

FEANTSA Statement

The urgent need to tackle homelessness : a key message of the 2007 Joint report on social protection and social inclusion

March 2007

Policy context

The Council adopted the Commission proposal for a Joint Report on social protection and social inclusion on 22 February 2007. This edition of the Joint Report draws on the National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion which the Member States submitted September 2006, and reviews the main trends across the EU and at national level.

The report was submitted to the Spring European Council to inform Heads of State and Government on the progress in the area of social protection and social inclusion. The aim is for the key messages emerging from the report to drive policy efforts in the areas of social protection and social inclusion over the next couple of years in EU-27.

Under the section on active inclusion, 3 main key challenges in Europe have been highlighted: **homelessness and housing exclusion**, social inclusion of ethnic minorities, and labour market integration of people with disabilities.

The Joint reports 2001-2007: emergence of homelessness on the EU agenda

FEANTSA has followed the EU social inclusion strategy since the beginning (2001-2006) and has seen the emergence of tackling homelessness and improving access to decent housing as key priorities for anti-poverty policy at EU level. The NAPsIncl have indicated a clear change in the importance attached to homelessness and housing in the different EU Member States, which is clear from the evaluation reports produced by the European Commission over the past 5 years: from homelessness and housing as urgent policy issues for some Member States (1st Joint Inclusion Report [2001](#)), for most Member States (2nd Joint Inclusion report [2004](#)), for all new Member States (Report on NAPsIncl of new Member States [2005](#)), to homelessness as one of the 7 key priorities for all 25 Member States (1st Joint Report Social Protection & Social Inclusion [2005](#)).

The increased importance attached to homelessness under the EU social inclusion strategy was confirmed by the EPSCO Council in March 2005. In the conclusions of the Council meeting, all EU25 Employment and Social Affairs Ministers agreed on key social inclusion priorities for the future (see [Council 2005 Press Release](#)):

p. 8 "Social inclusion measures must essentially aim at combating the deep causes of poverty and exclusion, and priority actions must include:

- the prevention of child poverty;
- supporting the caring capacity of families;
- promoting the equality of men and women and reconciling work and family life;
- the improvement of social services;
- **treatment of the phenomenon of homelessness;**
- the development of new approaches to the integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants."

The important focus on homelessness has **again been confirmed** in the 2007 Joint report on social protection and social inclusion which clearly refers to three priority issues or target groups in relation to "active inclusion".

They include people experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities.

FEANTSA has the following comments regarding some sections on homelessness in the Joint Report 2007:

- The Joint report 2007 comments on the evolution of policies to tackle homelessness: "Some Member States are developing a more structural approach to **housing exclusion and homelessness**, looking at prevention and housing quality rather than mainly rough sleeping." FEANTSA would agree: there is indeed a move towards **tackling the root causes of homelessness** and a greater focus on hidden forms of homelessness, rather than only on visible forms of homelessness like rough sleeping. This reflects the outcomes of the research of the FEANTSA Observatory on homelessness which indicates trends towards crisis intervention together with complementary measures for rehabilitation of people who are homeless, and prevention of homelessness.
- EU countries are indeed developing more "structural approaches" to tackling homelessness given that the problem of housing exclusion and **homelessness now concerns more and more people** including women, children in families, youths, immigrants, people leaving institutions (foster care, prison, medical institutions) who are not necessarily chronically homeless but who end up on the streets or in other forms of homelessness for short periods at a time. The pathways into these short periods of homelessness vary – some research has shown these can generally be due to structural factors, institutional factors, relational factors, or personal factors ([Edgar et al, 2005](#)) – hence some people experiencing homelessness not only have housing needs but also additional support needs (health, employment, etc).
- The Joint Report refers to the challenge of **homelessness as linked to active inclusion** and labour market integration which needs to be "joined up with a range of other services", including housing, health, and social services. Housing is indeed fundamental for effective labour market integration, but we would like to draw attention to the fact that housing is not a privilege or a service, but a **fundamental social right**. Moreover, France and a number of other countries have been heavily debating the possibility of introducing a justiciable right to housing.
- The Supporting Document refers to people experiencing **homelessness as a sub-group in measures aiming to reduce inequalities in access to healthcare**. Indeed, in many of the National Strategy Reports, there are examples of policies or elements of policies that will serve to improve access to services for certain people who are homeless or which will break down some of the barriers that the healthcare system frequently poses for people in a situation of housing exclusion.
- The Supporting Document does not refer to **homeless people as the target of employment programmes** or initiatives for people furthest from the labour market, disadvantaged groups, people at risk of exclusion from the labour market or socially vulnerable groups. Yet, some countries propose activation schemes that specifically target people who are homeless (Czech Republic, Denmark, Spain). It is worth highlighting this gap since people who are homeless (i.e. who have no home) very often belong to the people furthest from the labour market and often face multiple barriers, but many of them can and want to work (See FEANTSA 2007 analysis of the NAPs).
- In the Supporting Document of the Joint Report 2007, homelessness is referred to as "an extreme example of social exclusion." Indeed, all people experiencing homelessness are suffering forms of **extreme poverty**, hence the urgent need to come together on this issue at EU level to develop effective solutions to this societal problem.

Many of the points made on homelessness in the Joint Report 2007 (and the Supporting Document) reflect FEANTSA's [2007 analysis](#) of the recently submitted National Reports on Strategies for social protection and social inclusion of the 27 EU countries which confirm the following:

- Homelessness and access to decent housing are still key priorities for the EU member states
- The need for **urgent action** in providing access to decent and affordable housing, and the need to prevent different forms of homelessness and housing exclusion from increasing in Europe namely rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing and inadequate housing (see [ETHOS](#));
- The **huge potential** for learning on policies tackling homelessness and housing exclusion given that many EU countries are in the process of developing or revising policies in this area;
- **Housing has emerged as an important pillar** of the EU social inclusion and social protection strategy. National reports on social inclusion demonstrate that housing should indeed be an essential element of social welfare in any country;
- Some homelessness strategies presented in the latest National Reports 2006-2008 also include strong **health** and **employment** dimensions.

Follow-up action: Some recommendations

Now that homelessness and other key challenges are clearly on the EU anti-poverty agenda, it is important **to create clear mutual learning processes** around the societal problems covered under the strategy if the EU is to have a genuine impact on alleviating poverty. The EU offers a number of governance tools which enable actors in the social sector (ministries, local authorities, service providers, people experiencing poverty) to benefit from transnational exchanges. It is now time to use the full potential of these specific tools by coming together around the specific themes outlined as priorities in EU anti-poverty policy.

FEANTSA will support follow-up actions to take up the key messages from the Joint Report, and would make the following specific recommendations for action based on its knowledge of homelessness trends in different EU countries and the current momentum:

- **Focus on homelessness/extreme poverty in the Round Table on social inclusion organised by the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union in October 2007**

The annual Round Table on social inclusion is a key European awareness raising event with a view to promote dialogue between all stakeholders involved in the fight against poverty. The event is jointly organised by the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. The Round Table generally builds on the key messages from the NAPs and the Joint Report. FEANTSA would therefore encourage the Portuguese Presidency to build on the key challenges outlined in the Joint Report 2007 - namely child poverty, homelessness, inclusion of ethnic minorities and integration of people with disabilities - given that there clearly is a consensus around these issues at EU level. Given the obvious concern expressed in the NAPs around these issues, the time is right to bring people together around these themes at the 2007 Round Table.

- **Take initiatives for the improvement homelessness measurement in the EU**

A number of countries measure homelessness, although not all. Moreover, not all available data is comparable at EU level. In order to facilitate the development of indicators and measurement of homelessness trends at EU level, the European Commission has just published a Study on the measurement of homelessness in Europe. This study makes very clear recommendations - both to national administrations and to the European Commission - on ways to improve and coordinate the measurement of homelessness in Europe, and can serve as a basis for exchanges and learning on homelessness in different EU countries. Initiatives are already being



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taken at national level to improve measurement of homelessness as a first step in developing a homelessness strategy, and the Commission Study is an important toolkit which can support such work.

- **Organise a Light year 2009 on the issue of homelessness**

As one of the main societal problems dealt with under the Social Inclusion process, homelessness and housing exclusion could lead to interesting peer reviews and exchanges at different levels (NGOs, local authorities, parliaments, universities, ministries) in the framework of a light year on homelessness. FEANTSA, as the main network focusing on homelessness in Europe, could support and facilitate such transnational exchanges between different actors on by using its expertise and contacts to foster cooperation between different levels of government (from local to international) and different partners involved in the fight against homelessness.

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