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PRESS RELEASE
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United in Times of Crisis: The FEANTSA Forum 2023 Brings Together Over 300 Stakeholders in the Fight Against Homelessness

The fight against homelessness took centre stage on the 2nd of June as Stockholm welcomed more than 300 participants to the FEANTSA Forum 2023: United in Times of Crisis. Organised by FEANTSA in partnership with Sveriges Stadsmissioner, the Forum provided a dynamic platform for networking, knowledge exchange, and exploring effective strategies. Against a backdrop of challenging circumstances, advocates, practitioners, policymakers, and experts from various sectors put forward a shared vision to end homelessness.

The FEANTSA Forum 2023 kicked off with a thought-provoking panel discussion, 'Realising our European Ambitions of Ending Homelessness', featuring a line-up of influential figures in the field.

Karine Lalieux, the Belgian Minister of Pensions and Social Integration, highlighted the crucial role of the Housing First approach:

Homelessness knows no borders, and it is our collective responsibility to address this pressing issue. We cannot turn a blind eye to the plight of those without a roof over their heads, for it reflects a failure in our society's ability to provide basic dignity and opportunities for all. We must join hands, devise innovative solutions, and create a comprehensive framework to tackle homelessness. We recognise that traditional approaches have not been sufficient in addressing this complex issue. That is why we champion the Housing First approach, which places stable housing as the foundation for individuals' well-being and recovery. By prioritising housing stability, we can break the cycle of homelessness and address the underlying issues that contribute to it.

Let us embrace a compassionate and pragmatic strategy, offering not just roofs over heads, but comprehensive support services that empower individuals to rebuild their lives. Housing First is not just a policy, it is a philosophy that recognises the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Together, we can create a society where homelessness is no longer a reality, but a chapter of the past, replaced by a future of dignity, opportunity, and inclusive communities for all.

Addressing the persistent challenge of homelessness at the European level, Spanish Minister for Social Rights and 2030 Agenda, Ione Belarra, delivered a powerful message during her video address to the Forum. Setting the tone for the upcoming Spanish Presidency of the European

Union, she outlined an ambitious vision:

I believe that the Spanish Presidency of the European Union is a key date for making progress on these challenges at the European level.

During the Presidency, we want to promote a declaration in which, together with the countries concerned, we will convey the importance of the fight against homelessness in the political agenda and the need to maintain and strengthen the European Platform. In addition, we also want to work with the following presidencies, as we are already doing with Belgium, to give continuity to the achieved progress.

We are going to convene a meeting with the formal agenda of the Presidency on 13 September, in which we will address two central issues: the definition of public policies on the eradication of homelessness and the shift towards deinstitutionalisation and community-based responses as solutions to eradicate homelessness, putting citizen rights at the centre.

The significance of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness echoed throughout the event; its focus was evident in the 'Research on Homelessness: National Strategies and Models of Prevention' session, which presented the research conducted by experts in the context of Mutual Learning events organised by the Platform.

Through the day, participants had the opportunity to engage in a variety of sessions addressing key issues. 'War in Ukraine: Housing & Reception of Refugees' discussed research on long-term housing solutions for refugees and first-hand experiences from service providers. In the face of an escalating cost of living, the 'Cost of Living Crisis & Homeless Services' seminar addressed rising homelessness risk and the struggle of services against budget constraints.

The FEANTSA Forum also emphasised intersectionality in tackling homelessness, through sessions such as 'Insights and Practices in Combatting LGBTIQ Homelessness', 'Capturing Women's Homelessness' and 'Trauma-Informed Care in Practice'.

Reflecting on the event, Jonas Wihlstrand, Secretary General of the Swedish Association of City Missions, stated:

I am delighted that the Swedish Association of City Missions and FEANTSA have gathered so many people engaged in the quest to end homelessness. All EU countries share a common vision of eradicating homelessness by 2030. During this conference, we have exchanged knowledge, united forces, and shared experiences of our mission to provide a home for everyone.

But the fact remains: without enough affordable housing, we will never achieve this vision. Now policymakers must show their commitment. Only with a political will, we can ensure a home for everyone.

Beyond planned sessions, the FEANTSA Forum 2023 oversaw insightful conversations and idea exchanges among participants, offering space to build connections between different actors in the fight against homelessness. As we look towards the future and anticipate FEANTSA Forum 2024, we plan for a year of work and collaboration with renewed energy.

About FEANTSA

FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. We are the only European NGO focusing exclusively on the fight against homelessness. Working with over 130 member organisations from 27 countries, our goal is to end to homelessness in Europe. FEANTSA's members are predominantly NGOs working with homeless people, but also other stakeholders involved in the fight against homelessness such as public authorities, social housing providers, foundations, and research entities.

About Sveriges Stadsmissioner

The City Missions work for a more humane society where everyone has the power to shape their lives and participate in society. Our mission is to help people in social and economic vulnerability to their own home, an adequate economy and social security. The Swedish Association of City Missions (Sveriges Stadsmissioner) supports its members, the local City Mission, through fundraising, advocacy, and cooperation.