

Brussels
25/11/2013

Dear Commissioner Andor,

As European organisations active in the fight against homelessness, we are writing to you in advance of the Annual Convention of the European Platform Against Poverty. We wish to highlight the urgent need for concrete action at EU level to follow up on the Social Investment Package in the area of homelessness.

In the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy¹ and the Social Investment Package,² there is increasing pressure from a range of EU institutions and stakeholders to develop an action plan or strategy to support better progress on tackling homelessness. One of the thematic priorities of the SIP is the fight against homelessness. The European Commission has called on Member States (MS) to “confront homelessness through comprehensive strategies based on prevention, housing-led approaches and reviewing regulations and practices on eviction”.³ Furthermore, the package includes detailed policy guidance on homelessness.⁴

The EU institutions have broadly welcomed the SIP, but they have stressed the need for a detailed implementation plan in order to deliver real progress, particularly on the fight against homelessness. The European Parliament adopted a Resolution on the SIP, and requested “a concrete and detailed roadmap for the implementation of an EU homelessness strategy” in this context,⁵ the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has also asked the Commission to “produce a plan for the implementation of the thematic priorities” of the SIP, including homelessness.⁶ The Committee of the Regions has called on the Commission to develop a “concrete EU framework to support stakeholders to make progress on tackling homelessness”.⁷ You yourself have stressed, on several occasions, how important it is to ensure progress on homelessness as part of the implementation of the SIP.

It is our understanding that the SIP aims to contribute to the European Semester process and re-enforce its social dimension.⁸ Homelessness has been a priority within the Semester Process in the past few years. Several MS have concentrated on homelessness in their National Reform

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1044&langId=en&newsId=1807&moreDocuments=yes&tableName=news>

³ COM(2013) 83 final <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2013:0083:FIN:FR:PDF>

⁴ SWD(2013) 42 final <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SWD:2013:0042:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁵ P7_TA(2013)0266 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2013-0266+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

⁶ CESE 1557/2013 - SOC/481 <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.soc-opinions.26024>

⁷ CDR 1999/2013 <https://toad.cor.europa.eu/corwipdetail.aspx?folderpath=ECOS-V/042&id=22057>

⁸ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/special-reports/european-semester>

Programmes.⁹ In its Communication on the implementation of the 2013 Country Specific Recommendations (CSR), the Commission states that “*Member States need to pay more attention to combating different forms of poverty*” and lists the most important and urgent ones – “*child poverty, homelessness, in-work poverty and over-indebtedness of households*”.¹⁰ The European Parliament has also stressed the need to prioritise social exclusion issues in its 2013 opinion on the Semester process. It called upon Member States to reinforce their welfare systems and invest in prevention in order to reduce “*child poverty, homelessness, social inequality, in-work poverty and over-indebtedness of households*”.¹¹ The Annual Growth Survey 2014 highlights the need for social policies to address the needs of the most vulnerable¹², sustaining the opportunity for further EU level work on homelessness.

The Employment Committee, Social Protection Committee, and the Commission’s work on a Joint Assessment Framework for tracking progress and monitoring the Employment Guidelines under Europe 2020 has highlighted the need to analyse the social inclusion of groups at special risk, including by assessing to what extent specific measures are in place to reduce poverty amongst the homeless.¹³ So far, there has been no visible progress towards this objective. The analysis of housing and homelessness policies in the Draft Joint Employment Report 2014¹⁴ is superficial and unable to support any meaningful joint reflection on Member States’ policies. This demonstrates clearly the urgent need to create a strategy or action plan to follow up on the SIP in the area of homelessness.

On the 22nd November, Denmark hosted a Peer Review of its homelessness strategy in the framework of the Social OMC. This was the seventh Peer Review on homelessness since 2004, demonstrating the demand from policy makers in the Member States for EU level frameworks to collaborate on confronting homelessness. In the wake of the SIP, it is time to build on these isolated exchanges and move forward with a more ambitious programme.

One of the most important tools the European Commission has at its disposal in order to deliver on the SIP and reinforce the social dimension of the European Semester is the new EU programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), on which the European Parliament and the European Council reached a political agreement in June.¹⁵ In a report adopted by the EP Employment and Social Affairs Committee on the focus of the EaSI programme, the European Parliament, as co-legislator, states that the e-programme should provide “*support for active engagement of all relevant actors in the follow-up of already agreed Union priorities, such as active inclusion, combating homelessness and housing exclusion, child poverty, energy poverty and poverty amongst migrants and ethnic minorities*”.¹⁶

Given the numerous requests in recent years for an EU strategy on homelessness - from the European Parliament,¹⁷ the European Economic and Social Committee¹⁸ and the Committee of the Regions¹⁹ - and for an EU scheme on homelessness from the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO),²⁰ it is now urgent to launch the development of an action plan or strategy to support better progress on tackling homelessness. Such a strategy would help MS and other stakeholders in their efforts to combat homelessness through the promotion of transnational exchanges, training and research, progress monitoring and the provision of policy guidance, as well as financing social experimentation and facilitating access to the Structural Funds.

The conclusions of the 2010 European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (a Belgian EU Presidency initiative)²¹ and those of the Ministers’ Round Table on Homelessness in 2013 (an Irish EU

⁹ FEANTSA reviewed National Reform Programmes in 2013 <http://feantsa.org/spip.php?article1525&lang=en>

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nd/2013eccomm_en.pdf

¹¹ P7_TA-PROV(2013)0447 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2013-0447&language=EN&ring=A7-2013-0322>

¹² COM(2013) 800 final http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/2014/ags2014_en.pdf

¹³ 16984/10. <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st16/st16984-ad01.en10.pdf>

¹⁴ COM(2013) 801 final http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/2014/jer2014_en.pdf

¹⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1093>

¹⁶ A7-0241/2012 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2012-0241&language=EN>

¹⁷ P7_TA(2011)0383 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2011-0383&language=EN&ring=B7-2011-0475>

¹⁸ 2012/C 24/07 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52011IE1592:EN:NOT>

¹⁹ 2011/C 15/08 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:015:0041:0045:EN:PDF>

²⁰ 11639/12 <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/12/st11/st11639.en12.pdf>

²¹ <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article327&lang=en>

Presidency initiative),²² combined with the policy guidance in the SIP could provide a basis for such an EU action plan. There is scope to back up such a plan with funding from the Structural Funds - namely the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD),²³ the European Social Fund (ESF) (with reaching homeless people as a likely EU evaluation criterion),²⁴ and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (with a range of relevant priorities, including the possibility to fund social and health infrastructure).²⁵

Homelessness is an urgent problem that we cannot tolerate in the European Union.²⁶ It is currently increasing in virtually all EU Member States.²⁷ The demand for support from the EU, which is about knowledge and expertise as much as it is about funding, comes from public authorities, EU institutions and NGOs²⁸. A comprehensive EU strategy on homelessness addressing its socio-economic, health, and human rights dimensions is necessary to respond adequately to these calls for support. The undersigned organisations therefore call on the European Commission to develop such a strategy in order to help Member States make real progress on confronting homelessness by 2020.

Yours Sincerely,

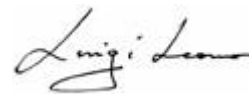
Freek Spinnewijn
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Network of Street Papers*



²² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=88&eventsId=872&furtherEvents=yes>

²³ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1704&furtherNews=yes>

²⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp>

²⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/regional/index_en.cfm

²⁶ <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique160&lang=en>

²⁷ See the June 2012 Employment and Social Situation Quarterly Review:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7830&langId=en> and the FEANTSA Monitoring Report on Homelessness and Homeless Policies in Europe, "On the Way Home" <http://feantsa.org/spip.php?article854&lang=en>

²⁸ Mental Health Europe, Position Paper: Access to Services by People with Severe Mental Health Problems Who Are Homeless, September 2013: http://www.mhe-sme.org/assets/files/publications/MHE_Task_Force_Position_Paper_Homelessness.pdf