



FEANTSA

EU Cohesion Policy 2014-2020: Supporting the reduction of poverty and social exclusion through integrated homeless strategies

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Supporting the reduction of
poverty and social exclusion through
integrated homeless strategies**

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FEANTSA, European federation of national organisations working with homeless people, welcomes the [legislative package](#) adopted by the European Commission on 6 October 2011 to reinforce the strategic dimension of cohesion policy 2014-2020 by aligning it with the new long-term objectives of the EU2020 strategy to promote jobs and growth.

According to the European Commission's proposals, the long-term EU2020 objective of **reducing poverty** will be supported by a number of financial instruments including the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and the EU Programme for Social Change and Innovation (PSCI).

These funds will be crucial for implementing evidence-based strategies to reduce homelessness in the EU, in line with calls from the European Commission and the Council of Ministers (see [Joint Report](#) on Social Protection and Inclusion 2010; and the EU2020 objective of reducing poverty), the European Parliament ([Resolution](#) on homelessness adopted in September 2011), and the Committee of the Regions ([Opinion](#) adopted in 2010).

Therefore, the Partnership Contracts to be agreed between Member States and the European Commission defining the priority areas for funding, must allow for operational guidelines on homelessness under the thematic objective of combating poverty and promoting social inclusion. If taken up, the proposals below can potentially provoke a real **paradigm shift** with a visible impact on our societies.

Our response to the Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 legislative package:

1. Highlights the three funds which can contribute to significantly reducing poverty and homelessness;
2. Proposes ways of operationalising the objective of reducing poverty in the Partnership Contracts.

1. Homelessness and the EU Cohesion Policy funds 2014-2020

Homelessness is a particularly pertinent issue in the context of the current economic and financial crisis¹. Housing and related services emerge as one area which has been particularly adversely affected by the economic and financial crisis. This is reflected in increases in evictions, homelessness, growth in waiting lists for social housing and increased indebtedness in relation to key utilities such as heat and water². The [Annual Growth Survey](#) published by the European Commission on 23 November 2011 confirms that homelessness has increased in some Member States as a result of the crisis.³ Maintaining and/or developing effective homelessness policies must therefore be a central element of sustainable responses to the crisis, and the Commission's draft legislative package on Cohesion policy for the period 2014-2020 creates a range of potential opportunities to use the Structural Funds to add value in the fight against homelessness.

ESF >> Empowerment of homeless people

Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty is one of four thematic objectives to be targeted by the ESF. Furthermore, at least 20 % of the ESF allocation should be dedicated to this thematic objective, hence reinforcing the social dimension of the ESF. This objective can be reached through a range of actions, including "active inclusion", "enhancing access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services, including health care and social services of general interest" and "integration of marginalised communities".⁴ These actions move away from the current predominant focus on employment, hence creating a more favourable context for homeless service providers to use ESF funds to meet the needs of the service beneficiaries. The ESF can therefore play a vital role in developing services to empower homeless people to change their lives, thereby contributing to general poverty reduction.

ERDF >> Infrastructure measures to support the implementation of homeless strategies

Whilst the ESF can be particularly relevant in terms of social support services, there is equally considerable scope for using the ERDF to support the infrastructure/housing element of homelessness strategies. According to the Commission's current proposals, one of the investment priorities of the ERDF is the promotion of social inclusion and combating poverty. This includes "investing in health and social infrastructure which contribute to national, regional and local development, reducing inequalities in terms of health status and transition from institutional to community-based services".⁵ This call for de-institutionalisation creates opportunities to support a shift from homeless shelters (institutional) as the predominant response to homelessness towards supported housing (community based). Such a trend would enable policy-makers to move from the traditional approach to tackling homelessness to a more cost-effective housing-led policy which is better for service beneficiaries and better for budgets – an essential consideration in the current economic and financial climate. The new Cohesion Policy framework will thus enhance the possibility that has existed since May 2010, to use up to 3% of the ERDF funding for each EU Member State for housing interventions for marginalised communities, including homeless people.

Moreover, there will be a clear focus on sustainable urban development in the framework of EU cohesion policy (see European Territorial Cooperation), with at least 5% of the ERDF resources allocated for strategies setting out integrated actions to tackle the economic, environmental, climate and *social* challenges affecting urban areas. Homelessness is a growing urban problem with an increasing number of cities using criminalisation methods to cope with rising street homelessness – a strategy which is both ineffective and costly. The ERDF can therefore genuinely support cities to find effective solutions to addressing this social challenge.

1 See FEANTSA, "Policy Paper Impact of anti-crisis austerity measures on homeless services across the EU"

2 H. Frazer and E. Marlier (2011), *Social Impact of the Crisis and developments in the light of fiscal consolidation measures*, CEPS/INSTEAD

3 COM(2011)815 final

4 COM(2011) 607 final

5 COM(2011) 614 final



PSCI >> Supporting research and monitoring of homelessness

The European Commission's package includes proposals for a new EU Programme for Social Change and Innovation (PSCI). This new financial instrument will be managed directly by the Commission (as opposed to the ESF and ERDF which will be managed by the Member States directly) to promote social change and innovation. It will not only support policy coordination, sharing of best practices, and capacity-building, but will also test and evaluate innovative policies, the most successful of which would receive support from the ESF. FEANTSA fully supports this shift from mutual learning to building evidence for effective policies. This creates an unprecedented opportunity to experiment and evaluate effective approaches to homelessness⁶, while reinforcing current efforts to develop methodologies to measure homelessness, to support mutual learning projects across countries, and to generally drive social innovation in anti-poverty policy.

2. Translating EU funding priorities into concrete actions to reduce poverty

By 2013, each Member State will be asked to draw up a Partnership Contract, where they will assess their development needs and define their national priorities supporting the achievement of their national targets for delivering on the Europe 2020 strategy.

In line with calls from different EU bodies to reduce homelessness in the EU, FEANTSA calls for the national authorities responsible for the management of the ESF and the ERDF to include a reference to the [national homelessness strategy](#) of their country (more than 10 EU countries now have a national strategy to reduce homelessness) in the Partnership Contract, and encourages countries without a homelessness strategy to use the new Cohesion Policy framework to develop such a strategy.

Funding >> Multi-funds for a multi-dimensional phenomenon

Member States will be allowed to combine ERDF and the ESF in "multi-fund" programmes to improve coordination on the ground and achieve integrated development. The purpose is to allow the biggest impact on the ground. Homelessness is a case in point, where an integrated approach coordinating ESF and ERDF spending at national and local level can maximise effectiveness of the funds, and genuinely have an impact on reducing poverty by 2020, especially in countries where a national homelessness strategy already exists. Evidence collected among FEANTSA members shows that successful professional integration of persons experiencing exclusion, particularly housing exclusion, depends on a possibility to ensure the infrastructure is there to provide them with accommodation during the project. There is indeed growing evidence and consensus that the stability provided by housing is a key lever in improving quality of life of homeless people.

Targets >> Measurable and achievable

These Partnership Contracts will include "targets that the Member States plan to reach by the end of the programming period, as well as performance indicators and milestones." Existing strategies to combat homelessness generally put forward clear and measurable targets to be achieved, such as phasing out shelter accommodation and replacing it with long-term housing solutions (Finland), providing suitable support interventions for homeless people (The Netherlands), a legal right to settled accommodation for all unintentionally homeless households (Scotland), reducing the number of evictions by 30% and no stay in temporary housing for more than 3 months (Norway), no one should be in emergency accommodation for more than 6 months (Ireland), and so on. We call on all Member States to integrate these achievable targets in their Partnership Contract, in order to financially reinforce existing strategies and make measurable progress to reduce poverty.

⁶ See FEANTSA statement "Housing-led policy approaches: Social innovation to end homelessness in Europe"

Research and evaluation >> National measures supported by European exchanges

We believe that Partnership Contracts should include a research strand, hence demonstrating the intention of national authorities to invest in research and evaluation to build evidence for effective policies. PSCI funding should then be used to support policy implementation through European social experimentation projects and transnational learning networks, hence encouraging countries to take a closer look at initiatives taken in other EU countries. Priorities could include testing new and innovative ways of working, improving data collection methods, measurement of policy impact, and developing appropriate monitoring instruments.

Implementing agencies >> Importance of fund coordination

Policy-makers at different levels (national/regional/local) will be involved in developing strategies to use EU Cohesion Policy funds. Local authorities will also be involved in implementing European Territorial Cohesion initiatives, including tackling urban social challenges like homelessness.

In social policy, including homelessness policy, universities and NGOs are also crucial for achieving lasting results. Both are important partners for testing, researching and evaluating innovative practices. Furthermore, NGOs act in different capacities - most commonly as beneficiaries of funding programmes to implement policy and projects on the ground, but also in a capacity of intermediary bodies. In homelessness policy, NGOs providing social services are often particularly well placed to design, manage and evaluate the implementation of EU funds.

Given the wide range of bodies involved in implementing social policy, including homelessness policy, it is crucial for EU fund managers to ensure coordination of different initiatives through a general strategic framework in the Partnership Contracts.

Outputs and indicators >> Measurement tools adapted to the target group

The evaluation of projects using Structural Funds will be linked to the objectives and targets of the Partnership Contracts. The suggested ESF indicators - immediate result indicators such as “inactive participants newly engaged in job searching upon leaving” or long-term result indicators like “participants with an improved labour-market situation 6 months after leaving” - provide appropriate tools for measuring the social development and professional integration of people furthest away from the labour market (such as homeless people). The same is true for the proposed ERDF social infrastructure indicator “number of households benefiting from improved housing conditions”.

However, we would strongly encourage fund managing authorities to develop outcome measurement in close cooperation with the beneficiaries of EU funding (including NGOs), to take into account the (often complex) reality of working with people in severe exclusion. Hard outcomes, such as the ones stated in the draft ESF and ERDF regulations, are useful but could be complemented by intermediate or soft outcomes (linked to the personal situation of a project participant) in order to measure progress of a project participant in a meaningful way.



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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

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