
PRESS RELEASE

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FEANTSA Policy Conference 2021 sees European delegates unite in recognition of pandemic recovery period as unique opportunity to tackle homelessness

Today, over 270 actors in the fight against homelessness gathered in Bratislava, Slovakia and online for the *FEANTSA Annual Policy Conference 2021: Prices Paid & Lessons Learned*. The hybrid Conference was held under the patronage of Zuzana Čaputová, President of the Slovak Republic, and in partnership with Slovak NGO and FEANTSA member, Proti Prudu.

"It is an honour for us to co-organise with FEANTSA this important Europe-wide conference focused on homelessness in these difficult pandemic times," said Zuzana Pohánková, director of Proti Prudu.

The Conference's title successfully captured the feeling, generated throughout this year's 15 workshops of a turning point for homelessness in Europe. Participants from all backgrounds – frontline service providers, local and national policymakers, academics, and advocates – united in their recognition that the recovery from Covid-19 presents a unique opportunity to change the way we address homelessness.

"It was a joy to be able to come together in person again, and a pleasure to have others join us online," said FEANTSA President, Kjell Larsson, "This years' strong turnout goes a long way to showing that we are not backing down when it comes to improving homelessness policy. There is room in the recovery to tackle homelessness and the workshops today have demonstrated once more that we have the tools and knowledge to do so."

Workshops including *Evictions in a Global Pandemic* and *Housing, Health & Covid* provided moments to take stock of policy leading up to the pandemic and to consider how this policy shaped our response to it. Likewise, *Rewind: Learning from Past Mistakes* brought together three former FEANTSA presidents to ask why countries, such as the Netherlands, Scotland and Ireland, with the resources, strategies and research to tackle homelessness have struggled with increases over the last ten years.

This stocktaking provided a natural springboard into thinking about the future. Nicholas Plesce's keynote address considered how the sector can maintain a commitment to ending homelessness as we move into the 'new normal': "The pandemic has shown that we can be more effective at preventing and ending homelessness. The challenge now is to find ways to prevent a hard reset."

Similarly, workshops such as *European Investment to End Homelessness* and *Alternative Housing Models: Converting Hotels Into Adequate Housing For Homeless People* presented practical pathways to reducing homelessness in the near future. While *Ending Homelessness in Eastern European Countries* reminded us that regionally specific solutions need to be brought in to tackle regionally specific problems if Europe is to progress in combating homelessness.

"The workshops highlighted the good practices of more successful countries and solutions to homelessness at national and local level," said Pohánková. "Now it's up to us to start implementing it. I believe that this is the only way to preserve, not only the dignity and lives of homeless people, but also our own dignity as a community of people with the capacity and resources to help the most vulnerable."

The launch of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness in June saw all 27 Member States, as well as the EU institutions and other stakeholders, come together to sign the Lisbon Declaration on Combatting Homelessness and thereby commit to ending homelessness by 2030. With the Platform in the process of being operationalised, the time was ripe for our Policy Conference to provide a space to exchange cutting edge knowledge, pioneering policy tools and the latest best practices.

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 Proti Prudu

NGO Proti Prúdu has been helping to improve the situation of homeless people in Slovakia for over 20 years. Its core project is the NOTA BENE street paper that helps homeless people or people in danger of homelessness to gain income in order to improve their situation. Other projects include HOUSING NOTA BENE, a social rental agency based on housing first principles, that provides housing and social support for vulnerable people, and ADVOCACY project, that defends the rights of homeless people and educates professionals, stakeholders and public.