



## HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION

September 2010

### The context

**New forms of homelessness** and housing exclusion are developing throughout Europe as an increasing number of young people, families, migrants and asylum seekers are reported to be in situation of housing exclusion or homelessness. The **economic and financial crisis** appears to exacerbate this trend, as a working poor phenomenon is still developing, and increasing mortgage foreclosures and unemployment are pushing more and more people to the limit of financial sustainability further down in a downturn spiral of debt and vulnerability to homelessness and housing deprivation. Many studies<sup>1</sup> argue that the **deterioration of traditional structure of care** - such as family breakdowns and change in government support systems – have contributed to this evolution<sup>2</sup>.

In this context, the **2009 light year on Homelessness and housing exclusion** had the advantage of raising the profile of this specific issue, as social ministries from the 27 European Union Member States agreed to focus on homeless policies in 2009 under the framework of the EU social inclusion strategy. The network of independent expert on social inclusion prepared a report based on information from the 27 member states, drawing on their expertise and analysing the "social and economic inclusion of homeless people" and the "access to adequate housing"<sup>3</sup>.

This report outlined key recommendations to tackle obstacles to the fight against homelessness and housing exclusion such as "insufficient political commitment, lack of understanding of homelessness and housing exclusion and lack of agreement on definitions and appropriate indicators, absence of or inadequate data sources, and inadequate (if any) monitoring and reporting."

## Eurodiaconia and homelessness and housing exclusion

### Taking a stance

Eurodiaconia decided to enhance its work on homelessness at EU level due to several factors.

**Eurodiaconia's members** have been working with homeless people for years. In order to reflect this work, preoccupations and needs, it was necessary for Eurodiaconia secretariat to further the policy efforts on this issue. Furthermore, our recent follow-up survey on the impact of the financial and economic crisis revealed that more than half of the respondents were **expecting to need to increase their provision of homelessness services during the coming year (2010)**.

Homelessness and housing deprivation are **often intertwined with areas of expertise for Eurodiaconia**, such as access to services and the broader issue of poverty and social exclusion. Last but not least, the

<sup>1</sup> For instance - [European Research Study into Homelessness and Employment ,September 2007:](#)

*"Key factors fit into three main causal categories: social, personal and structural:*

- *Social (e.g. relationship issues, violence and abuse)*
- *Personal (e.g. family breakdown, lack of skills)*
- *Structural (e.g. job loss, poverty)"*

<sup>2</sup> Conclusion of the report on homelessness and housing exclusion across EU Member States - Analysis and suggestions on the way forward by the EU Network of independent experts on social inclusion - Hugh Frazer and Eric Marlier – December 2009 - [here](#)





issue of homelessness is currently more and more debated at EU level, as the question of the definition of homelessness and measures or poverty are being analysed and debated. Therefore, Eurodiaconia decided to develop an official position on this debate, hoping to be able to bring its specific voice and perspective, based on the work of its more specialised partners such as FEANTSA<sup>4</sup>.

## Eurodiaconia's experience

Eurodiaconia's members supply **services to hundreds of thousands of people in need** across Europe. Our members aim **to serve** and **provide a Christian response to concrete challenges faced by individuals, families and society** as a whole today. They seek to support individuals and families in crisis situation by **fostering independence and responsibility**, providing support and freedom of choice when possible. Our members' actions on homelessness have three main focuses:

- **Bring immediate help** to people in need
- Offer **a long-term follow-up and support** to work toward a sustainable solution that ensures social inclusion.
- Advocate. Unless legislation is transformed, change will not happen.

Our members provide a mix of **long-standing and innovative services** for homeless people who often have complex difficulties beyond homelessness. These activities include, but are not limited to, emergency lodging, temporary housing, supported accommodation, permanent housing, health services, "reactivation" services toward employment, administrative support and preventive actions.

## Our basis

Eurodiaconia believes that **a dignified living for all** is a requirement for social inclusion in a social Europe. However, today Europe's social reality is very different from this minimum prerequisite. **Homelessness and housing deprivation are persistent in every EU country**, harming directly human dignity and basic human rights of the most vulnerable, impairing directly the capacity of people to develop their potential and to participate fully in society. Furthermore, homelessness and housing deprivation **damage social cohesion** and the social and economic well-being of European societies. We believe that despite the economical and financial crisis, the European Union and member states have **the means to eradicate homelessness** and establish a minimum living standard for all by rationalising and prioritising their efforts and financial investment. We therefore advocate for the care homeless people to be developed in order to **go beyond the only provision of emergency services, to go toward a strong long term political vision, aiming to eradicate homelessness and improve the life condition of people with inadequate housing conditions on a permanent basis**.

That is why we encourage Member States and the European Union to take a closer look at our key recommendations of the fight against homelessness and housing deprivation.

## Recommendations

We believe that 2010 is a key opportunity to ask national Member States and the European Union for far-reaching actions to be taken at EU level as 2009 has been the light year on "homelessness and housing exclusion", 2010 being the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion and the development of the Europe 2020 strategy. In this context, we urge Member States and the European Union to implement the following recommendations as tools in the fight against homelessness and housing exclusion.

---

<sup>4</sup> [European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless \(FEANTSA\)](#)



## 1. Develop an integrated approach

- *Enlarge the perspective:* Homelessness and housing exclusion are not limited to housing but are multi dimensional. That is why strategies to address these must look at a variety of areas such as health, employment, minimum income, access to services of general interest and access to health and social services
- *Involve stakeholders and people in situation of exclusion:* Stakeholders (NGOs, local authorities, social workers, etc.) and people in situation of housing exclusion or homelessness possess a priceless knowledge and experience on this issue. Their successes, challenges and failures should feed in any policy attempt to tackle homelessness and housing exclusion.
- *Invest in solidarity for social cohesion:* Solidarity mechanisms, such as those implemented by a strong welfare state, are the cement of social cohesion. As inequalities are growing, social cohesion is cracking. Develop policies to reinforce social cohesion such as urbanism and housing policies aiming to increase social mix, policies strengthening social protection systems and allowing quality, holistic and personalized care services for people in need.

## 2. Prevent homelessness and housing exclusion by developing access to housing

- *Identify and protect people in need:* Strengthen mechanisms of care for people in situations that have potential for exclusion such as people living below the poverty threshold, people leaving institutions, etc.
- *Facilitate access to decent housing:* Develop National Strategies establishing access for all to a decent and affordable housing as a priority e.g. by increasing its affordability or by reinforcing mechanisms to tackle obstacles to the housing market such as complicated or high rent guarantees.
- *Prevent evictions, especially of families.* Facilitate the establishment of a system of information to social services for families with serious rent arrears and in deep indebtedness. Support the work of NGOs and social services on indebtedness and financial advice.

## 3. Provide an adequate minimum income

- *Empower every individual:* Support the elaboration of a common definition on “adequate minimum income” and the adoption of a Directive on guaranteeing adequate minimum income for all. Building on the 92 Recommendation and the Active Inclusion Recommendation (December 2008), this directive would ensure universal income support throughout life cycle, enhancing protection against social risk.

## 4. Protect access to services of general interest

- *Ensure universal access to social services:* Access to social services is necessary to uphold human dignity and is a fundamental right. This is supported by Part 1 article 14 of the European Social Charter and Article 34 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>5</sup>. It is therefore essential to establish

---

<sup>5</sup> The Union recognises and respects the entitlement to social security benefits and social services providing protection in cases such as maternity, illness, industrial accidents, dependency or old age, and in the case of loss of employment [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#)



in national legislation a right to housing, and to give to the regional and local authorities the tools to implement it.

- *Where social and health services are provided for remuneration they must be affordable to all, without being detrimental to quality.* The European Commission recognised the importance of social services in promoting social inclusion and cohesion<sup>6</sup>. Services being made accessible to the most vulnerable must not become second-range quality services. Member States must implement the Active Inclusion principles on access to quality social services<sup>7</sup> and the European Commission must monitor their implementation.
- *Do not leave Social and Health services at the mercy of the market:* Member States and the EU must ensure that social and health services are provided on the basis of solidarity, publicly funded.

## 5. Support the efforts to end street homelessness by 2015

- *The vision: from managing to solving:* Support a long term vision, aiming to eradicate homelessness by looking at reintegration of homeless people into permanent accommodation
- *The tool: European framework definition of homelessness:* As proposed by the European Parliament Written Declaration on ending street homelessness 111/2007, work toward the development of a European definition of homelessness. This would allow the gathering of comparable data, facilitating the evaluation of policies, progress and the exchange of good practices.

## 6. Support the grass-root actors of inclusion

- *Improve concretely the holistic approach:* Support financially and technically efforts to create links between homelessness services and other relevant services (health, employment, etc).
- *Empower:* Support initiatives to help people in situation of exclusion to rediscover skills and abilities and to discover new skills.

### Who are we?

Eurodiaconia is an ecumenical federation of churches, non-statutory welfare organizations and NGOs in Europe operating at national and international level. Our members are rooted in Christian faith within the traditions of the Reformation as well as in the Anglican and Orthodox traditions.

“Diakonia” is Greek for “service”. In the biblical tradition “diaconia” is service for and with people in need. Diaconia means working for reconciliation, by bringing help where it is needed, demanding justice in situations of exclusion and advocating for those whose voice is not heard, we work for quality of life in a social Europe. We engage in learning processes, exchanging knowledge and service among our members across national and confessional boundaries.

<sup>6</sup> See also the European Commission’s communication COM(2006) 177 final for a comprehensive description of social services. Please note however that Eurodiaconia believes that social security schemes are not services in themselves.

<sup>7</sup> COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market C(2008) 5737