

**Towards an *EU framework against homelessness based on the principle of "Housing First"***

**07.10.2022 | 09:30 – 13.00**

***European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)***

*As highlighted in the Lisbon Declaration on Combatting Homelessness,* ***homelessness is one of the most extreme forms of social exclusion****, negatively affecting people’s physical and mental health, well- being, and quality of life, as well as their access to employment and to other economic and social services[[1]](#footnote-2). Homelessness concerns all EU Member States and has continued to increase over the last decades.*

*According to Eurostat,* ***4% of EU nationals say they have been homeless at least once in their lifetime.*** *This figure varies greatly among Member States, ranging from**1% in Hungary to 10% in Denmark. Among these, 3% declared they have already had to live with relatives on a temporary basis and 1% say they have already lived on the street, in emergency or temporary accommodation or in a place not suitable for housing[[2]](#footnote-3).*

*Residential exclusion, a phenomenon that affects all Member States and whose latest and most serious episode is homelessness, has grown exponentially in recent years in the EU. It increasingly affects more diverse profiles, including families with children, unaccompanied minors, the elderly or the migrant population. This is confirmed by a recent study published by FEANTSA and the Abbé Pierre Foundation, in which the main indicators in this area are reviewed and where it is noted that currently nearly 700,000 people face homelessness. According to the organizations responsible for the research, since its first annual study in 2015, there has been an unprecedented growth in the homeless population in the EU, to the point that* ***during the last decade the number of people who are in this situation has grown by 70%[[3]](#footnote-4)****.*

***The COVID19 pandemic has further raised the magnitude of homelessness in the EU****. According to Caritas, between March and May 2020, the demand for food aid increased by 25% to 30% in Western Europe[[4]](#footnote-5). The impact of the pandemic was particularly severe for* ***young people****. In France, since the start of the health crisis, 1 in 5 of young people aged 18 to 24 have had to resort to food aid and more than I in 3 fear that they will no longer be able to meet their housing expenses in 2021[[5]](#footnote-6).*

***Homelessness also rose among people in exile*** *in all Member States where data is available. In Germany, families with children accounted for more than 1 in 4 homeless refugees, while in Greece, around half of the 4000 unaccompanied minors were sleeping rough[[6]](#footnote-7). The pandemic made it even more difficult for newly recognised refugees to find or maintain an occupation, increasing their risk of becoming homeless[[7]](#footnote-8). The share of refugees among the EU homeless population might further increase due to the Ukrainian conflict.*

*Despite this data, homelessness is not sufficiently addressed either at the European or at the national levels. The lack of a truly global approach and of comprehensive strategic solutions means that the problem of homelessness remains unsolved in many Member States. The European Union and its Member States should put in place policies to combat homelessness that are based on the right to affordable, adequate social housing.* ***Homelessness is not a pre-existing situation: it is the result of political and economic choices****[[8]](#footnote-9). Addressing this issue requires understanding how different groups in different communities are affected, including children, youth, women, single parents and large families, older people, migrants, ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups.*

*Progress should also be made at European level in the* ***collection of statistical data****. It would be necessary to have reliable data on homelessness, including youth homelessness, which would allow a better analysis of the factors that influence this situation and for a systematic comparison and monitoring at EU level.*

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| **Therefore, the aim of the conference will be to gather input from policy makers, civil society organisations and social partners on the different dimensions of homelessness in the EU, with particular reference to energy poverty and mobile EU citizens. It will be the opportunity to reflect on how the EU, national, regional and local authorities, as well as the organised civil society, can join forces and identify practical steps to be taken to eradicate homelessness in the EU.** |

**DRAFT PROGRAMME**

***Interpretation will be provided from FR-EN-CS-HU-PL-RO***

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| 09.30 – 09.50 | | **Opening session**  *Moderated by Baiba Miltoviča, President of the TEN Section of the EESC*   * Christa Schweng, President of the EESC * Zdislava Odstrčilová, Czech Labor and Social Affairs Deputy Minister * Freek Spinnewijn, Director, FEANTSA |
| 09.50 – 10.05 | | **Recommendations from people who have experienced homelessness**  No measures aiming at combating homelessness should be designed without the inclusion and leadership of those concerned. As being excluded and silenced is a huge part of the experience of homelessness and poverty, inclusion is especially vital in this context. This session will feature activists with a lived experience of homelessness, who will share their expert recommendations on how to tackle homelessness at EU level.  Speakers:   * Dominique Calonne, Vice-Secretary, Fédération des acteurs de la solidarité, Hauts-de-France * Tii Juden, Expert, No Fixed Abode NGO |
| 10.05 – 11.20 | | **First panel - *Homelessness: a multifaceted phenomenon***  *Moderated by Milena Angelova, EESC representative, European Platform on Combating Homelessness*  Homelessness can constitute a direct violation of human rights and usually stems from a combination of complex and interrelated factors. These include rising housing costs, insufficient supply of social housing or housing assistance, unemployment and/or labour market exclusion, job loss, aging and family breakdown, discrimination, long-term health problems, and release from institutional settings. The COVID19 pandemic has increased the urgency for effective action to address homelessness, as many people are still facing its severe economic consequences. The situation risks being aggravated by the rising prices of energy across the EU, resulting in rampant energy poverty. Already in 2019, over 30 million Europeans claimed to be unable to afford to keep their homes adequately warm, and these figures might further increase as a consequence of the armed conflict in Ukraine. Another concerning trend within the homeless EU population is the overrepresentation of mobile EU citizens. For instance, in Barcelona, 27% of the rough sleepers were EU citizens in November 2020, a larger percentage than the overall mobile EU citizens living in Barcelona. Similar trends can be observed in the other EU capitals. This panel will address the underlying causes of homelessness and how these can be addressed at EU level with measures based on the complete respect for human rights.  Keynote: Maria Jepsen, Deputy Director, Eurofound  Speakers:   * Michele Calandrino, Team Leader, Disability and Inclusion Unit, European Commission * Clotilde Clark-Foulquier, Project Manager, FEANTSA * Virginie Toussain, Responsable juridique, MAE Union sociale pour l’habitat, on behalf of SGI Europe * Mette Petersen, Director, Red Cross EU Office * Bert De Bock, Outreach worker, DIOGENES |
| 11.20 – 11.35 | | *Coffee break* |
| 11.35 – 12.50 | | **Second panel - Homelessness: the transformative power of housing and quality jobs**  *Moderated by María del Carmen Barrera Chamorro, EESC representative, European Platform on Combating Homelessness*  Combating homelessness requires a holistic approach, encompassing both legal and policy measures. The housing-first approach has proven to be the perspective and the necessary policy to address the scourge of homelessness in Europe. In parallel with affordability and access to housing for vulnerable groups are social protection policies to ensure a decent life, the role of the social economy and social service providers to address and prevent homelessness. There are measures that can help people get back on the leading wheel of their life and support them in the pathway from being homeless to having a quality job. Such measures are connected to counselling, training, up- and re-skilling, job opportunities, career guidance, temporary support for the period of job seeking, and then – income support if the initial job is low-paid. Minimum-income schemes, in particular, are an effective response to the persistent problem of homelessness in the EU. These benefits play a crucial role as last-resort safety nets for long-term unemployed and often represent the only form of financial benefit available to already homeless people. Support and coordination of European policies is needed to promote progress, in particular through mutual learning and by fostering collaboration. This panel will analyse the tools available at EU level to combat homelessness with a "housing first" approach, with particular reference to the labour market and the upcoming Council recommendation on minimum income.  Keynote: Yves Leterme, Chair, European Platform on Combatting Homelessness  Speakers:   * Marina Monaco, Senior Advisor, ETUC * Marion Unal, Director for housing, Medef, on behalf of Business Europe * Solene Molard, Policy Advisor on social policies, Eurocities * François de Borchgrave, Administrator, Inclusio |
| 12.50 – 13.00 | **Closing remarks**   * Ákos Topolanszky, EESC representative, European Platform on Combating Homelessness * Aurel Laurențiu Plosceanu, President of the SOC Section of the EESC | |

1. Lisbon Declaration on Combatting Homelessness, 21 June 2021. Available at: https://www.2021portugal.eu/en/news/lisbon-declaration-on-the-european-platform-on-combatting-homelessness/#:~:text=WE%20acknowledge,other%20economic%20and%20social%20services. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Eurostat, Ad-hoc Eurostat module on housing difficulties and material deprivation, 2018. Available at: https:// ec.europa.eu/eurostat/docume nts/1012329/8706724/2018+EUSILC+module\_assessment.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Fondation Abbé Pierre – FEANTSA, Fifth overview of housing exclusion in Europe, 2020. Available at: https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/OHEE/2020/Fifth\_Overview\_of\_Housing\_Exclusion\_in\_Europe.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. ‘Escala la pobreza – Coronavirus en Europa: largas filas para pedir bolsas de comida, otra postal de la pandemia’ [‘Scale of Poverty – Coronavirus in Europe: long queues for food aid, another sign of the pandemic’], Clarin Mundo, 16 May 2020, available at: https://www.clarin.com/mundo/coronavirus-europa-largas-filas-pedir-bolsas-comida-postal-pandemia\_0\_p\_8b2B4Sr.html [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Ipsos survey of 1,000 people exclusively carried out for the Foundation Abbé Pierre – 14 and 15 January 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. FEANTSA, Fifth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2020. Available at: https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2020/07/23/fifth-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe-2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. EASO, Asylum Report 2021. Available at: *https://easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EASO-Asylum-Report-2021.pdf* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. SOC/408 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)