



Delivering an Employment Agenda for Homeless People in Europe

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EU Agenda

Over the past two years the Juncker Commission has made employment a flagship component of its social affairs strategy. The European Commission (EC) has committed to raising 20 million people out of poverty as part of its 2020 Agenda. As part of this target, the EC has prioritized employment as a means of reducing poverty through initiatives such as the Skills Agenda, the Youth Guarantee and the Alliance for Apprenticeships. A challenge for the EC and the Member States in implementing these policy measures is to ensure that those most in need of support can benefit from EU action.

FEANTSA has recently launched its [Be Fair Europe – Stand Up for Homeless People](#) campaign, which provides 5 key steps for the European Commission in reducing homelessness. In the area of employment, the Commission needs to engage with the homeless sector, to avoid “creaming” of EU policy instruments and ensure that those most in need of assistance are reached.

Why Should EU Employment Action Focus on Homelessness?

The Commissioner responsible for employment and social affairs has stated that no one should be left behind in EU policy. To give full effect to these words, the EC as a whole must act to ensure that vulnerable people already experiencing social exclusion and living in extreme poverty are not forgotten by EU policymakers. Ensuring that people experiencing homelessness can benefit from initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee and Skills Agenda, requires specific strategies to include this target group. A hallmark of homelessness is social exclusion, indicating that you are out of the reach of social and employment services. Employment is a key pathway out of homelessness and an effective method to lift people out of poverty, but requires a targeted approach.

Skills Agenda and Skill Guarantee

*“To step up action and **not to leave anyone behind**, we propose a basic skills guarantee. This is a recommendation to Member States to bring together their resources to **offer low skilled people** opportunities to catch up and acquire the skills that will help them to find employment, stay in work, and improve their working situation”*

Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Address to the European Parliament - 7 June 2016

Youth Guarantee

*“It is the Commission's firm intention to steer the Union more strongly towards social fairness. This means **no one should be left behind**, in particular our youth”*

Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Address to the European Parliament - 5 July 2016

Linking Homelessness and Employment

Ending homelessness is about more than housing. The link between employment and homelessness is important. Housing can be costly and in the long term a sustainable income is required to make housing solutions successful. Employment that provides a decent level of income and allows for an adequate standard of living safeguards against a person becoming homeless in the future.



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Obstacles to the Labour Market:

Those experiencing homelessness are generally far removed from the labour market. However, this does not mean that they cannot be supported back into employment. The obstacles they face are detailed below and demonstrate how EU action such as the Skills Agenda, Youth Guarantee and European Alliance of Apprenticeships have the capacity to give greater assistance to people who are homeless.

Lack of Education or Appropriate Training

Many people who are homeless lack relevant training that match the labour market. For example, a key feature of youth homelessness is leaving second level education early, meaning they likely lack the required skill-set needed by potential employers.

Lack of awareness of education and training opportunities

Even where people are entitled to participate in training, education or vocational programs, people who are homeless can often be unaware of their very existence. It's not necessarily that homeless people are "hard to reach", sometimes it is the support services that are "hard to reach".

Stigma

Stigmatization is a common experience of homelessness. Often prospective employers don't want to hire people who are, or have been, homeless, irrespective of their skills and qualifications. Stigma is often rooted in a misunderstanding of what homelessness is.

Precarious living situation

People who are living between shelters or in a housing program for a brief period of time can find it difficult to source employment without a permanent address. Some social welfare systems may use a permanent address as a pre-requisite for participating in training programs, which can further bar homeless people from education services.



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How Can EU Action Support the Needs of People Experiencing Homelessness?

Skills Agenda: The lack of relevant skillsets among people experiencing homelessness is particularly relevant for the Skills Agenda, which prioritizes supporting people with low literacy and numeracy skills and the long-term unemployed, many of which are over-represented in the homeless sector. Supporting the needs of people experiencing homelessness won't happen in a vacuum, as noted above, people who are homeless are hidden from such services and may not be aware of the existence of these programmes. DG EMPL needs to engage with the homeless sector in order to ensure they reach out to these target beneficiaries. Case Study one provides an example of how the Skills Agenda can support people with experiences of homelessness.

European Skills Shortage

“70 million Europeans lack adequate reading and writing skills, and even more have poor numeracy and digital skills, putting them at risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. More than half of the 12 million long-term unemployed are considered as low-skilled”

Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions: A New Skills Agenda For Europe – June 2016

European Alliance for Apprenticeships: Work-based learning is considered a more flexible and effective means for upskilling people with experiences of homelessness. Vocational educational training (VET) and apprenticeships are considered a more effective and suitable means to bring people experiencing homelessness back into the labour market. While the Alliance has published a framework for SMEs which includes engaging with disadvantaged learners, it fails to provide concrete methods to engage with people with experiences of homelessness. Funding for participating in apprenticeships under the alliance is sourced from the ESF and the Youth Employment Initiative. These programs should be directed to reserve specific funding to support young people who either are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Additionally, guidelines should be produced on how to encourage the participation of people with experiences of homelessness. Case Study 2 provides a concrete example of how apprenticeships can provide employment and training opportunities to those with experiences of homelessness.

The Youth Guarantee: The Guarantee sets out to support **all** people under the age of 25 in accessing education, training or employment after 4 months of becoming unemployed. The real impact of the guarantee is still unknown, but there is evidence to demonstrate that the guarantee is failing to reach out to the most vulnerable young people. Interventions such as this, if designed and implemented for young people facing homelessness, can have a significant impact on reducing and ending homelessness. DG EMPL should give greater consideration to the needs of young people, and using the Guarantee both to prevent young people from becoming homeless and to provide young people who are homeless with a pathway to both employment and housing. Case Study 3 provides an example of how the Youth Guarantee can support homeless youth not in education, training or employment.



Delivering an Employment Agenda for Homeless People in Europe

Case Study 1: Simon Communities, Cork, Ireland.

This Case Study is an example of how the European Skills Agenda and Skills Guarantee can provide valuable training and upskilling to people with experiences of homelessness.

In 2008 the Cork Simon Communities established a training and employment programme. The programme is targeted to people at risk of homelessness, experiencing homelessness or who have recently exited homelessness. The programme demonstrates the value in training and upskilling both in the fight to end homelessness and in promoting community integration.

The participants of the programme are generally low skilled, have a history of precarious employment and/or are far removed from the labour market. Participants have a wide age range from 18-63. Simon Communities operates an open-door policy and doesn't set a threshold for working with clients. Experiences of mental illness, insecure housing or alcohol or substance misuse do not prohibit anyone from participating in the programme.

After expressing an interest in training, the participant has an assessment where they highlight their desires, what they want to learn, where they want to work and what they want to progress towards. This enables the services to be tailored to the participant. The value is in the person engaging with the service, whether it is for an hour a week or daily training for several weeks, while having a positive experience. The flexibility of the time commitments allows a gradual transition towards employment and education.

Cork Simon offers a wide variety of education, training and employment options. Courses include literacy and numeracy or accredited

workplace qualifications such as fire safety or operating a fork lift. Simon also provide a range of culinary courses around menu planning and meal services, which addresses an estimated 5000 vacant positions in the culinary sector in Ireland. Courses are developed and designed to meet the needs of participants.

The service provision does not end with training. Over its nearly 10 years in operation, Simon Communities have built relationships with over 50 local businesses.

To help facilitate the transition to work, a series of courses such as communication and personal effectiveness are facilitated to provide the participants with the practical skills to succeed in their employment. Employers have had a very positive experience of working with the Training and Employment service, and have said that the staff they hire through this programme have a higher retention rate than mainstream recruitment.

The successful transition from training to work is important. Simon Communities also provide a "Step to Work Program", which allows participants to do work experience, and understand the role of the position and to feel comfortable to ask questions.

While in employment, Simon Communities provide mentoring support. These are facilitated by an external consultant with experience in the private sector, who coaches and advises service users with challenges they encounter in their new work environments.

Each year the programme works with approximately 250+ participants. It is proven to be an empowering experience for those that have participated in the training, with 82% having successfully transitioned out of homelessness.



Delivering an Employment Agenda for Homeless People in Europe

Case Study 2: Connection Crew, London, England

This Case Study is an example of how the European Alliance of Apprenticeships can provide valuable training and employment to people with experiences of homelessness.

Connection Crew provides an example of how highly skilled professionals can provide employment opportunities to people who are homeless.

Connection Crew is a company which specialises in building events. Their staff are highly skilled as manual handlers, specialist drivers, and in rigging stages and sets and setting up PA and lighting systems. Connection crew noticed a 200% increase in the number of people becoming homeless and sleeping rough in England, as a result of the economic crisis. For those who became homeless, re-engaging with employment has been extremely difficult.

Connection Crew plays a pivotal role in working with homeless charities to help people exit homelessness, by providing a structured transition back into employment. Connection Crew operates a 10-week training program at the Connection Crew Academy, along with work shadowing, on-the-job learning and peer support to successfully bring people with experiences of homelessness back into employment. The program has proved successful in not only upskilling people who are homeless but in raising their self-confidence.

The process is a better, slower transition to work. No one is expected to be thrown straight into employment. Connection Crew run a Build Day to give potential participants a taster of the programme, accompanied with an interview,

induction and training days and work shadowing. Connection Crew is also careful to cap hours to ensure there is no disruption to accessing benefits. Connection Crew selects participants on the basis of interviews and direct referrals from homeless charities, in order to identify the people with the greatest likelihood of success, no one should be set up to fail. Connection Crew has 10 criteria for selecting trainees, including: the right to work, to be in stable accommodation for the duration of the training, to be free of alcohol and drug dependency, to declare if they are receiving treatment for a mental illness, to have the support of a charity based job coach, to have access to a phone and computer, to declare if they have any criminal convictions that may limit their availability to work or access to public spaces and are in good physical health. Experiences of mental illness will not disqualify anyone, as long as they are receiving counselling and support for it.

The programme offers additional support services including training sessions on soft skills for general employment and CV development to broaden the participants' ability to change jobs towards other forms of employment. While in training, the programme offers a mentoring support programme where experienced employees help the trainees with the adjustment to the new workplace.

At the end of the training academy the most suitable trainees will be offered positions with Connection Crew. Those who are not offered employment are given advice and support on finding other forms of employment. Where possible Connection Crew also introduces trainees to potential employers.

Over the last 11 years, Connection Crew have employed 157 people who have previously been homeless, with over 88,000 hours of work completed. Connection Crew staff is at least one quarter formerly homeless.



Delivering an Employment Agenda for Homeless People in Europe

Case Study 3: Tapaj, Bordeaux, France

This Case Study provides an example of how the Youth Guarantee can specifically target vulnerable youth with experiences of homelessness.

Tapaj is an innovative model of blending social support and employment for vulnerable youth between the ages 18 and 25. Participants of the programme are generally homeless: living in squats, the street or other forms of precarious housing. The service users have usually experienced family breakdown and suffer from mental illness, exacerbated by the misuse of drugs or alcohol. Many of the young people who experience homelessness are socially marginalised and are far removed from the labour market. Many are socially excluded have suffered difficulties in the care system and a history of missing medical and social appointments.

Tapaj operates in three phases, allowing for a gradual transition to employment while also increasing engagement in care.

Phase One focuses on short-term work, the young person registers for one day of work per week for 4 hours. Young people register through street workers, health or social centres or by telephone. Tapaj places up to 7 young people together for their job, with one supervisor. The young person gets paid EUR10 an hour, and is paid at the end of the working day. After a young person grows accustomed to the work they move to the next phase.

Phase Two allows the young person to work up to 3 days a week, and get paid at the end of the working week. In addition to increased employment, Tapaj focuses on the “global” needs of

the young person. You can't view employment, housing, health or social care in isolation. To improve the overall well-being, a holistic approach is needed to ensure all needs of the young person are considered together. The future housing needs of the young person are also given consideration, and they are supported in searching for sustainable and safe housing.

Phase Three increases the number of the hours worked towards full time employment, with the aim of assisting the young person into other forms of employment.

Examples of employment with Tapaj include maintenance of green spaces with Town Halls and SNCF, logistics support with retail company Auchan and reception work with the EDF, the French electricity company.

The gradual nature of Tapaj has enabled its participants to build their skills and self-confidence as they prepare for full employment. On average, 45% of the young people make a healthy transition to employment. Considering the high level and complexity of needs this is a very positive development. For those who choose not to progress beyond Phase One or Two, significant progress has still been made in upskilling, acquiring valuable work experience and re-engaging with health and social services.

In 2016, Tapaj operated in 10 cities across France and worked with over 400 youth and clocked up over 10,000 hours of work.



Delivering an Employment Agenda for Homeless People in Europe

Case Study 4: The Rambler Studios, Amsterdam, Netherlands

This Case Study provides an example of how the Youth Guarantee can specifically target vulnerable youth with experiences of homelessness.

The Rambler Studios project provides young people experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, with the skills and tools that empower them to design, manufacture and sell their own unique fashion collections. The studios work with young people, generally aged 17-28, living rough on the street or participating in housing programmes. The young people participating generally have complex needs including at least one of the following: i) financial instability, ii) poor health – either physical, mental or both, iii) absence of an active support network such as family members, iv) school dropout and/or v) experience of the justice system.

The project collaborates with a local organisation supporting youth homelessness, Street Corner Work, which refers suitable young people to the Rambler Studios. While in the studio, participants work with the Rambler's coaches who assist participants to navigate the creative process in designing a fashion collection from inception to selecting materials and sewing the clothes together. Each week social workers from Street Corner Work pass by the studio to check in on the progress of the clients, they do not interfere in the creative process but use this more informal space to check up and engage with their service users. Testimonials have showed that participants have successfully used this environment to share their stories, experiences and the problems they face. They are in fact encouraged to develop their collections around themselves and their identity.

This programme usually takes 40-50 young people a year and participation is voluntary. Participants are not mandated to fulfil a set number of hours a week in the studio, but rather come as often as they wish. This approach has aided the project in creating a family/community dynamic among participants that can be used as a safe place to seek advice and support from their peers. The service takes a client centred and flexible approach that understands and caters to the complex needs of the participants. Participants have often found it difficult to engage with rigid education and employment systems, and found this to be a successful model to re-engage with such services gradually.

The project's aim is to help stimulate and develop the creative interests of participants and help them to discover and use their talents. The project doesn't impose a strict deadline for exiting the programme. In fact, Rambler executes an open door policy regularly welcoming previous participants to come back to the studio to visit, engage in their services and share their stories.

The project has welcomed the use of Erasmus+ funding to enable them to broaden their network, spread their story and set up similar initiatives in other cities, such as Berlin. However, a key issue with EU funding has been managing the administrative burden. In such projects the focus, energy and resources need to be used towards assisting the young people and in small organizations, the bureaucracy of EU funding has led to resources being spent on administrative issues.