabilitation Resources:
 - Labour Co-operative Rauxa (started October 1994).
 - Restaurant "La Terrasseta" without alcohol, where 134 suppers are offered daily for free (opened in May 2000).
- 5) The aim is that at the discharge, patients maintain a different life-style, free of drugs and addiction.

This organisation also has the interesting possibility of offering its service users a chance of being trained in order to join the staff. This system has been in place for at least ten years.

Service users who are able, can choose whether they would like to follow a course of study in order to be prepared to work in a professional capacity within the organisation. Those that successfully take the course get basic degrees as "auxiliares de clínica" (clinical auxiliary) or "auxiliares de psiquiatria" (psychiatric auxiliary). Many attend a specialized course of 700 hours at the "Toxicomanias" (Drug addiction) Unit at the St Pablo hospital, which is given by very good professionals.

Furthermore, any person that goes to work or volunteers in Associacio Rauxa has to do a basic course about alcoholism given at the centre by the Doctor who is at the head of the centre and by a rehabilitated former alcoholic or drug user.

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Netherlands and Denmark: Involvement of Homeless and Formerly Homeless People in Policy-making

NETHERLANDS: CLIENT COUNCILS PARTICIPATE IN POLICY-MAKING AT LOCAL LEVEL

The organisation in the Netherlands, Centrum voor Dienstverlening, described in its response the client boards that have been put in place in services in line with the statutory obligation to promote participation. These boards are entirely made up of service-users and function alongside the rest of the service. They examine various issues in relation to service provision and have to give an opinion and be included in applications for funding and so on, without which the request for funding will not be accepted. The Client Board advises the administrative board on client perspectives when there are new initiatives planned.

The local government is also very keen on working with the Client Board, and to get their input when a new development or initiative in the local communities or boroughs is planned. It is common practice for the client boards to have annual meetings with the City Government on the issues of care and public safety. They also organize meetings with politicians and citizens if there's a major change of legislation or as a form of social political action.

This is in part due to the fact that client boards are an established phenomenon in the Netherlands across the social sector. They are a major influence on politics in the area of care. Certain client boards, such as those which represent disabled people, are very influential. If the client boards for the homeless reach this kind of

influence and political power, the position of homeless people would be advanced.

DENMARK: COUNCIL FOR SOCIALLY MARGINALIZED PEOPLE

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This national policy initiative in Denmark was mentioned by the Danish respondents. FEANTSA member organisations SAND and Projekt Udenfor are involved in it.

Terms of reference for the Council for Socially Marginalized People:

Virtually all groups in the Danish society have their own mouthpiece to represent them and they are often very large, efficient organisations, but this is not always the case for the weakest groups. The government has tried to remedy this by creating a body to represent vulnerable and socially marginalized groups: the Council for Socially Marginalized People. Socially marginalized people are primarily defined as homeless people, drug addicts, prostitutes, mentally ill people, alcoholics, etc.

The Council is appointed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, though it remains independent of the ministry. The Council for Socially Marginalized People measures the progress of social initiatives for the benefit of the weakest groups against the government action programme. It prepares an annual report on the situation of the weakest groups and presents proposals for improved initiatives aimed at them, including proposals for how the civil society can continue its involvement in solving problems. As required, the government consults Council.

The Council is made up of 8-12 members appointed personally by virtue of their special insight into, and practical experience of, the various areas. It is assisted by a secretariat under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs. At present, the Council includes a formerly homeless person, a person who has suffered from mental illness, mental and physical health workers and various service provider representatives.

COUNCIL STRATEGIES

Based on its terms of reference, the Council for Socially Marginalized People works to improve both short and long-term conditions for the group of socially marginalized people. The strategy is two-pronged: firstly, to increase the understanding in society of socially marginalized groups and secondly (which is closely related to the first) to increase socially marginalized people's own chances of participation and of making themselves heard in the public debate.

For the Council, treating socially marginalized people on an equal footing with all other citizens involves three interconnected dimensions:

- social inclusion and integration
- a reasonable level of living
- participation in activities, including the labour market

It seeks to increase the understanding of the dimensions among players in society, i.e. in political life, both at central and local levels, in the corporate sector, in the labour market, in association activities and among ordinary citizens. The Council tries to increase awareness of the actual conditions under which socially marginalized people are living, of how they are affected by general trends in society and of how planned and adopted political intervention affects their conditions.

A full list of the proposals made by the council in its first year can be found at: www.udsatte.dk

Peer Research in the UK and Ireland

This is a type of participation that was described in two of the questionnaire responses received, one from Groundswell in the UK and one from the Heart Project in Ireland. However, this type of project does not seem widespread and none of the other organisations mentioned anything similar.

Groundswell: Peer research is described as “utilizing people with experience of homelessness to conduct questionnaires, focus groups etc with currently homeless people”. Groundswell also considers it to be one of its very successful initiatives.

OSW's recent research report 'No Home, No Job: moving on from transitional spaces', which presents homeless people's experience of trying to move towards or into employment was carried out by individuals who themselves had been homeless - that is to say, peer researchers. The Groundswell UK volunteer peer research team fulfilled this role and it comprised seven researchers.

All peer researchers had previously received training in research and interview techniques. To ensure consistent standards in this research, they also attended a specially designed 'top-up' course on conducting interviews and facilitating focus groups. During the training sessions, the peer researchers reviewed the draft survey, interview schedules and focus-group questions. They were able to draw upon their experience and suggested many changes to the draft document.

This approach proved highly successful, as was stated in the report itself: "The involvement of peer researchers in shaping the methodology and in carrying out the surveys, interviews and focus groups made a significant difference to the level and quality of data captured. Many of the [homeless] respondents, for example, said that they would not have been as open and forthcoming about their experiences if the interviewer had not themselves had personal experience of some of the issues. Furthermore, many of the respondents felt that the peer researchers were role models, inspiring them to become more involved in shaping homelessness services."

Indeed, it was so successful that OSW have used it again to conduct research into homeless people's experiences of and aspirations towards volunteering

The Heart Project: This is an Irish project that corresponds to what Groundswell describes as "peer research". The focus of the peer research actually being carried out is also participation, which Irish FEANTSA members confirmed is a relatively undeveloped area of their work, though one which they increasingly wish to focus on. The project began officially in October 2004.

HEART stands for Homeless Empowerment Action Research Team. The project was set up in response to user led research which looked at mental health services in the western health board. The study also highlighted the need to ensure that services have 'an open and honest approach, address discrimination, provide an equitable service and address issues that affect homeless people'. The method is participatory action research which involves participants in all aspects of the study and acknowledges the participants as having ownership of the research. Its aims are:

- Creation of partnerships between service users and service providers, ensuring more effective services.
- To facilitate the empowerment of service users and to evaluate services from the direct experiences of homeless people.
- For the results of the survey to be used to inform the planning of a range of statutory and voluntary services in the homelessness sector.
- The development of a model of user involvement that can be applied in organisations working with homeless people.

The project is now six months into its work. The research team are devising a questionnaire which has come from their own direct experiences of being homeless. This is the core of the participatory research method. Research will be carried out between May and July, which will include questionnaires, focus groups, interviews as well as primary and secondary research.

When the project comes to an end, the aim is to have a service user forum in place which will be able to feed into the ongoing planning and development of services in the Galway area.

Participation Network in Germany: The Federal Service Users Initiative (Die Bundesbetroffeneninitiative - BBI)

The Federal Service Users Initiative (BBI) has existed as an independent organisation for ten years. Support from the national umbrella organisation of homelessness

service providers Bag-Wohnungslosenhilfe helped this initiative to get off the ground. The BBI existed as an initiative in 1992-93. It came about through the efforts of homeless people in Berlin, Cologne, Braunschweig and from various South German cities. It was founded as an organisation in 1994. According to the statutes of the organisation, its aim and mission is to represent the interests of homeless people in Germany to the State, to the social protection system and to society.

The needs and expectations of homeless people have changed decisively over the past few years in Germany. With the improved quality of integration work, more general goals have become increasingly important: such as having an input into the services for homeless people; human rights policy work on minority groups; and political participation on the basis of a political mandate. The BBI sees its task as observation, on the basis of these goals, of the developments within different organisations and initiatives, as well as involvement in social politics at national level. The BBI is now seen as having developed into a fully-fledged organisation, one which came into being through its own means and for its own ends.

The first years for the new organisation were very hard. When the BBI went from being an initiative within the framework of the national umbrella BAGW to being an independent organisation, it lost the material advantages that BAGW had put at its disposal. The new organisation began its work without sufficient money, without premises and without technical equipment. The organisation has spent 10 years teetering on the brink of material collapse. Only by taking the consistent line that all projects and activities of the organisation have to be financed by the participants, has its work been possible at all.

From 1990 to 2000, Federal funds were still available for BBI conferences. A yearly conference of 2-3 days was far too little for any real strategies to emerge, however. There was no real sense of continuity in these early years. Every year there was a new team and new repre-

sentatives. Conflicts and power struggles were an ongoing problem, as were the lack of financial means and of a system or protocol. Agreement remained elusive. It was a rather bitter experience: it seemed that homeless people weren't able to undertake lobby work concerning their own life situation.

The turning point of the development of the BBI came with the founding of a regional level organisation with officially recognised status (LAG – Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft) in the Land Baden-Württemberg and the readiness of committed people from Cologne, Berlin, Freiburg, Karlsruhe, Offenburg to act in consequence. Despite understandable difficulties, a stable network gradually developed. Since then, homeless people from about a dozen organisations have become involved in the BBI. The executive committee meets 5-6 times annually, the membership perhaps twice. This is also made possible by the willingness of service providers in these cities to host the meetings of the BBI.

With support of the membership, the BBI works in a range of areas all year round:

Preparation of meetings of the membership, informing of the public.

- Participation in meetings of homelessness service providers on themes such as expulsion policies in Germany, social policy changes in the context of the agenda of 2010 etc.
- Participation in the two-year federal conferences of the BAGW through organising a workshop or through participation in a thematic workshop.
- Meetings with the street papers of Germany.
- Development of policy position papers on social policy changes in the areas of health, labour and the hardening of expulsion practices at local level.
- Increased discussions with homelessness service providers in Germany on the application of key concepts in social work.
- Cooperation in the specialized committees of the BAGW and in conferences and meetings organised by the Catholic and Evangelical homelessness services.

- Participation in the annual “Berbertreffen” (annual gathering of people from the Berber cultural tradition) in Offenburg.
- Help and support for meetings of individual projects in Germany.
- Publication of experiences and opinions

Close dialogue and cooperation with the national homelessness service provider umbrella organisation BAGW has grown up. The national conferences that BAGW organises, its seminars and conferences and its lobbying work would no longer be complete without the contribution of the BBI. The BBI is involved as an equal partner in the decision-making processes around these events and it is something that both organisations are very happy about.

In its 2001 programme of work, BAGW adopted a clear position on participation of homeless people: “we affirm the freedom and the majority of service users. This must be expressed through respect of their rights to choose and their freedom to accept or reject services, through working as equal partners in the development and integration process and through the respect of the right of self-determination. Our goal for homeless people is self-determination, acceptance of different lifestyles, material security, the building up of community networks through self-organisation and the strengthening of participative policy-making.”

Conclusions

- The FEANTSA members who responded felt that good participation was a vital facet of their work and one which many are planning to continue to develop, and invest in, in the future. For some of the respondent organisations, it was a relatively new element of their work, particularly in such forms as user meetings and consultation. However, it is clear that participation is now a clearly established principle and practice among many service providers across the fifteen member States that responded positively to this questionnaire. It has even been written into law in Hungary, Denmark, France and the Netherlands.
- All of the respondents expressed their belief that participation has a positive impact on the quality of their services and on relationship between staff and users within the service. Other positive outcomes that reoccurred in the responses were empowerment and progress towards reintegration on the part of the users. A belief that promoting participation is part of a democratic, ethical and rights-based approach to providing services was also expressed by certain organisations.
- All of the respondents admitted that substance abuse, illness and the vulnerability that homelessness creates can be real barriers to participation. However, there was a pragmatic feeling that these problems constitute a part of their every day work and that they are a part of the framework in which they operate and within which it is still desirable that participation should take place.
- Other barriers and pitfalls, such as overly high expectations, complicated procedures, initial frustration and inexperience, can be overcome with time and effort.
- The respondents also expressed interest in the participation audit and in finding out more about what is going on in other countries. Some countries, such as

Spain, felt that this is useful theme to consider at this time, as a statutory obligation to put in place certain practices in the area of participation is likely in the future.

- **Participatory Democracy:**

Finally, it is clear in this report, that the efforts made by FEANTSA's members to put in place good participation structures are underpinned, in many cases, by a desire to be democratic and to promote a sense of involvement and even citizenship. Thus it is clear that it is important to look beyond the practicalities of participation in the day-to-day working of services to see its inherent value in a wider context. Participation is also about seeing vulnerable people as full citizens with a place in society and about bridging the democratic divide that can cut off marginalised groups from the decision-making that affects them and impacts on their lives. Participation is about recognising the fact that homeless people and poor people should be able to express their views and opinions on the very situation that they have lived and that their first-hand knowledge of the issues impacting on homelessness and poverty is very valuable if real progress in policy-making is to be achieved in the long-term.

This is why it is important also to consider even the most simple participation structures put in place by service providers in terms of empowerment. The fact of being able to participate in a pragmatic way within homeless services can be a valuable step towards being heard in a wider forum. As this audit has shown, participation of homeless people in local and even national decision-making processes is slowly becoming a reality in some countries. The voices of homeless people in wider circles are also being heard through their participation in research and even their leading role in research projects such as those in Ireland and the UK, described in this report.

Each year for the past four years, the Presidency of the EU and the European Anti-Poverty Network has organised the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty. The conference brings together people who are experiencing poverty from across the EU to meet and exchange and especially to make their voices heard at European level and to recall the objective the EU set itself of eradicating poverty. In 2005, the opening speaker at the conference was Bruno Goncalvez, a participant from Portugal. In his speech, he highlighted how full participation is the basis of citizenship and the rights of others.

“I believe that only a social Europe that guarantees the enjoyment of rights, the respect of the fundamental principle of living in dignity for each person, no matter what their country, ethnic origin, religion or gender, can offer real citizenship. That is what I expect from Europe: a true Europe that ensures equal rights and the possibility for all citizens to participate in all aspects of life, to be heard locally, nationally and in the European institutions. This respect and this communication is the only way to build a truly social Europe. ”

Annexe 1 : The participation questionnaire

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Questionnaire for a Participation Audit

The involvement of homeless people in the decision-making processes affecting the services that they use

Brussels February 2005

Preamble:

What is participation?

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The term “participation” is intended to denote full inclusion in decision-making processes. It is a term often used in discussions of citizenship, as participating in the democratic process at national level is a part of fully exercising ones rights as a citizen. However, this same principle is increasingly finding its place within the decision-making practices of non-political bodies seeking to operate in an inclusive and democratic way.

In the context of this questionnaire, we will define participation as “the involvement of homeless people in service design and/or the decision-making processes affecting the services that they use.”

Aim of the Participation Audit

This questionnaire seeks to establish an overview of participation of homeless people in decision-making affecting the services that they use across Europe. FEANTSA is aware that the experience of participation will vary a lot from country to country and from organisation to organisation.

This audit is meant to take a snapshot of where we are now, what practice is out there, and what issues there are for agencies. FEANTSA hopes that the information gathered will feed into a learning process on this question.

Questions about this audit

Should you have any queries relating to the content or the practical aspects of this audit, please do not hesitate to contact:

Dearbhal.Murphy@feantsa.org

Tel: 0032 25344930

Deadline for returns

The deadline for the return of the questionnaire is **Monday the 4th of April**.

Questionnaire

Q1: Does your organisation have a specific definition for "participation", or a clear understanding of the term that you use in your work?

- Yes No

If Yes, please describe.

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Q2: Does your organisation have experience of participation?

- Yes No

If you ticked No to Q2, please go to Q8 of this questionnaire.

If you ticked Yes to Q2, please indicate below any activities that apply:

- Informal exchanges and consultation on a one-to-one basis by staff
- An on-going group where service users can make an input
- Occasional or one-off meetings for homeless people to have an input
- Participation of homeless people in the existing decision-making structures of your organization, e.g. service user representative on your governing board, etc.
- Service user involvement in recruitment of staff
- Training for homeless people to empower them to participate in decision-making that affects them beyond the framework of your organisation and its activities.
- Other (Please describe)

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Q3: If you said yes to Q2, can you please provide more detail concerning the activities undertaken by your organisation in this area.

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Q4: Why has your organisation become active in promoting participation of homeless people?

- We are under a statutory obligation to do so.
- It is a requirement of our funding .
- Our stakeholders wanted us to take this direction.
- Our service users influenced us to take this action.
- Other (please describe)

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Q5: Has your organisation undertaken any activities in this area that you consider to have been very successful? If so, please describe them.

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Q6: What have the barriers or pitfalls been? What hasn't gone well?

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Q7: What difference has it made to your organization or services?

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Q8: If you said NO to question 2, is there any particular reason?

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Annexe 2: Respondent Organisations

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- Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk (Belgium)
- Armada Spasy (Czech Republic)
- SBS §94 Samarbejdende boformer efter servicelovens (Denmark)
- Koefoeds Skole (Denmark)
- Tallinna Hoolekande Keskus (Estonia)
- FNARS (France)
- FAPIL (France)
- Habitat et Humanisme (France)
- BAGW (Germany)
- Klimaka (Greece)
- Salvation Army (Hungary)
- Women's Shelter run by the Salvation Army (Hungary)
- ReFomix (Hungary)
- Heart Project – Cope (Ireland)
- Simon Communities of Ireland (Ireland)
- Nuovo Albergo Popolare – Opera Bonomelli du Bergamo (Italy)
- FIO.psd (Italy)
- Caritas Luxemburg (Luxemburg)
- Smo-Helmond (Netherlands)
- De Bocht (Netherlands)
- Kessler Stichting (Netherlands)
- Centrum voor Dienstverlening (Netherlands)
- Serviço Jesuíta aos Refugiados (Portugal)
- Arrels Fundació (Spain)
- FILOS (Spain)
- Association Rauxa (Spain)
- AEP Desenvolupament Comunitari (Spain)
- The Swedish Network For Housing and Homelessness Issues (Sweden)
- St Mungo's (UK)
- Groundswell (UK)
- The Connection at St. Martin's (UK)
- Thames Reach Bondway(UK)
- Depaul Trust (UK)
- Off the Streets and into Work (UK)
- UK: Two unidentified organisations from the UK sent completed questionnaires by post and by fax, but omitted to provide names and contact details.



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**Tackling Multiple Disadvantage in
London by Improving Employability**