

STATEMENT

Brussels, 11th September 2020

End of evictions ban will cause surge in homelessness

In response to the pandemic, many public authorities have taken extraordinary measures to address homelessness and many have provided thousands of homeless people with emergency housing, proving that it can be done. These short-term solutions have proved essential in times of emergency, but also underlined the need for systemic change to eradicate homelessness.

But the risk of a sudden and exponential increase of homeless people is very real, as the moratoria on evictions slowly end but the impact of the coronavirus continues to endanger the situation of already vulnerable groups. The economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis has put many people at risk of homelessness and public authorities have reacted swiftly to prevent a wave of new people losing their homes due to the pandemic to prevent evictions, secure incomes and provide other support for those struggling with rental or mortgage costs, etc. FEANTSA and its members are concerned that the termination of these measures that have offered a respite may put thousands at risk of homelessness. **In order to stem the flow of people into homelessness is necessary to keep people housed.**

Protecting tenants from being evicted into homelessness must be a priority for EU Member States. Public authorities should maintain the measures until the end of the health crisis and ensure a smooth transition to alternative accommodation. As the former Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, Leilani Farha, stated "*housing has become the frontline defense against the coronavirus*" and evictions without an alternative accommodation that result in homelessness are a violation of international human rights law, including the right to housing^[1]. Therefore, **Authorities that do not provide alternative housing solutions to people faced with rental eviction are violating international law.**

We welcome recent steps towards continuing to protect tenants in **France**, where a regulation (instruction) issued by the former Minister of Housing, Julien de Normandie, aims at "preventing rental evictions without alternative accommodation and avoiding homeless people being released to the streets from emergency and temporary accommodation".

In the **United Kingdom**, Scotland extended the protection for tenants during the Covid-19 pandemic for a six-month period, due to expire on 30 September 2020. The Scottish government recently announced their plan to extend these measures further, until March

¹ The former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Leilani Farha, issued a statement detailing measures to be taken to ensure the protection of tenants and people in debt. COVID-19 Guidance Note on Prohibition of evictions, 28 April 2020: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/SR_housing_COVID-19_guidance_evictions.pdf

2021. Northern Ireland has equally joined Scotland in extending this protection for renters². Even in England, where the suspension of new evictions ended last August 23, ministers were forced to extend the ban, amid warnings of housing charities³ and local authorities⁴ that thousands of renters could lose their homes.

In the **Brussels' region** a moratorium on evictions expired at the end of August and there are no plans of an extension to this date⁵. A platform of organisations demonstrated against the end of the moratoria and called for a new extension in early September. The activists claim that the Brussels government should define other protective measures for tenants⁶. In the Brussels region many families are still severely impacted by the health crisis: job loss, loss of income, health problems. The moratorium on home evictions has allowed them to "keep their heads" out of the water a few months but homeless organisations fear that many families may end up homeless.

In **Spain**, the government approved a suspension of evictions until six months after the lifting of the state of alarm (which will happen on December 21) in the case of vulnerable families when an alternative housing could not be provided. In Italy the moratorium on evictions has been extended until end of December⁷.

FEANTSA believes that EU member states must continue to protect everyone against eviction for an extended period. However other legislation needs to be introduced providing legal and financial support for renters. The extension of the ban on evictions is not enough, measures should include debt relief and others as many vulnerable families may be otherwise losing their homes.

EU Member States must provide the resources to ensure that this can be done in conformity with their obligations under human rights law: *an end to evictions until the end of the pandemic and for a reasonable period of time thereafter*⁸. If an eviction takes place, the person must be provided with adequate alternative housing. Members States must ensure

² <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2020/aug/21/hope-for-renters-in-england-facing-eviction-due-to-covid-arrears> <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/news/minister-ni-chuilin-announces-extension-legislation-protect-renters>

³ 230,000 could lose homes as eviction ban ends in England and Wales: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/aug/19/230000-could-lose-homes-as-eviction-ban-ends-in-england-and-wales>

⁴ Manchester 'faces 1930s-style homelessness' as eviction ban ends: https://www.rtb.be/info/regions/bruxelles/detail_expulsions-de-logements-a-bruxelles-manifestation-contre-la-fin-du-moratoire?id=10573887the-guardian.com/society/2020/aug/19/manchester-faces-1930s-style-homelessness-as-eviction-ban-ends?utm_term=Autofeed&CMP=tw_t_gu&utm_medium&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1597868602

⁵ Brussels, the moratoria on evictions will end at the end of August https://www.rtb.be/info/regions/detail_bruxelles-le-moratoire-sur-les-expulsions-vient-a-echeance-fin-aout-et-il-ne-sera-pas-prolonge?id=10565053&fbclid=IwAR2BsQrBmGvr4YiManb_7MaNE_91mkGfwwRo6SJXB0i6p67F9H8A7vW7o

⁶ Brussels: demonstration against the end of the moratorium on housing evictions https://www.rtb.be/info/regions/bruxelles/detail_expulsions-de-logements-a-bruxelles-manifestation-contre-la-fin-du-moratoire?id=10573887

⁷ https://www.repubblica.it/economia/2020/06/28/news/coronavirus_blocco_degli_sfratti_fino_al_31_dicembre_2020-260455048/

⁸ UN Special Rapporteur on adequate housing called on governments around the world to halt all evictions until the COVID-19 pandemic ends: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26170&LangID=E>

access to justice for those individuals, families or communities that experience an eviction and are seeking access to effective remedies.

In order to protect distressed tenants and homeowners, EU funds should be key. EU funding should be used to prevent and alleviate homelessness through housing solutions but also for the prevention of homelessness, keeping people housed should be as important in order to avoid increasing homeless flows. Member States and regions are currently laying down the programming for the 2021-2027 budget – this is a new opportunity to reduce homelessness with the help of EU funds.

Over the last decade, homelessness has been increasing across Europe. This has to stop. FEANTSA calls for immediate action from the EU and Member States on three fronts: in the immediate future, temporary housing must be provided to households who are or are at risk of being homeless, strategies need to be implemented to provide long-term housing, and an integrated approach must be taken to prevent homelessness– starting with mediation and support services for people faced with evictions.