

2010 European Consultation of Homeless People



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Preface

The fight against homelessness is one of my priorities and I am endeavouring to put in place the necessary consensus for determining the means and strategies capable of producing lasting solutions.

That is why I have undertaken to organise a European Consensus Conference on Homelessness.

This important event in the programme of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union will take place on 9–10 December 2010 in Brussels.

In the process of building this consensus, I am aware that a policy-maker must be able to combine the optimism of the heart and the pessimism of the intelligence. It is difficult to bring a vast project to a successful conclusion during the period of a Presidency.

It would have been a serious error of judgement to attempt to tackle this challenge alone. That is why I have chosen to involve, in the organisation of the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness, organisations representing the interests of people who are homeless or have experienced homelessness. To that end, I have asked them, via a research-action system, to organise a consultation of homeless people on the themes and questions which will be discussed and submitted to the jury during the conference's work.

You have, in your hands, the results of this painstaking, conscientious work which reflects the authenticity of the observations and viewpoints collected by the Front Commun des Sans-Abris and its partners.

I am convinced that this report will make a valuable contribution to our discussions during the conference and the post-conference phase. It will provide us with elements that will help us understand homelessness, as it is experienced by people who find themselves in such a situation which is unjustifiable and intolerable for the European social model.

Philippe COURARD

Secretary of State for Social Integration and the Fight against Poverty

INTRODUCTION

In the framework of the right to housing and the right to “a roof over everyone’s head”, the Belgian Anti-Poverty Network (BAPN) wants to emphasise the crucial importance of taking into account the views of homeless people themselves as a fundamental condition for resolving this persistent problem, alongside political lobbying and the relationships forged with numerous partners.

Combating the reality of homelessness is an integral part of the fight against poverty and must accordingly be taken into account in its own right in social and structural policies, in particular in housing policies, but also in policies relating to health, education, access to good-quality services, etc.

Participation plays a fundamental role in this approach. The *Front Commun* implements this participatory approach on a daily basis by working with people who live on the streets and who do not have a roof over their head, either temporarily or on a permanent basis.

The *Front Commun* allows homeless people to express their views in non-restrictive conditions. Such a communication approach may give rise to certain aspects which may seem slightly strange in the eyes of traditional society, but the input of people who have direct experience of homelessness contributes real added value to the debate on this issue. Their views reveal and/or denounce the true “bottlenecks”. Thus, BAPN and the members of its network can forge and/or foster partnerships in order to succeed, together with homeless people, in putting forward proposals and recommendations with the support of a wide network.

For a true and accurate picture of their reality, we invite readers to read this report from *Front Commun des Sans-Abris* through the eyes of homeless people and thus accept their real-life expertise and recognise its invaluable contribution to this debate.

In the future, BAPN and the *Front Commun* will continue to support the content of this report and its recommendations at political level.

BAPN’s concerns with the reality of the homelessness situation were also clearly expressed in a publication entitled “Accès et exercice des droits au logement en Europe” [Access and exercising rights to housing in Europe] (March 2010) and a follow-up to this report is planned in the framework of a joint project at European level, with Belgian and other European partners, on homelessness and housing.

In conclusion, BAPN supports this report based on the input of homeless people themselves. The answers and recommendations relative to the six questions asked have a profoundly human and realistic value. The crux of the matter is that it is essential for them to speak from their heart on their problems and for their views to be published in this way and brought to the attention of policy-makers who, too often, receive reports that are prepared and drawn up in the comfort of a warm office.

Christine Mahy
President of BAPN

Paul Vaernewyck
BAPN Coordinator

European policy on homeless people

Agenda

2007: The European Commission published a study entitled "Measurement of homelessness at EU level". The aim of this study was to establish methodologies and practices in order to develop a database indispensable for measuring housing deprivation and homelessness. In the same year France organised a Consensus Conference entitled "Ending street homelessness".

2008: The European Parliament adopted a declaration on "Ending street homelessness" by 2015. In the same year, during the French Presidency, in the conclusions of the meeting of housing ministers and the roundtable on poverty and social exclusion, the French Presidency called for a consensus conference on homelessness at European level.

A consensus conference is a term that was originally used by the medical sector. It used this type of conference to decide between several treatments proposed and to choose the best treatment for the patient. This method is widely used in Anglo-Saxon and Nordic countries for societal issues. In France it was used for the first time in 2007 with the conference on "Ending Street Homelessness".

2009: The Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion specified that "sustained work is required to tackle homelessness as an extremely serious form of exclusion."

The Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion is published every year by the European Commission in cooperation with the Social Protection Committee of the European Council. It is one of the salient points of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in which the main trends regarding social protection and social inclusion throughout the EU are discussed.

The social OMC had selected homelessness and housing exclusion as a priority theme in 2009. The Member States submitted national reports on homelessness and housing exclusion.

2010: On the basis of its analysis of these reports, the 2010 joint report called on the Member States to draw up integrated strategies to combat homelessness and housing exclusion.

Belgium holds the Presidency of the European Union during the second half of 2010. It is organising the "European Consensus Conference on Homelessness" in Brussels, on 9–10 December. The Belgian Secretary of State for Social Integration and the Fight against Poverty, Philippe Courard, has entrusted his department with the task of organising this conference, with the FEANTSA.

2011: There are plans to compile a census of homeless people in the Member States.

Methodology of the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness

The preparatory committee

In January 2010, a preparatory committee, called the "Prep Com" was set up. Its twenty-seven members include representatives of the various stakeholders: sociologists, doctors, public authorities and hostels for homeless people. There are 3 homeless people representatives.

The Prep Com has met five times since January 2010. Its tasks are: a) to prepare the themes and questions; b) to choose the experts; and c) to appoint an independent jury.

The experts

At the conference, for each of the questions, three experts selected by the Prep Com will be heard. The conference presentations of the experts will be based on the questions drawn up in advance. They will then be asked questions by the jury on the basis of their input. The other stakeholders present will also be able to take part in the session.

Any person having knowledge or experience on the subject may be designated as an expert. They may be researchers or NGO and public authority representatives. Homeless people may also be appointed as experts.

The questions

The consensus conference will address six key questions relative to homelessness, on which there is no consensus, thereby blocking political progress. These questions will have been selected by the preparatory committee.

The jury

The jury must, after the conference, meet behind closed doors and reach a consensus on the questions and themes discussed. This consensus will be published in a report which will serve as the basis for the development of homelessness policies at European level.

The jury is composed of seven people who are not active in the area of the fight against homelessness but are sensitive to this debate and want to contribute solutions.

The jury's report will be transmitted to Hungary which will be responsible for disseminating it during the six months of its EU Presidency (first half of 2011).

The jury's report will also be accessible on various websites.

The views of homeless people

The participation of homeless people is a key element of the consensus conference. To be certain that their views are heard, the Secretary of State Philippe Courard has entrusted the task of organising a consultation of people with direct experience of homelessness in the EU to a Belgian platform, namely the Front Commun SDF.

The choice of the Front Commun SDF to carry out this task is based on the fact that it is a network which has substantial experience in:

- collecting the views of homeless people;
- analysing these views and making incisive comments;
- putting forward precise recommendations;
- engaging in dialogue with the authorities in charge.

The Front's work is appreciated by regional and national authorities and it is regularly invited to participate in seminars and working meetings at all levels. The Front SDF participates in university studies commissioned by the authorities and regularly engages in a pertinent dialogue with the public authorities, acting along the lines of a trade union.

The various stakeholders participating in the consultation

The Front Commun SDF

The Front Commun SDF is a platform composed of several basic organisations, self-managed by people who have experienced homelessness. This network covers Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels. The three main organisations are Solidarités Nouvelles (Charleroi), Chez Nous - Bij Ons (Brussels) and DAK (Antwerp).

The Front was set up 13 years ago when a group of homeless people demonstrated in the streets of Brussels because the law which allowed them to receive an income, even without a fixed address, was neither applicable nor applied. Their occupation of the "Château de la Solitude" in Brussels and that of an old social housing building in Antwerp, by the DAK, were the starting point of the Front Commun SDF.

"Today, we continue to draw attention to the legal vacuum which deprives homeless people of their rights and we discuss policies. We provide the people concerned with as much information as possible regarding their exact rights. Similarly, when there is a flagrant case of a city or a CPAS failing to apply the law, we react collectively. Numerous public authorities refuse to comply with laws or impose so many conditions not included in the law, that many homeless people in Belgium are deprived of their fundamental rights."

The Front has published, in collaboration with the Belgian Federal Public Service for Social Integration, a "homeless person's guide". This brochure is intended to inform homeless people of their rights and sets out in particular the services for which the CPAS (Public Centres for Social Action) are responsible.

In 2009, the Front participated in several sociological studies:

- "Report on CPAS assistance to homeless people" produced by the Universities of Antwerp and Liège and commissioned by the FPS Social Integration, anti-Poverty Policy and Social Economy.
- "For a consistent approach to combating homelessness and poverty" produced by the Service for the Fight against Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion.
- "The Conditionality of Rights" produced by the *Collectif Rapport Général sur la Pauvreté*.

DAK

The association DAK (*Dakloze Aktie Komitee*/action committee of homeless people) is composed of voluntary workers having experienced homelessness. The association is active mainly in Antwerp, but its expertise is called upon throughout Flanders. Its objective is the emancipation of poor people who live on the margins of society or who are vulnerable. It represents the interests of homeless people. It is a kind of trade union which offers legal, medical, physical and psychological help and support to the most disadvantaged people. It implements projects concerning basic needs: the need for homeless people to feed and clothe themselves, the need for housing and culture. DAK often collaborates with the CPAS and the relevant services. It is part of various networks: the *Collectif Rapport Général sur la Pauvreté*, the Front Commun des SDF, Stop Armoede Nu, the Ministère de la Crise du Logement and the Antwerp Housing Platform. DAK also participates in various consultations such as "Straatoverleg", a consultation of all street workers, and "LIDO" (*Lokaal Intersectorieel Drugs Overleg*/Intersectoral Consultation on Drugs).

Solidarités Nouvelles

The objective of the association *Solidarités Nouvelles* is to help vulnerable people to resolve their housing problems. It creates the necessary conditions to enable people who are excluded from society to re-establish social ties and participate in their re-integration into society. That is why it supports and promotes the development and creation of communities in which individuals and families can shape their own destiny and are united in their battle. *Solidarités Nouvelles* is responsible for the running of Right to Housing (DAL) communities in Charleroi, Mons and Liège and also organises committees of permanent residents of sites normally intended for tourism (camp sites). It promotes the participation of homeless people and other disadvantaged people in regional assemblies. It lobbies politicians via strong actions such as demonstrations, occupying empty building, etc.

Solidarités Nouvelles participates more widely in various networks in Belgium, such as the *Front Commun SDF*, the *Ministère de la Crise du Logement*, etc. Outside Belgium, it maintains close ties with the French DAL and the International Alliance of Inhabitants, as well as with the Movement of Inhabitants in Brazil.

Chez Nous/Bij Ons

The association Chez Nous/Bij Ons offers an open house where homeless and underprivileged people can meet in a welcoming environment. It works actively with the most underprivileged groups in the Brussels region. It supports its target groups in their everyday lives. Moreover, it provides, via its social welfare service, assistance and information to people with problems, answering their questions, in particular concerning housing. The association's workers help housing applicants resolve their administrative or legal difficulties, act as an intermediary vis-à-vis third parties, negotiate with creditors and refer people in need to specialised services.

Chez Nous/Bij Ons cooperates closely with various field workers and participates actively in various organisations such as the *Rassemblement Bruxellois pour le Droit à l'Habitat* (RBDH), the *Front Commun des SDF*, the regional meetings of shelters, and many others.

BAPN

The Belgian Anti-Poverty Network (BAPN) is a national association. BAPN's objective is to combat the structural causes of poverty at national (and European) level, with associations where people living in poverty have their say and with civil society partners. BAPN undertakes actions and draws up political recommendations. In this way, BAPN endeavours to change social, political and economic structures with a view to breaking the vicious circle of poverty. BAPN strives to implement a policy which is also appropriate for people living in poverty. A policy which – in the short term – helps them to overcome day-to-day difficulties and which – in the long term – eliminates poverty entirely. By creating a positive image and communication (publicised every year on 17 October, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty), BAPN wants to eliminate gradually the stigma attached to poverty.

BAPN is a liaison body and disseminates knowledge across networks and at the level of its partners and associations where people living in poverty can air their views.

BAPN's members are regional anti-poverty networks, namely networks/partners in the Brussels region (*Forum Bruxellois de Lutte contre la Pauvreté* and *Brussels Platform Armoedebestrijding*), in the Flemish region (*Vlaams Netwerk van verenigingen waar armen het woord nemen*) and in Wallonia (*Réseau Wallon de Lutte contre la Pauvreté*). BAPN is itself a member of EAPN, the European Anti-Poverty Network.

Chez Nous/Bij Ons and Solidarités Nouvelles are members respectively of the Flemish and Walloon Anti-Poverty Networks. However, this does not undermine their autonomy.

BAPN is part of the EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network) which has been, since 1990, the European network of associations combating poverty and social exclusion. It is an independent network of associations and groups engaged in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union.

Organisation of 2010 European consultation of homeless people

Preparation of the consultation method

The Front has developed a simple method for collecting the views of homeless people in the EU countries with a view to presenting them to the conference.

The following elements are taken into account:

- in developing this method, the participation in the project of as many homeless people as possible;
- the way in which homeless people are informed about the conference and consultations (meetings);
- the organisation of the consultations (meetings) themselves;
- the transcription of the views of homeless people at the meetings and in meeting reports;
- the method of analysing these reports.

During this process a number of proposals were produced. The participants in the project, in Belgium and in the countries where the consultation took place, were asked on each occasion to give their reactions to the proposals put forward.

These proposals revealed the need for meetings to be organised by local organisations.

"We prefer to work with associations that are self-managed by homeless people, if necessary supported by professional organisations. But if such associations cannot be found, the consultation (meeting) could be organised by professionals."

The local organisations were given responsibility for producing the invitations to meetings. The invitations to attend the meetings were aimed at people with direct experience of homelessness. The intention was to ensure the wide distribution of the invitations via local networks, professional organisations and associations.

It was agreed that the meeting reports would refer to contributors by a first name or an alias. It was also agreed that the words of participants should be transcribed as faithfully as possible.

Preparation of the themes and questions to be asked during the consultations

The preparation of the questions to be asked at the conference is one of the tasks of the Prep Com. On 31 March 2010 the Prep Com announced that the questions would not be ready before May 2010. In order to avoid jeopardising the consultation schedule, the Front was authorised to draw up the questions itself. The themes and the proposed questions put forward by the Front reflect the themes chosen by the preparatory committee. These questions were put to homeless people in various EU countries. Local organisations were authorised to adapt the wording of the questions.

Themes

1. What is a homeless person?
2. What are the short-term solutions?
3. What are the long-term solutions?
4. Migrants
5. Europe

Production of a consultation guide

On 1st May 2010, the Front circulated a guide in 3 languages (French, English and Dutch) intended for the partners charged with organising the meetings in the various European Union countries. It explains the how and why of the Consensus Conference and the consultation of homeless people. The text contains the resultant themes and proposed questions. It explains the interview methodology and how to use the site. It also provides the schedule.

Setting up a website

Originally the site www.europeanhomeless2010.eu was created by the Front as an internal means of communication and a databank accessible to everyone working on the project.

"Then, we used the site to contact homeless people throughout Europe. We invited them to participate in the building of the site. To that end, they could send us texts, links, comments to supplement information already posted on the site (recent European reports, information and links to other websites).

We published short texts on our blog on special themes, thus inviting, via another form of participation, homeless people to share their thoughts and opinions with us. We also requested homeless people to let us have their views on the reports published in their country."

At the Prep Com meeting of 31 March 2010 a number of participants expressed their concern that the agreed work scheme provided for only consultations in 5 countries: Denmark, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Belgium, which could be perceived as a geographical imbalance as regards participation in the consultation. The Prep Com therefore authorised the Front to enlarge the consultation to encompass other European Union countries, via the site.

Accordingly, the Front's homepage invited people with direct experience of homelessness to participate in the consultation. It was also possible to send video clips in which people who have experienced homelessness answered one or more of the questions.

The difficulties encountered by the Front

"Naturally, this survey cannot aspire to be exhaustive. We were not in a position to interact with homeless people in all Member States. Nor were we able to converse with them or ask our questions in each of the European Union's official languages. However, our approach enabled us to collect very useful, relevant information which will certainly provide food for thought at the conference."

The consultations

In the end, the consultations took place in 8 Member States – Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Scotland, France, Hungary, Italy and the Netherlands – and on the site. 225 people participated in the process.

Receipt of the consultation reports by the Front

The reports of the consultations in the various European Union countries were received by the Front's secretariat during July and August 2010. The reports were written in different languages: French, Dutch, English, German, Hungarian and Danish.

Redefinition of the themes

When examining the reports the Front noted that the questions varied from one country to another and that the answers covered several themes at the same time. This was due to the fact that in the guide on organising the consultations, the Front left the partners free to use one or another of the proposed questions and even left them the option of adapting them.

The views of homeless people led the Front to redefine the themes as follows:

1. The situation of homeless people
 - Rejection and exclusion
 - Lack of hygiene and safety
2. Why and how
 - Breakdown in family relationships
 - Joblessness
 - Problems of health and dependency
3. The solutions
 - Access to housing
 - Access to accommodation
 - Prevention
 - Support
 - Participation
 - Access to work
 - Obtaining rights
 - Access to education
 - Access to healthcare
4. Migrants
5. Europe

Answers to the 6 questions which will be asked at the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness

The Prep Com meeting of 6 June 2010 decided the 6 questions to be submitted to the "Consensus Conference on Homelessness", to be held on 9–10 December in Brussels.

Question 1: What does homelessness mean?

→ A home is synonymous with housing as expressed in the "right to housing".

That is to say a place where not only basic needs, such as hygiene and safety, can be satisfied and where a person feels at home, but also a place where he or she is the owner or tenant.

→ A homeless person is a person without housing.

This may be a person living on the street, someone who lives temporarily with friends or someone in a hostel.

→ homelessness is equivalent to the absence of housing.

This is a situation in which people are excluded from society and where they are held personally responsible for the situation in which they find themselves.

Being homeless gives rise to different feelings

Exclusion

It's complete social exclusion.

I define myself. I have the feeling that I am a burden on society. It's an absurd social cost. It would cost less for society if I were more closely integrated into society.

Social exclusion can affect a child or either parent after a divorce or separation, which can be a very traumatic experience (lies, being thrown out of the parental home, parental alienation). This can lead to a feeling of being different, where people choose to exclude themselves from society. That can be the result of discrimination. (2 c).

Feeling of guilt

It's sometimes better to be dead than homeless.

If you're jobless and with no fixed address, you're a complete nonentity, as if the world had finished with you.

Feeling of invisibility

The problem is, it's as if there is no problem. The problem only exists when someone dies.

Loss of self-confidence

When you don't have a fixed address, you lose your identity, nobody listens to you, you lose your self-confidence and nobody helps you to regain your lost self-confidence.

It's the worst thing that could happen to you. You're not only affected emotionally, but you also lose your self-confidence and no longer trust others. You think that you can no longer trust anyone and as a result society excludes you because you cannot be integrated into it.

Being homeless means that you've lost everything, your possessions and your fundamental rights as a Belgian or European citizen. You don't know where to go if you want to go to the toilet or wash yourself. We don't get enough to eat. You're abandoned by everyone (family, institutions, CPAS). You don't know 2 hours in advance whether you'll have somewhere to sleep or a bowl of soup. It's the way people look at you, the total lack of solidarity.

Being homeless means various needs cannot be satisfied

The lack of hygiene and safety

Having a house means that you can have a certain hygiene. But it's also a shelter, a place where you can be happy and shut out the world when you want to be alone. A shelter against bad weather or when you are sick, even with a slight fever.

Being homeless means you can't satisfy numerous basic needs, such as sleeping, resting, having your own possessions, washing, protecting your private life and security.

The night is another world, especially for a woman. The night outside becomes the house for a woman. It's very tough for a woman compared with a man to sleep outside. She is more exposed to violence (theft, racketeering, trafficking to get money, crime, criminality, etc.).

Being homeless means that you don't have any protection.

It means not sleeping, eating, looking after yourself properly, it also means being exposed to various dangers (alcohol, drugs, violence, etc.). Being homeless means having no privacy.

Multiple causes of homelessness

Breakdown in family relationships

Children, young people who have left home or have been asked to leave the family home by their parents, find themselves on the streets.

My mother's new boyfriend wanted me to leave home.

I lived with my family until the breakdown, I then stayed with a friend until I found myself on the streets.

After a divorce, one of the spouses may also find himself or herself on the streets. This applies to men and women alike.

In the case of a divorce, most of the time, it's the men who keep the apartment and the women who find themselves on the street and go to a hostel (emergency shelters, CHRS, etc.).

When my relationship broke off I left my girl friend and my children for the street.

Joblessness

Most homeless people are out of work and following the loss of their job, they then lose their apartment and then find themselves on the street.

I lost my job because of various problems, I had no more money, so I ended up living in my car.

I made some mistakes but losing my job was the death blow. On top of that I was old when I was made redundant.

Mental health and dependency problems

I was practically driven out after having admitted my dependency. All my money was spent on alcohol and drugs.

If you have dependency problems, they get worse when you find yourself homeless.

I lived with my brother and my father. My father is a severe alcoholic, who has thrown us out more than once. I was fed up and it's not as bad on the streets.

Being homeless we all suffer some kind of psychological problems.

Question 2: Ending Homelessness: A realistic goal?

→ Ending homelessness is a realistic goal if the political fight for access to housing is carried out in the framework of the fight against poverty.

Homeless people are first of all poor people. The only thing which distinguishes them from other poor people is the fact that they have lost their home. The causes leading to homelessness are the same as those that lead to poverty.

Homeless people are made to seem ordinary, part of everyday life, they are the former poor, now they can be found on every

street corner. Stop attaching a negative image to homeless people.

Stopping poverty is the main target.

→ The cornerstone of this preventive policy against poverty and homelessness must be the implementation of social rights, as set out in the Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights, in order to ensure equal access to education, healthcare, work and housing.

The solutions

Access to education

Education must be free for everyone from the age of 3 throughout the period of compulsory schooling. Measures must be taken in favour of the most disadvantaged people to facilitate access to higher education or training. Everyone should be entitled to good-quality education irrespective of their social status. The skills of young people must be developed and they should receive career guidance.

Some teenagers spend years on the streets. The role of parents is to educate their children and avoid a situation where they are on the streets. Young people need to be supported until they reach adulthood. Their skills need to be developed and they need guidance to help them find a job which they enjoy.

I was never fortunate enough to receive a good quality education as we couldn't afford it. Neither did we have the money to go on holiday or participate in any cultural activities.

I can't answer the question on Europe. For me it's a difficult question and that makes me feel stupid. I'm not sure I know what the EU is, I was absent for almost the last two years at school and at home we didn't have any newspapers.

Access to work

The inclusion of poor people depends on work, even via voluntary work.

The only way of resolving the situation of homeless people is work, because inclusion can only be achieved via work.

I went from shelter to shelter then I worked as a voluntary worker for the Petit Rien and I'm still working there.

The minimum wage must be increased to motivate poor people to turn to work.

To reduce poverty, if the government increased the minimum wage, more people would want to go to work and earn more money.

The labour market must be made accessible to the most disadvantaged. There is a need for a positive discrimination policy to make the labour market accessible to these people.

Municipalities should protect vulnerable people; instead of looking for the best deal they should help unemployed people. Provinces and communes should conclude contracts with

companies to recruit a percentage of unemployed people who are living in dormitory-style temporary accommodation.

When people lose their job, it is necessary to ensure that they can continue to pay for their home. That requires an adequate system of unemployment benefits which enables the recipients to make their rent payments on a long-term basis.

It's very difficult to find and above all to keep a job when you're homeless.

It's a vicious circle, no home, no job. No job, no money, so no home. It's like a dog chasing its tail.

I can't find a job or go to school because I don't know where I will be from one day to the next.

Support

Like many extremely poor people, homeless people often need intensive support. Nevertheless, they do not need to be treated as a "special category". That increases social exclusion.

Support must be individualised.

It's useful of course for a network to support people, but different actions are necessary for each person.

Support must be provided by a competent person, capable of empathy and who understands about life on the streets.

They need intensive support, the person providing support should be like a friend. If you go to any service for homeless people, you have to tell them your life story, then if a few days later you go to another service, you have to tell your story all over again. At the end you're fed up so you try to manage otherwise. If you're well supported, you shouldn't have to find yourself homeless again.

Social workers should receive not only theoretical training, but their training should also include practical experience of working with people with difficulties. They need a sense of responsibility, seriousness, humanity and good listening skills. They need to be able to respond immediately.

Support should still be provided even when the person in question has found somewhere to live, in order to avoid the person losing his or her home again.

It's not enough to move out of a shelter, you're still on a razor's edge even when you've moved into your own home. The problems start over again, with bailiffs, more and more bills and your new home is at risk. There should be support to help people live in peace in their new home. An awful lot needs to be done to enable people to find their place again in society.

Ongoing monitoring would help people avoid the pitfalls of finding themselves on the streets again or in a hostel, especially when they don't have any family.

Support may be suggested but cannot be compulsory.

Monitoring to avoid the same errors. Following-up but not controlling the private life of people.

Follow-up and support should be offered to everyone who has difficulties. Obviously that depends entirely on what the person in question wants. For some, it's indispensable, while for others it's unbearable.

Access to healthcare

Access to healthcare cannot be conditional. It must be the same for everyone, irrespective of the person's situation.

I needed to quit the dope and find a job.

It would be more beneficial for me if I could receive mental health care, but that requires a doctor's recommendation, which is expensive and you have to wait a long time.

Obtaining rights

Poor people need to be informed about their rights in order to assert them. Access to rights cannot be conditional to such a point that they become inaccessible.

The CPAS must stop managing things as they see fit. They must be forced to apply laws at federal level instead of interpreting them.

I don't know my rights (we're very badly informed). Even the rights that I think I have are very often completely ignored by the police who refuse to recognise my fundamental rights.

It's very difficult for people without money to get by, because they don't know the laws which should be applied.

Without a fixed address we have no rights. We should be able to count on CPAS benefits but these are allocated in dribs and drabs, depending on the good will of social workers. We're deprived of this right.

Question 3: Are Housing led policy approaches the most effective methods of preventing and tackling homelessness?

→ A housing led policy based on the application of the "right to housing" is the most effective way of preventing and combating homelessness. This right is included in the Community Charter of Fundamental Rights which has become legally binding as a result of the Treaty of Lisbon. To implement the "right to housing" it is necessary to make it possible for poor people to have access to housing.

Housing

Access to housing cannot be conditional.

A home is a right for everyone and it should never be called into question.

The right to housing cannot be called into question, it can only be improved. There must be no conditions attached to it. It cannot be turned into an obstacle course with unbelievable and often pointless administrative formalities, intended to waste time and dissuade homeless people.

All homeless people want to find a home again. This applies equally to those living on the streets and those in shelters.

Homeless people don't necessarily sleep on the streets, but they're always looking for somewhere.

In order to enable poor people to have access to housing, rents must become affordable. Rents must be regulated.

There are not enough homes and above all not enough affordable housing. People are given very little help when it comes to finding accommodation. Existing services are operating at their maximum capacity and cannot reach everyone.

Here in Hungary even people with money find it hard to house themselves. So what can someone like me expect?

Something should be done with regard to owners. In 10 years rents have doubled. The rent should be a third of income. If you earn €750, rent should be €250.

My daughter would have found a home very quickly if prices were affordable. We should put an end to speculation on house prices.

A social housing building policy must be put in place and combined with sanctions if the quotas fixed by governments are not respected.

It's a vicious circle, if you have a very low income you have to rent something from a slum landlord and naturally you end up with very poor housing conditions.

We should be given priority on social housing waiting lists because we're on the streets and we urgently need a roof over our head. We're the ones who require assistance, not politicians.

The authorities must organise the requisition of empty buildings to use them for housing purposes. The renovation of these buildings could be entrusted to poor people in the framework of inclusion, apprenticeship and work projects.

There's also a lack of political will to transform all these empty offices and empty spaces above shops into housing.

The city could requisition the vast number of houses and flats that numerous rich people leave empty, sometimes for several years.

Politicians should approach people living on the streets and say to them: "That building needs renovating (work offered to homeless people) and if you do the work you'll have a home".

We need to create more homes and renovate those that exist but which are inhabitable. In that way we would provide work and increase the number of homes.

We should offer vacant housing (in particular social housing) and give homeless people, if applicable, the possibility to renovate them. That would remedy the problems of these people but it would above all empower them.

People who prefer to live in a community must be able to do so. Various solidarity-based schemes exist, where individuals or families have their own home, but where there are communal areas, such as the kitchen and living room. But they cannot be used to house undesirable people a long way from their customary place of residence.

I live in temporary accommodation with my own toilet but a communal kitchen. It's a way of living that suits my temperament, but it's obviously not ideal for everyone.

→ As long as there is no access to housing, decent accommodation should be offered to all those who have lost their home.

Accommodation

The accommodation must meet minimum European standards. First, human dignity and the need for privacy must be taken into consideration. Therefore, dormitory-style temporary accommodation does not meet these conditions.

I had to stay in a dirty hotel, where there was no possibility for me to cook meals or wash my clothes. I also stayed in a hotel for women where there were 3 toilets for 73 women. The hotel was infested with ants and bugs. It smelt of drains.

For me housing is important because in dormitory-style accommodation you don't really have any privacy. You can't sleep or have your own space or time.

Communal living is fine but for a man to be a man he needs his privacy.

I don't like the idea of being confined in a house with other homeless people. Who are they? I didn't choose them. Even at the station, they always try to rob me. So what's going to happen in a house where we're forced to live together?

What we need is a real home not dormitory-style accommodation where everything is difficult.

Housing must not be conditional.

I didn't receive any help, I had asked for it but I had to sleep in the station because I didn't accept the programme proposed by the social worker.

I was thrown out of the shelter in July because I didn't follow the official procedure. It's a kind of psychological blackmail.

People who become homeless should be able to stay in their own region. Every European Union country should require the municipalities to organise accommodation by region which would reduce the appeal of cities where there are more accommodation structures.

I was moved to a new region and I find that very hard. Transport is expensive so I can't go and visit my friends.

It is necessary to provide above all accommodation where people can live for a sufficiently long period, during which housing support can be provided as well as access to healthcare and work. Support should also be provided to help maintain people in work where applicable. However, this period of time should be limited. The authorities must be able to guarantee access to long-term housing and autonomy within a certain timeframe.

I use the services. They help to prepare me for living alone.

For me, a community is the best place because dormitory-style accommodation is like being on the streets.

We need more crisis centres where you can stay for 3 to 4 weeks. There the formalities are taken care of for you so that you can go to another hostel where you can stay for between 3 and 6 months while waiting for subsidised housing provided that you agreed to accept support.

More houses with home help, not hostels.

Night shelters, where homeless people have to sign in on an almost daily basis, should only be used for dealing with emergency situations.

There are people who live in dormitory-style accommodation for 20 or 30 years.

→ **Everything possible must be done to ensure that poor people do not lose their home. Preventive measures to that end must be taken.**

It would be a good idea to put in place an alert system in the event of the non-payment of rent. This would avoid a large number of evictions.

It's clear that there's an urgent need for preventive actions. This would involve specialists becoming involved as soon as financial difficulties are noted, such as the late payment of bills or charges (rent, electricity, etc.).

I was helped by the Fondamentalee non-profit association which helps with prevention, provides employment support and backs specific measures which go to the heart of the real problems.

No eviction without appropriate re-housing.

Question 4: . How can meaningful participation of homeless people in the development of homelessness policies be assured?

→ To ensure that homeless people participate significantly at European level, Europe should support the creation of a European network of homeless people which would be part of the participatory networks of poor people.

Since the problem of homeless people is that of extremely poor people, a European network of homeless people should be part of the participatory networks of poor people in order to be significant, representative and effective.

Membership of this European network would be open to all homeless people and all organisations of homeless people, from all European Union countries, that want to be part of it, without distinction: not only people living on the streets, but also people living temporarily with friends or those who have found accommodation via the competent services.

A European network of homeless people should be able to represent homeless people in all consultations, in all areas concerning them.

It would be worthwhile to involve the users of services in political solutions, since as long as we're not involved, we'll never be able to participate properly in the discussions.

Homeless people should be involved. They also need to be informed in a timely manner of the various decisions or laws adopted and not simply told what they must do. Procedures must be simplified instead of asking them for a large number of documents which homeless people don't know how to obtain and which are then read by any old person.

→ Europe should help local authorities which support initiatives intended to promote the participation of homeless people.

Participation

According to the expression: "only the person wearing the shoes can feel where they pinch", that is why homeless people should be involved in decisions affecting them.

People who have experienced homelessness could inform homeless people of their rights and support them in their dealings with the various social welfare services and in accomplishing the necessary formalities.

There are people who arrive on the streets, they don't know who to contact. Most of the time they're given explanations by people who are themselves on the streets, not by the authorities.

I talk every day with homeless people and also with people from Sand who use my knowledge

Problems are not resolved at the top but through talking to users of services and employees.

They can invite homeless people to participate in areas which concern them.

In the hostel where I live, I'm the district leader. I encourage other tenants to participate and there are lots of things going on.

Local organisations which are self-managed by people with homelessness experience should be represented in everything that concerns them. Homeless people want to have representatives who defend their interests and work politically at different levels of power to improve their situation.

One solution would be to create committees representing inhabitants, services, with around 25 people, including two homeless people representing them.

Homeless people should be represented in ordinary law bodies (Conseil Général, Pole Emploi, Commission Droit Au Logement Opposable, Services Intégrés de l'Accueil et de l'Orientation, MDPH, Centre Communal d'Action Sociale, etc.).

We need to be represented on the boards of directors of associations and federations

We should set up a national, independent, grassroots decision-making body to link together the bodies representing homeless people.

Question 5: To what extent should people be able to access homeless services irrespective of their legal status and citizenship?

→ Everyone residing in the European Union who, for whatever reason, is destitute and homeless in another EU country, must be entitled to have access to welfare benefits and the same local emergency and housing services.

I know that a lot of foreigners come to work here, but they're badly treated and end up doing undeclared work or doing something illegal. I believe that in the European Union they should be treated with equal respect in all countries.

I've heard that it's better in Belgium, France and Germany.

Homeless people in the EU must have the same rights as Danish homeless people.

→ We need to create a European social fund to which all European Union countries contribute. It would enable local authorities to provide assistance and offer accommodation to European migrants who find themselves destitute and homeless in another EU country.

It's difficult to guarantee equal rights to migrants when resources are already limited for nationals. Racial conflicts will increase severely in proportion to the exhaustion of resources.

Denmark can't support all the homeless people on its own. I wouldn't be happy about being invaded by homeless people from across the European Union.

First of all we should look after Belgians, Europeans and then foreigners from outside Europe.

If my country is incapable of resolving the problems of its own homeless citizens, will it be able to help other European citizens? In my opinion it would be logical for everyone to start by "cleaning up their own backyard".

There aren't enough homes for homeless people in our city and allowing other EU homeless people to enter the system would only make the situation worse.

We need to see which homeless people have the proper legal status and send back the others. Where I live this is a kind of social obligation, it's a system which drives away a lot of homeless foreigners, who find another place where it is easier for them to adapt.

Question 6: Which elements should be integrated into a European Union strategy to combat homelessness?

→ Definition of the term "housing" and the term "homeless person"

There's an urgent need for all European countries to have the same definition for homeless people.

→ Combating poverty and social exclusion via the implementation of fundamental social rights.

-The fundamental rights of all Europeans should be guaranteed.

The reality is such that the EU doesn't have the means to force its Member States to implement a social policy. Nevertheless, the proper application of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms would ensure that the fundamental rights of European citizens are respected.

As some Member States don't have enough political will vis-à-vis homeless people it's up to the EU to act. It can broaden the scope of its action in the welfare area via subsidies and grants to associations.

→ Implementation of the right to housing

The European Union should encourage countries to build more social housing for those in need.

By legislation, adopting the same laws everywhere.

The right to a home is a universal right. This right should be recognised in all European Union countries.

The European Union didn't hesitate to privatise postal services, electricity and trains. Why shouldn't it tackle housing? It could require municipalities to have a certain number of social housing units per number of inhabitants; it could give more aid to enable slum landlords to bring their properties into line with applicable standards and thereby avoid the need to destroy them or sell them to certain large companies. When Europe grants subsidies to modernise cities, it could impose conditions regarding the construction of a certain number of affordable housing units.

→ Promoting the participation of homeless people.

Following-up the consensus conference in order to follow up the knock-on effects: being involved as a stakeholder in the evaluation.

→ Right to migration, free movement and an ID document.

The EU must not only allow all citizens to travel where and when they want, there must also be a change in rights.

Europe has been built without taking into account social rights. It could open its borders to rights for Europeans. During the first 3 months you're in Belgium you're considered as a tourist and this means that you don't have any social rights.

Europe must allow the free movement of poor people. Currently, you can only stay in a country if you're in declared work. All these Romanian, Polish and French migrants who are here and don't have declared work don't exist. They have no rights, why? They're full Europeans. They should have rights like everyone else, but in that case, their country should pay, instead of putting an extra burden on our CPAS in Belgium.

Conclusions

All homeless people want to be housed, to have a home in the true sense of the word. The views of all the people who participated in the consultation, in 8 EU countries, reflect this position. All the homeless people living on the street, those in temporary accommodation and those who are living temporarily with friends, expressed the same wish: to have their own home.

As regards preventive solutions, to avoid losing their home and as a re-housing solution, homeless people recommend above all that rents should be affordable. Support is often seen as essential.

"Housing first" is an idea which advocates immediate access to stable housing for homeless people, thereby addressing numerous problems without the latter being forced to rely on shelters and temporary accommodation. This political option could make it easier to achieve the objective evoked at European level, namely to put an end to "street homelessness". However, significant amounts must be invested in building homes and a major effort must be made to facilitate the implementation of the assistance and support needed in this approach. Otherwise, there is a very high risk that this approach will reach only a small number of the homeless people who are to be found, nowadays, in public and semi-public places, such as stations, while waiting to be housed. Moreover, there is a risk that the people who fall through the net will disappear from public places without having been helped. In addition, investing chiefly in actions which target homeless people living in public areas penalises those who are not on the streets.

Too often the security of users of public and semi-public spaces is evoked to justify actions, the ultimate aim of which is to remove "potential suspects" from these places. It is naturally vital to ensure security, but that should not be achieved at the expense of people who are very often considered as a nuisance which must be eliminated even though these people have not committed any crime or offence.

The only valid way of putting an end to homelessness is to continue and intensify the work intended to put an end to poverty and social exclusion.

In order not to forget or lose sight of the fact that the ultimate aim of the Social Europe project is to build a society based on access to and the exercising of human rights for everyone, it is important to emphasise strongly this principle. To achieve this just and ambitious objective, it is the responsibility of all authorities at all levels of powers to do their utmost to apply the laws and regulations which guarantee access to and the exercising of rights in the areas of healthcare, education, employment and housing.

Too often, access to and the exercising of these rights are prevented by conditions that are imposed or inappropriate, in particular for those who need them the most. Decision-makers must have the will to resolve this problem. Nobody would claim that it is easy to achieve this objective of social justice via the construction of a Europe which is based on rights. However, via judicious choices and a proactive attitude, it is possible. It is important to realise that the fruits of access to and the exercising of rights for everyone will benefit several generations. It is therefore vital to make the necessary targeted choices and significant investments promptly.

Refusing to sink into pessimism, homeless people want to continue to believe in a solution. It is the responsibility of politicians to listen to them and involve them in the process, while acting wisely, concretely and swiftly.