

WORDS FROM FEANTSA

At the root of social work sits a fundamental tension: how do we acknowledge and combat the systematic and social disempowerment of individuals without perpetuating this very disempowerment in our efforts? How do we avoid replicating the power dynamics that keep people marginalised while trying to promote their welfare and rights? Social actions such as the fight to end homelessness can, despite the best of intentions, inadvertently strip those it intends to help of their autonomy, dignity, and power. Navigating this tension underlies the practice of participation.

Giving voice to marginalised communities has long been central to grassroots and community-based social movements, such as the 20th-century Civil Rights Movement in the US. For many years now, it has been a priority of FEANTSA to listen to, and encourage the listening to and involvement of, people with experiences of homelessness in actions that concern them. In pursuit of this, we have previously examined the state of participation in homeless services and explored how organisations involved individuals with lived experience in decision-making and advocacy efforts. In both our actions and through dedicated publications we have explored the benefits achieved and the challenges faced in implementing participatory approaches.

As the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH) continues towards the goal of ending homelessness in Europe by 2030, against the backdrop of at least 895,000 people living in homelessness throughout Europe, it remains necessary to reflect on the nature and structuring of services and policies, and the latent attitudes they may reveal. While planning activities aimed at lifting people from homelessness and preventing further homelessness, participation continues to offer us the opportunity to challenge our perceptions of the role and character of homeless social and policy work. Importantly, this must be done without tokenism – it is not enough to simply show those who have experienced homelessness in decision-making processes; we must listen to them, recognising their expertise and informed perspectives. As the articles in this edition illustrate, participation is a means to empower individuals, challenge stereotypes, and ultimately, shape a more open and inclusive world.

In this edition of our magazine, we take a deep dive into how homeless services have been implementing participation in recent years, bringing forward successful examples of real participation. We explore a collection of articles that spotlight the voices and experiences of those who have experienced homelessness, shedding light on how their active involvement is inspiring innovation within services, challenging stereotypes, and influencing policies on homelessness.

EDITORIAL



By **Bryony Martin**, Communications and Events Officer, FEANTSA

The magazine begins with **neunerhaus'** Peer Campus in Vienna. The article explores how the campus empowers individuals with lived experience to become mentors for others recognising the guiding value of peers and their unique position and ability to support others through shared knowledge and experiences.

Arrels Fundació in Barcelona challenges norms by involving those with lived experience in a variety of roles from everyday operations to decision-making. They explore how participation, in particular visible participation, helps to dispel prejudices. **Focus Ireland's** Lived Experience Ambassador Programme (LEAP) humanises homelessness and influences policy through personal narratives. It gives participants the opportunity to push for their own rights and recognition, instilling them with greater self-confidence.

Participation may demonstrate its respect for lived experience by valuing self-direction. For example, **Kralji ulice** explain how they empower individuals and acknowledge their potentialities by letting their own desires and interests inform the activities of the association and the opportunities provided - leading to projects such as persons with lived experience guided tours of Ljubljana, and their street paper. In the article on **Budapest's "Home for everyone"** strategy, we learn how a series of forums and the creation of a *Council of Experts by Experience* helped generate a deeper sensation of citizenship and more effective policy responses. **The Erasmus+ "HOOD Homeless's Open Dialogue"** project fosters autonomy and cooperative problem-solving by utilising an Enabling Co-planning approach. This article explains how the HOOD project consortium actively challenges traditional approaches (f.ex.: avoiding paternalistic, service worker-led aid), and allows people to dictate what will help them: asking beneficiaries to imagine themselves *happy*. It is not assumed that the organisation knows better than the individual.

Finally, we had the pleasure to guide an interview with YLDISS and Roberto, members of **Le Syndicat des immenses** about what they found to be the significance of participation, and what kind of barriers might impede access to participation. They expanded on the power of participation for combating prejudice and the invisibility of those in poverty in Belgium.

As you navigate through these articles, you may observe a common thread: participation not only prevents the reinforcement of marginalising power dynamics, but it is necessary for transformation. Numerous challenges remain for achieving real participation, such as limited funding opportunities and the need for broader policy changes for substantial progress, as explored in the articles within. We hope this edition of the magazine may serve as inspiration for how participation may be successfully implemented in our efforts ahead of the 2030 deadline. Ultimately, the respect we aspire to promote for those individuals both in situations of homelessness and with past experiences of homelessness, must begin within our services themselves. We must recognise the knowledge of those with lived experiences of homelessness as exactly that - knowledge.

