



FEANTSA

Policy Statement

December 2008

# Access to Employment for People experiencing Homelessness

## Recommendations for Member States and the European Union

FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless is an umbrella of not-for-profit organisations which participate in or contribute to the fight against homelessness in Europe. It is the only major European network that focuses on homelessness at the European level.

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## **Access to Employment for People experiencing Homelessness** Recommendations for Member States and the European Union

Member States across the European Union are increasingly promoting the “activation” of people far from the labour market as a means to raise employment levels and boost national economies. The inclusion into the labour market is regarded as one of the most effective ways to fight poverty and promote the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups. This commitment at national level is in line with employment objectives at EU level.

However, existing employability initiatives generally fail to reach out to the most excluded groups in society and those people who are the least likely to find employment without support, such as people experiencing homelessness.

This document highlights the shortcomings of European as well as national employment policies and sets out recommendations to make these policies more effective for people experiencing homelessness in the future. The recommendations are based on the findings of **FEANTSA’s European Report 2007 “Multiple Barriers, Multiple Solutions”** which provides an overview about the employment situation of people experiencing homelessness in 16 EU member states.<sup>1</sup>

### **A shared priority - Raising employment levels in Europe**

Full employment is one of the overarching objectives of the Lisbon Strategy for Jobs and Growth of the European Union. Attracting and retaining more people into employment has been identified as one of the key EU priorities. This priority is shared by a number of EU Member States who are eager to increase employment levels of people far from the labour market.

Despite this political commitment, people experiencing homelessness are usually excluded from existing employment programmes. Very often, employment initiatives are not adapted to the multiple needs and aspirations of people experiencing homelessness and have requirements that are too high to fulfil for this group. In addition, structural changes in the labour market have made access to employment more difficult for people with higher support needs and lower qualifications.

### **Employment profiles of people experiencing homelessness**

Homelessness is one of the most extreme forms of exclusion that affects women as well as men throughout Europe. People experiencing homelessness face multiple obstacles in accessing employment and related employability initiatives, including personal, structural and societal barriers.

While the majority of people who are homeless are unemployed or economically inactive, a significant number are working. However, homeless workers are often employed under precarious conditions. Although they work, they are still not able to secure adequate accommodation.

While many people experiencing homelessness have high support needs, they are also an important resource and have skills and experience to offer. Service user surveys show the high importance that people experiencing homelessness attribute to work, even though employment may not be a priority for all immediately.

### **Inclusion into and through employment**

It is clear that for many homeless people, employment will not mean a full-time job in the mainstream labour market, at least not in the short term. In particular people with the experience of street homelessness who are often in a very bad physical and mental health condition may need other forms of support first before engaging with mainstream employment services.

Therefore the concept of “employment” that is promoted in this paper goes beyond the common understanding of “inclusion” into the mainstream labour market. Inclusion into and through employment is rather linked to the active engagement of an individual in all kinds of occupational activities that will improve the employability of the person.

By improving employability we understand the development of skills and competencies that will help an individual to connect with working life and the labour market in general. The focus of activities is therefore

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<sup>1</sup> FEANTSA European Report 2007: Multiple barriers, multiple solutions: Inclusion into and through employment for people who are homeless in Europe:  
[http://www.feantsa.org/files/Employment\\_annual\\_theme/Annual\\_theme\\_documents/European\\_Report/European\\_Report\\_FEANTSA\\_A\\_employment07\\_EN\\_final.pdf](http://www.feantsa.org/files/Employment_annual_theme/Annual_theme_documents/European_Report/European_Report_FEANTSA_A_employment07_EN_final.pdf)



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less on hard outcomes (e.g. the number of people who accessed mainstream employment), but on soft outcomes such as a general improvement of the living conditions of a person (e.g. health, housing, self-confidence).

Improving employability requires the use of a diversity of employability services. These include job placements in the mainstream labour market but also supported employment, i.e. where people receive ongoing financial and/or social support. In addition, training and education is important as well as the opportunity to participate in very low threshold activities such as meaningful occupation and life skills training.

The FEANTSA European Report 2007 clearly demonstrates that with the right support framework in place, it is possible to bring about positive changes in the lives of people experiencing homelessness and help them to move towards employment.

### **Recommendations for Member States**

Member States have a crucial role to play in promoting the employment of excluded people in the European Union. This does not only concern the national but also the regional and local level.

#### **1. Develop employability strategies for the most excluded people**

A number of employment initiatives for very disadvantaged people exist in many EU countries. However, many of these are very limited in their scope and time and do not offer long-term solutions for the participants. What is more, mainstream employment initiatives often fail to provide the individualised and holistic support that many people who are homeless need and therefore indirectly exclude them from participation.

Member States must develop employability strategies for the most excluded people as part of overall employment policies. These strategies have to include the provision of holistic and individualised support for people with multiple needs. In particular for women, access to affordable and adequate child care services is crucial in order to promote their employment. Depending on the different national contexts, it can be useful to develop local action plans and to agree on employment targets for multiply disadvantaged workers.

#### **2. Develop a pathway approach to the employment of people who are homeless and diversify employment services accordingly**

Pathways into employment for people who are homeless will vary from individual to individual. Employability services have to offer a variety of options and various entry points that can be tailored to every individual, ranging from job placements in the mainstream labour market to supported employment, training and education, life-skills training and meaningful occupation. (See Annex)

#### **3. Improve coordination and cooperation of different stakeholders**

A pathway approach to the employment of people who are homeless requires policies that favour the coordination and cooperation of different stakeholders. There is evidence that people experiencing homelessness currently fail to access employability services due to a lack of coordination and cooperation between social services, social partners, employment and homeless services.

To tackle this problem, it has become a good practice in a number of countries to provide tailored employment services and advice within homelessness services. In addition there are good examples of employment offices that offer specialised and individualised support for people with multiple needs in close cooperation with social and/or homeless services.

#### **4. Establish a multi-annual funding system for employability services**

The inclusion into employment for a homeless person often requires several years of support. However, most employment initiatives only run for shorter periods of time due to the nature of the funding. Service provider organisations need to have access to stable and sufficient long-term funding in order to accompany and support people during the inclusion process. Funding for homeless organisations should always include employability measures and these need to be clearly defined in the budget. Good projects developed with ESF and EQUAL funding should be continued with national funding resources. There is evidence that tailored and ongoing services for people experiencing homelessness will be less costly in the long-term than ad-hoc emergency interventions.



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### **5. Provide supported employment as an alternative for people with multiple needs**

Supported employment is a key element of effective employment strategies for people experiencing homelessness. It provides both a long term employment option for people with multiple needs as well as a step towards mainstream employment. However, supported employment should not be the automatic option for people experiencing homelessness. It is important that supported jobs are offered to the people who are in most need and who are least likely to access mainstream employment. While the time that a person can benefit from supported employment should not be limited, a regular assessment of development and progress should ensure that an effective transition from supported employment into the mainstream labour market is encouraged for the people who are ready for this.

The social economy, in particular so-called WISEs (work integration social enterprises), have an important role in offering employment for disadvantaged workers and should be supported in that role. In addition, there are good practice examples of supported employment in the private and public sector outside of WISEs. Information about these initiatives should be disseminated and their further development should be financially encouraged.

### **6. Ensure in work and transitional support**

The transition to the mainstream labour market is a crucial and often very difficult moment in the inclusion process of a homeless person. For many this transition means losing contact with social workers and other people that provided support beforehand. Sustaining employment can even be a bigger challenge for people than actually getting the job.

In-work support that allows people to keep in contact with their previous support peers and helps them to deal with administrative and financial hurdles linked to the new job (e.g. opening a bank account) is a vital though still very underdeveloped way of ensuring job sustainment.

### **7. Promote the effective participation of service users**

The effective participation of service users in designing their own inclusion pathway as well as in the development of employment services and decision making processes affecting these services is crucial in order to ensure that services are adapted to the needs and aspirations of people. Funding for employability measures should therefore incite and allow for improved service user participation.<sup>2</sup>

### **8. Create real incentives for people to gain employment and ensure adequate levels of minimum income**

In a number of countries, badly structured benefits may constitute a barrier for people to seek work in the mainstream labour market as they risk losing benefits. Taking up a job has to pay in real terms for people that are ready to do so. Having the possibility to combine social benefits with income through work for an initial period of time may be essential for job retention. However, active labour market policies should not replace genuine poverty policies. People who are not ready to work need guaranteed access to adequate minimum income and social benefits.

### **9. Abolish sanctions for the most vulnerable workers**

Sanctions are not an effective policy measure for the most disadvantaged workers, such as people experiencing homelessness. This group is already in a very vulnerable situation and sanctions only risk further contributing to their social exclusion. Social support and empowerment that are adapted to the personal needs and aspirations are more effective instruments and more likely to lead to a sustainable improvement in the living situation (e.g. housing, health, employment) of people experiencing homelessness.

### **10. Ensure access to clear and consistent information on rights, entitlements and existing support services**

Many homeless people find it hard to access information on the range of services available to them. Many find it even harder to gain accurate and consistent advice on their benefits or tax entitlements, or their right to engage in activities that are related to employment. Clear, consistent and accurate information needs to be easily available and kept up to date. This can be achieved through the provision of sufficient and well trained staff, the provision of accessible information material as well as improved coordination between different services and sectors.

<sup>2</sup> Good examples for improving service user participation within homeless services can be found in the FEANTSA Participation Toolkit 2007: [http://www.feantsa.org/files/Participation/policy%20statements/EN-Final\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.feantsa.org/files/Participation/policy%20statements/EN-Final_toolkit.pdf)



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### 11. Ensure geographical distribution of services

Most homeless services are located in cities and urban areas, where also the majority of people experiencing homelessness live. However, a significant proportion of people experiencing homelessness also live in rural areas, where the lack of services as well as the lack of public transport facilities may constitute an important barrier to access the necessary support.

### 12. Develop and make use of indicators that measure soft outcomes of employment initiatives

Indicators for the effectiveness of employment initiatives currently focus too much on hard outcomes such as the number of people who have gained employment. There is a risk that employers are forced to “cream off” those people who have the least problems and are most likely to increase their productivity in order to comply with quantitative performance criteria. Indicators that are mindful to the soft outcomes of interventions, such as an overall improvement of the living situation of participants, are more effective for evaluating employability schemes.

### 13. Establish homeless data collection systems that look at the employment profiles of people

There is an urgent need to further develop homeless data collection systems in Europe in order to better understand the profiles, skills and needs of people experiencing homelessness, including their employment profiles. This system would be an effective tool to further develop policies to combat homelessness at regional, national and European level.

## Recommendations for the European Union

The main responsibility for developing effective employment policies remains at Member States level. In addition, the European Union can make a significant contribution for supporting policy developments at national and local level which will help people with multiple needs to improve their employability. To strengthen the instruments and policies at EU level, FEANTSA makes the following recommendations.

### 1. Ensure policy coherence between the European Employment Guidelines<sup>3</sup>, the Flexicurity Principles<sup>4</sup> and the Active Inclusion agenda<sup>5</sup> and develop a European Employment Guideline that specifically deals with the inclusion of people with multiple needs

People who are homeless are usually not in a position to access mainstream employment services for disadvantaged workers. There is a need to promote employment strategies for this group who faces multiple barriers to work. FEANTSA recommends a revision of the European Employment Guideline 19 along the following lines..

#### Guideline proposal:

#### Promote the Inclusion of people with multiple disadvantages into employment through

- Active and preventive labour market measures, including
  - Initial and ongoing identification of the needs and aspirations of each individual and the development of a personalised action plan
  - Tailored job search assistance and access to information on rights and entitlements
  - A variety of employment opportunities with ongoing support
  - Training and education, including low-threshold life skills and basic skills training for the people who are not ready to take up a job immediately
  - Provision of quality social services to support the inclusion of those furthest away from the labour market
- Continual review of the tax and benefit systems in order to tackle badly structured benefits that may create a disincentive for people to take up decent work.
- Ensuring adequate levels of social protection for all, independent from their employment status.

### 2. Develop effective mutual learning processes in the field of employment for disadvantaged groups

Many Member States are currently trying to improve their activation policies for people with multiple needs. They are eager to know more and learn from the experiences and practices in other

<sup>3</sup> For an overview about the European Employment Guidelines, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=108&langId=en>

<sup>4</sup> For more information on Flexicurity, visit: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=116&langId=en>

<sup>5</sup> Active Inclusion aims to promote the labour market inclusion of people furthest away from the labour market. See also: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/spsi/active\\_inclusion\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/active_inclusion_en.htm)



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countries. The European Union has a role to play in gathering the expertise and further promoting mutual learning processes that specifically look at the employment situation of people with multiple needs. European research, transnational projects as well as the Mutual Learning Programme and its different components (Thematic Review Seminars, Peer Reviews, etc.) could become effective tools for transnational exchanges in this area and demonstrate the added value of the European Employment Strategy. Possible topics for transnational exchanges include:

- How to ensure access to employability initiatives for people who face multiple barriers to employment?
- How to promote cooperation between employment services and other related social services, including housing services?
- How to organise effective transitions for people from supported employment to a job in the mainstream labour market?
- What are effective long-term employability initiatives outside the labour market for people with ongoing support needs?

#### 3. **Develop an Active Inclusion framework that promotes policy progress at national level**

The concept of Active Inclusion and its three pillars – labour market reintegration, minimum income and access to services - can become a useful EU framework for promoting policy progress for the employment of multiply disadvantaged workers. However, it is necessary to better understand how Active Inclusion translates into concrete practices of individualised and holistic support for different target groups. Without concrete policy relevance, the added value of an EU “Active Inclusion” concept remains questionable. There is a risk that Member States will use Active Inclusion as a “container concept” that can be filled with everything that can be linked to the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. Active Inclusion, however, should be limited to people in working age and cannot replace genuine social inclusion policies for people for whom employment is not an option, such as children and older people.

#### 4. **Ensure that the European Social Fund targets initiatives for the most excluded groups and promotes transnational exchanges**

The European Social Fund and European Community Initiative EQUAL have played an important role for the funding of employment initiatives for people who are homeless. The ESF continues to be key funding source in the new Member States in 2007 -2013. In some Member States access to these funds for projects targeting the most disadvantaged groups has been more difficult recently. Many organisations also feel that the EQUAL principles are not adequately represented in the new ESF programmes. More efforts are needed to mainstream the principles of EQUAL, such as transnational cooperation and to ensure that Member States replace successful practices developed under EQUAL and ESF with long-term national funding.

#### 5. **Create effective State aid rules for the employment of disadvantaged workers**

FEANTSA believes that the new General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)<sup>6</sup> will create more legal certainty in the area of state aid for the employment of disadvantaged workers. FEANTSA particularly welcomes the new differentiation between disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged workers. This might favour initiatives for the most vulnerable people. However, FEANTSA is concerned about the rulings regarding aid intensity. People with multiple needs usually require ongoing support for several years and many will need a higher level of support than 50 % for wage support, at least for an initial period of time.

#### 6. **Fight undeclared work without penalising the most vulnerable groups**

FEANTSA still misses in EU debates on undeclared work the link between undeclared and access to fundamental (social) rights for the most vulnerable people. Many people experiencing homelessness are working in the informal economy in order to secure a minimum standard of living. This makes them extremely vulnerable to exploitation. For most, the informal economy is part of a survival strategy and people should not be additionally penalised for their difficult living situation. A fight against undeclared work should therefore start with ensuring access to a decent standard of living for people experiencing social exclusion and facilitating the transition from informal to the formal

<sup>6</sup> The new General Block Exemption Regulation was adopted on 6 August 2008 and declares certain categories of aid compatible with the common market in application of Articles 87 and 88 of the Treaty : <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32008R0800:EN:NOT>



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economy for these workers. This should include the provision of adequate levels of minimum income and supported employment possibilities for people with multiple needs.

#### **7. Flexicurity policies must take into account the situation of people furthest away from the labour market**

The general principles on flexicurity must be complemented by policies that look at the social and labour market situation of the most excluded groups.

Security for people experiencing homelessness has to include

- Equal access to a high level of social protection irrespective of the employment status of the person;
- Guaranteed minimum income in case of economic inactivity, unemployment or participation in supported employment in a way that the overall income is above the poverty line;
- Adequate level of minimum wage for all workers and its correct implementation. For workers with part time employment, there should be the possibility to combine minimum income and salary.

Flexibility for people experiencing homelessness has to include

- Personalised support from properly funded services that respond to the needs and aspirations of each homeless individual;
- For-profit and social enterprises that flexibly adapt work contracts, working time, job responsibilities, working environment and duration of the contract according to needs and competencies of the worker who is homeless;
- The provision of a wide range of occupational activities that constitute a first step into supported employment and/or mainstream employment.

#### **8. Develop life-long learning strategies for the most disadvantaged groups**

Current debates on life-long learning focus mainly on people who already have a substantial educational background, such as students and employees. To reach out to the people who are the furthest away from the labour market, basic education also at later stages in life has to be part of life-long learning strategies. For people experiencing homelessness, for example, adequate training in numeracy and literacy is as important as training in basic computer applications, e.g. Internet. The EU should encourage Member States to develop these training initiatives and promote mutual learning on educational programmes for adults with multiple needs.

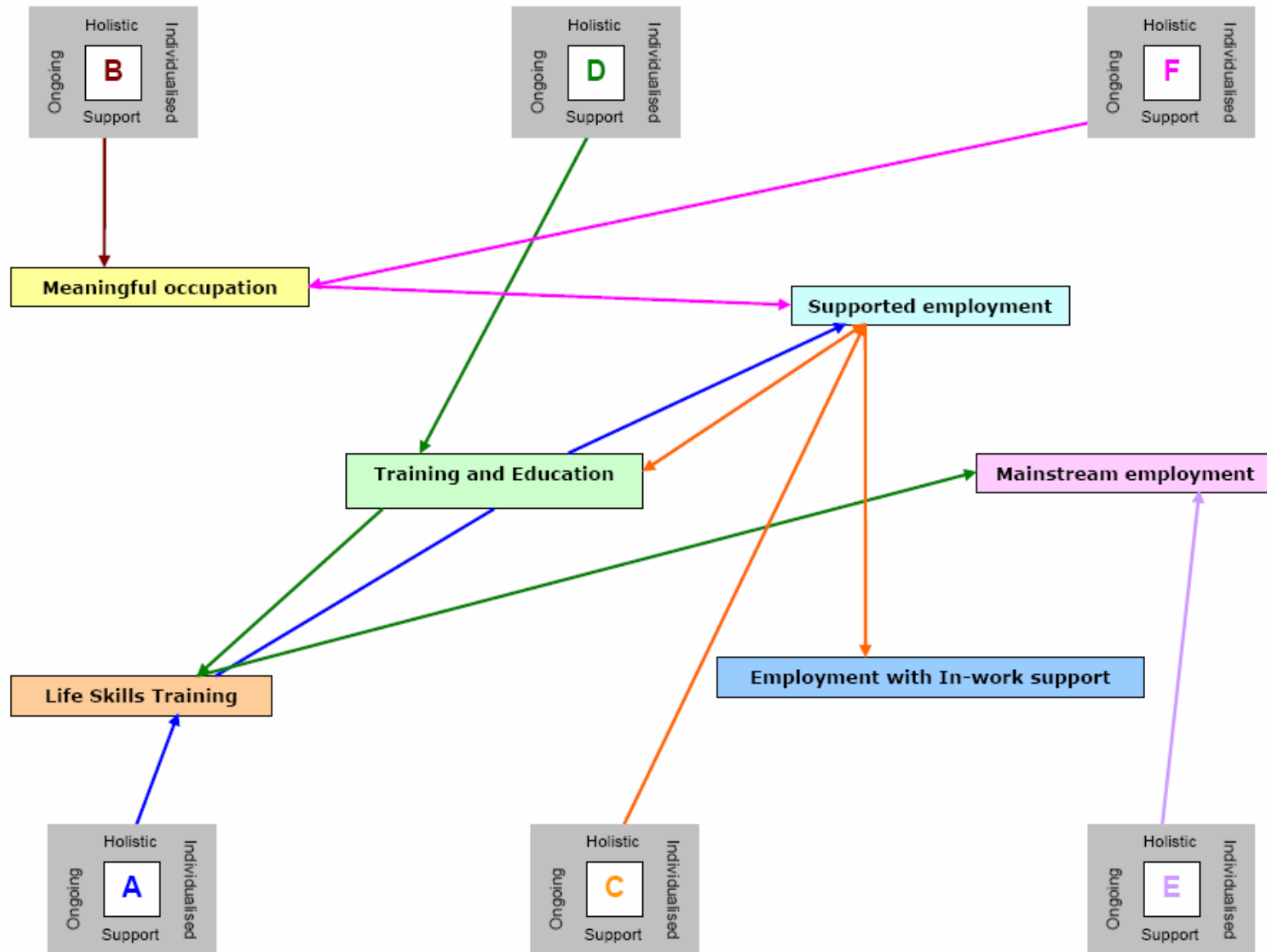
#### **9. Further develop European employment indicators and encourage Member States to apply them consistently**

FEANTSA welcomes the emphasis given at EU level on employment rates than unemployment figures. In particular figures on the labour market gap for disadvantaged groups or the activation of long-term unemployed people could become useful instruments to measure progress in the area of employment for the people furthest from the labour market. However, these must be complimented by indicators that are mindful to the overall living situation of an individual who is participating in an employment programme. For the most excluded groups, the “success” of employability initiatives cannot be reduced to an effective transition into the mainstream labour market. Improvements in relation to the housing or health situation of a person are equally important and are beneficial for the social cohesion of society as a whole. In addition, Member states should be encouraged to apply existing indicators consistently and not only choose some of the proposed indicators for the National Reform Programmes. Reliable and comparable employment data at EU level will contribute to developing effective policies and identifying those practices that actually work best for the most vulnerable groups.

FEANTSA believes that the recommendations set out in this statement will contribute to making employability initiatives more effective for people experiencing homelessness. This will not only help Member States and the European Union to meet employment targets for disadvantaged workers. More importantly, tailored occupational activities and employment will provide people with a meaningful occupation in life and contribute to the person’s self confidence and recognition in society. This will have a positive impact on the social cohesion and economy of society as a whole.

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### Annex: Examples of Pathways into Employment, Training and Education and Occupational Activities





## Annex: Examples of Pathways into Employment, Training and Education and Occupational Activities

The diagram above illustrates examples of possible pathways into occupational activities and employment. The arrows show that not all will use the same path and that many paths will include turns and detours. The boxes refer to the ongoing holistic and individualised support that service users should receive during the inclusion process **Please note that the descriptions below do not represent actual cases but only serve as an illustration for the diagram.**

**Pathway of A:** A is a 34 year old man who has been homeless for more than 3 years. He has a history of alcohol abuse and is currently taking part in an alcohol rehabilitation programme twice a week. He lives in a temporary housing project and hopes to be able to move on to permanent housing over the next year.

A has an educational background in mechanics and is currently working 20 hours per week in a social workplace that has specialised in repairing old cars. Before taking up this position, A has participated in a life skills training programme that was organised in a homeless organisation. During the life skills training he learnt how to structure his time and deal with conflicts that may arise when working in a team.

**Pathway of B:** B is a 54 years old woman who has been in and out of homelessness for more than 8 years. She has a history of severe drug abuse and her general health situation has suffered from her experience of homelessness. B is currently living in supported housing. She has her own room and bathroom and shares a common space and kitchen with five other women. She receives ongoing support with keeping her room clean, cooking as well as with organising her papers and finances. She loves everything related to music and arts and regularly participates in a music and arts workshop that is organised in a nearby day centre. The day centre is planning an exhibition in the entrance of the City Hall and B volunteered to welcome visitors and show people around at the exhibition.

**Pathway of C:** C is a 45 year old man who has been in and out of homelessness for more than 5 years. He used to be a heavy drinker but managed to reduce his alcohol consumption considerably. For six month now he is living in his own apartment but continues to meet with a social worker once every two weeks. C has an educational background in IT. Two years ago he started working in a supported workplace dealing with woodwork. He did not really enjoy this work and had problems with his colleagues. He dropped out of the programme. A year later the Employment Office offered him to participate in an IT training. He took part and is now working in a computer project that aims to modernise the IT equipment of the public social services.

**Pathway of D:** D is a 22 year old man who was homeless for eight months. During this time he either stayed with friends and acquaintances or slept rough. D did not finish school and was doing odd jobs for the last years. He came in contact with social services through a day centre where he used to spend his time when it was raining outside. Social workers helped him to get a room in a flat share where he is now living with three other young men. His rent is paid by the social service. He was offered to go back to school but felt more like doing something practical. So he took part in a practical training and works now 20 hours a week in a company that sets up kitchen for people. He likes the contact with his colleagues and is thinking of doing some more training.

**Pathway of E:** E is a 32 year old woman. She lives together with her two children who are three and five years old. E has left the father of the children a year ago and was living in a women shelter for three months. Afterwards she got a small apartment for herself and the children in another part of the city. E has an educational background in languages and wished to go back to work soon. She was given priority on a list for a kindergarten. The older child goes to elementary school. E found a job as a secretary in an international company where she can make use of her language skills. The job is full time but gives her the possibility to work from home so that she can take care of the children if they are ill. If the children are a bit older, E would like to take part in more training during the weekends.

### Pathway of F

F is a 62 year old man. After spending some time in prison, F became homeless. For more than 10 years he was sleeping rough and moving in and out of various hostels. This has affected his general health as well as mental health. F is now living in a single room in supported housing, which also has a day centre and offers several occupational activities to the inhabitants. F enjoys being outside and has started growing vegetables in the garden together with the housekeeper.



## **Annex: Examples of Pathways into Employment, Training and Education and Occupational Activities**



FEANTSA is supported by  
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This programme was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals in these fields. The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries. To that effect, PROGRESS purports at:

- providing analysis and policy advice on employment, social solidarity and gender equality policy areas;
- monitoring and reporting on the implementation of EU legislation and policies in employment, social solidarity and gender equality policy areas;
- promoting policy transfer, learning and support among Member States on EU objectives and priorities; and
- relaying the views of the stakeholders and society at large.

For more information see:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/progress/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/index_en.html)

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