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Time for the EU to Act on Homelessness!

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Calls for Concrete Policy Coordination and Support on Homelessness Can No Longer Be Ignored

■ European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless AISBL

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Time for the EU to Act on Homelessness! Calls for Policy Coordination and Support on Homelessness Can No Longer Be Ignored

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.

In February 2013, the European Commission launched its Social Investment Package (SIP) to reinforce efforts to deliver on the social inclusion objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, including the objective to reduce the number of people living in poverty and social exclusion by 20 million.³ One of the thematic priorities of the SIP is the fight against homelessness. The European Commission calls on Member States (MS) to “confront homelessness through comprehensive strategies based on prevention, housing-led approaches and reviewing regulations and practices on eviction”.⁴ Furthermore, the package includes detailed policy guidance on homelessness.⁵

The EU institutions have broadly welcomed the SIP, but they have stressed the need for a detailed EU strategy 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” as part of the SIP.⁶ The employers’ federations, trade unions, and the third sector represented by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) asked the European Commission to “produce a plan for the implementation of the thematic priorities” of the SIP, including homelessness.⁷ The cities and regions represented by the Committee of the Regions have called on the European Commission to develop a “concrete EU framework to support stakeholders to make progress on tackling homelessness”.⁸ Furthermore, Commissioner László Andor has stressed,⁹ on several occasions, how important it is to ensure progress on homelessness as part of the implementation of the SIP. At the SIP launch during a conference in Leuven in May this year, László Andor said “The Commission will support Member States in their efforts to confront homelessness.”¹⁰

The SIP aims to contribute to the European Semester process and re-enforce its social dimension.¹¹ Homelessness has emerged as a social inclusion priority within the Semester Process in the past few years. Several MS have concentrated on homelessness in their National Reform Programmes.¹² In an overarching Communication on the implementation of the 2013 Country Specific Recommendations (CSR), the European 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”.¹³ The European Parliament also stresses 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”.¹⁴ In addition, 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.¹⁵

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

⁵ SWD(2013) 42 final <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SWD:2013:0042:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁶ 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>

⁷ CESE 1557/2013 - SOC/481 <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.soc-opinions.26024>

⁸ CDR 1999/2013 <https://toad.cor.europa.eu/corwipdetail.aspx?folderpath=ECOS-V/042&id=22057>

⁹ http://europa.eu/epic/news/2013/20130530-irish-presidency-sip_en.htm

¹⁰ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-13-382_en.htm?locale=en

¹¹ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/special-reports/european-semester>

¹² FEANTSA reviewed National Reform Programmes in 2013 <http://feantsa.org/spip.php?article1525&lang=en>

¹³ http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nd/2013ecomm_en.pdf

¹⁴ 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>

¹⁵ 16984/10. <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st16/st16984-ad01.en10.pdf>



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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.¹⁶ 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”.¹⁷

It is significant that the overall policy framework for making progress towards the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy (the Semester), the specific social inclusion policy framework for the European Commission (the SIP) and the main operational framework for supporting activities in the social area (EaSI and the EU 2020 Flagship Initiative – the European Platform against Poverty) all highlight homelessness as a priority.¹⁸

Given the numerous requests in recent years for an EU strategy on homelessness - from the European Parliament,¹⁹ the EESC²⁰ and the CoR²¹ - and for an EU scheme on homelessness from the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO),²² it is now urgent to launch the development of an action plan or strategy to support better progress on tackling homelessness. Such a strategy could support Member States 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)²³ and those of the Ministers' Round Table on Homelessness in 2013 (an Irish EU Presidency initiative),²⁴ 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) (with homeless people as specific target group),²⁵ the European Social Fund (ESF) (with reaching homeless people as a likely EU evaluation criterion),²⁶ and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (with a range of relevant priorities, including the possibility to fund social and health infrastructure).²⁷

Homelessness is an urgent problem that we cannot tolerate in the European Union.²⁸ It is rapidly increasing in virtually all EU Member States.²⁹ The demand for support from the EU, which is about knowledge and expertise as much as it is about money, comes from public authorities, EU institutions and NGOs. An EU action plan on homelessness is necessary to honour these calls for support.

There are still 7 years to go until the EU 2020 strategy reaches its term. A lot is still possible in that time. Let's not waste the opportunity!

¹⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1093>

¹⁷ A7-0241/2012 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A7-2012-0241&language=EN>

¹⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=961>

¹⁹ 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>

²⁰ 2012/C 24/07 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52011IE1592:EN:NOT>

²¹ 2011/C 15/08 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:015:0041:0045:EN:PDF>

²² 11639/12 <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/12/st11/st11639.en12.pdf>

²³ <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article327&lang=en>

²⁴ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=88&eventsId=872&furtherEvents=yes>

²⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1704&furtherNews=yes>

²⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp>

²⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/regional/index_en.cfm

²⁸ <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique160&lang=en>

²⁹ 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>



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- 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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