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PRESS RELEASE
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FEANTSA Policy Conference 2022 unites European delegates towards a vision for ending homelessness

Today, over 300 actors in the fight against homelessness gathered in Dublin for the *FEANTSA Annual Policy Conference 2022: Towards a Vision for Ending Homelessness*. The Conference was held under the patronage of Darragh O'Brien, Minister for Housing, Ireland, and in partnership with Irish NGO and FEANTSA member Simon Communities.

Commenting following this morning's session at the FEANTSA conference Minister O'Brien said,

"The vision which everyone here today shares, to end homelessness, can be achieved with collaboration and innovative thinking. This Government is determined to use all tools at our disposal to bring an end to this crisis."

Announcing his intention to make changes to the HAP discretion limits the Minister said,

"I am working with my government colleagues to roll out an increase in the HAP discretion rate to 35% and expanding the couple's rate to single persons. This will secure and expand more tenancies and is something I know many Irish delegates here today have been seeking. Ultimately, I want us to get to a place where we are decreasing our reliance on market subsidies and we will do that through significantly scaling up our social housing supply. Housing for all sets us on a pathway to delivering 90,000 social homes between now and the end of 2030."

Concluding Minister O'Brien said, "Today's conference provides an important forum which brings together some of the foremost housing experts from across the continent and is testament to the important role played by FEANTSA in bringing together non-profit services that support homeless people in Europe."

This year, FEANTSA offered an innovative format with a variety of different sessions to celebrate the milestone of hosting the first entirely in-person Policy Conference since the start of the pandemic. Beyond the usual workshops and seminars, participants enjoyed "spotlight on" and "in conversation with" sessions, which provided spaces to meet and interact with experts in specific fields within the homelessness sector.

The day kicked off with a panel discussion questioning what it means to end homelessness, directly addressing the title of the Conference. Critical voices from diverse backgrounds participated in this debate, including policymakers and NGO representatives. The European Platform on Combatting Homelessness was key to the conversation.

Freek Spinnewijn, Director of FEANTSA said,

“All 27 EU Member States committed to ending homelessness when signing the Lisbon Declaration in June 2021 and to make substantial progress towards this objective by 2030. The EU Commission set up the EU Homelessness Platform to support Member States by means of transnational learning and access to EU funding and financing opportunities. FEANTSA expects a lot from this Platform and counts on Member States to make it a success.”

Speaking from the panel Wayne Stanley Head of Policy and Communications with the Simon Communities of Ireland noted the positive contribution of the Minister for Housing and Department officials in Ireland to the Homeless Platform.

“Looking across the agenda today we see a wonderful opportunity to learn from our colleagues across Europe and beyond but we can also be heartened by how much, Irish homeless organisation, Local Authorities and Government Departments have to contribute.

“But if we are to end homelessness, we also have to address the fact that the answer to homelessness is a home. We have a deepening housing crisis in Ireland, and the target of 2030 will only be achieved if we can deliver the homes that are needed quickly. We have to unlock the potential in the more than 90,000 homes that are vacant to get ahead of the crisis.” He also noted, “We have come through the COVID crisis because we saw a single minded, all of government, person focus ambition to address the crisis. If we address homelessness with such a singlemindedness 2030 is achievable.”

The Conference provided an opportunity to reflect on current topics of concern, including the humanitarian crisis resulting from Ukraine. FEANTSA President, Kjell Larsson, addressed it during his opening speech:

“The war in Ukraine has placed growing pressure and demands on homeless services to support people fleeing the war. We have seen millions of Ukrainians leave their homes, and we don't know yet what the effects of this crisis will be. We are ready to discuss it in a session led by our Polish colleagues. The strength of FEANTSA lies in the network and the collective expertise we share.”

Housing First took centre stage with sessions of all kinds to explore the topic. *In conversation with Juha Kaakinen* provided an opportunity to have a discussion with one of the pioneers of Housing First, not only in Europe but across the world; and the seminar *Housing First and Women* presented

how the core principles of Housing First can and do work for women. In addition, some participants joined an on-the-ground learning experience with a site visit to *Dublin Region Housing*, operated by Peter McVerry Trust. The overwhelming interest of participants in the topic points towards Housing First as a pathway to end homelessness.

The Conference also called for self-reflection, with sessions that encourage critical thinking. FEANTSA Director Freek Spinnewijn presented seven *Inconvenient Truths about Homelessness* in a thought-provoking seminar that struck up a conversation on how the sector works. Likewise, FEANTSA was put in the hotseat during a session led by participants, who had the opportunity to pose daring questions to the organisation.

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. Our goal is an end to homelessness in Europe. We work with over 115 member organisations from 24 countries. FEANTSA's members are predominantly NGOs working with homeless people, but also include other stakeholders involved in the fight against homelessness such as public authorities, social housing providers, foundations, and research entities.

About Simon Communities

The Simon Communities support over 24,000 men, women, and children. We have 50 years of experience providing homeless, housing and treatment services to people facing the trauma and stress of homelessness. We are a network of independent Communities based in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the Northwest and the Southeast, responding to local needs and supported by a National Office in the areas of policy, research, communications and best practice. We share common values and ethos in tackling homelessness and, informed by our grassroots services, we campaign for more effective policies and legislation regionally, nationally and at European level.

Whatever the issue, Simon's door is always open for as long as we are needed. For more information, please visit www.simon.ie