



BRIEFING AND ADVOCACY ACTION PLAN ON HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION

How is the European Union involved?

The EU does not have direct competency on homelessness or housing policy, and is therefore not in a position to draw up a legally binding Europe wide strategy. Nevertheless, Member States have come to realise that they were facing more and more common challenges, such as the fight against poverty and social exclusion. They consequently agreed on an EU level cooperation and coordination process to “support and complement Member states activities in various social policy relevant fields”¹.

The European Union is therefore entitled to support Member States, for example by coordinating efforts to collect comparable data or work toward a common definition of homelessness (through the Social Open Method of Coordination). Through this process, and various initiatives such as the [2008 Written Declaration on ending homelessness](#) and the [2010 Written Declaration on an EU homelessness strategy](#), the European Union institutions can work toward the eradication of homelessness and the long-term improvement of the life condition of people with inadequate housing conditions.

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 2010 joint report, covering 2009, gave a very interesting presentation of the work of member states on *Homelessness and housing exclusion*. Member States agreed to have national homelessness strategies and clear guidance for these strategies.

In March 2010, the European Commission went a step further in the cooperation on social policies through its proposed draft strategy for the 10 coming years, Europe 2020. This strategy presented a new “Flagship Initiative”, the “European Platform Against Poverty”. The Social OMC is expected to be reinforced through the “European Platform Against Poverty”. From there, we hope Social NGOs, stakeholders and people in situation of exclusion will be empowered to cooperate and inform Member States with their experience and ideas to go forward.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF EU COMPETENCY

Poverty and Social Exclusion

Article 136 and 137 of the European Union treaty (EC Treaty) gives competence to the EU institution to fight poverty.

Article 9 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU) is the mainstreaming social inclusion clause which state that “*In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health.*”

¹ The EU and Social Inclusion, Facing the challenge, page 21. Marlier, Atkinson, Cantillon and Nolan



Homelessness and Housing exclusion

The importance of housing issues is acknowledged by the European strategy against poverty and social exclusion. The December 2000 Nice summit established the common objectives of the strategy, access to housing is one of them.²

“Homelessness and housing exclusion” have also been established by the intergovernmental body called the Social Protection Committee³, as the priority theme in the EU social inclusion strategy for 2009, making 2009 the “light year on “Homelessness and housing exclusion”. Therefore, all EU member states were encouraged to focus their social inclusion strategy reporting on the theme of homelessness and housing exclusion, for instance by collecting information on their policies, data, and governance issues in tackling homelessness.

Article 34.3⁴ of the Charter of Fundamental Rights recognises the right to social and housing assistance.

Housing support and Social housing are also recognised as essential for inclusion policies e.g. in the Commission Recommendation on active inclusion [2008/867/EC] paragraph 4(c).

Why is it relevant for you?

Consultation process - The Social Open method of coordination is not only an opportunity for you to contribute to shaping policies, but it is an important instrument for Member States to use your experience and knowledge to build a stronger strategy to fight **homelessness and housing Exclusion (HHE)**. HHE are multi-dimensional issues linked to several factors such as employment and quality job, housing market, health, access to financial services, etc.

In this perspective, the process of the Open Method of coordination involves cooperation between authorities and relevant stakeholders. Member States have to translate the agreed common objectives and use the agreed common objectives into their own policies through a national strategic report (NSR) on social protection and social inclusion. In the preparation of the NSR Member States should consult all relevant stakeholders in their country.

Exchange of best practices – In addressing HHE you might be interested to get a broad overview of what other NGOs and decision makers are doing. That is also one of the mechanisms of the OMC. Whether you are interested by such an exchange through your Member State or Networks like Eurodiaconia, there are many possibilities to advertise your good practices or to learn about others projects. For more information, please contact us.

² “To implement policies which aim to provide access for all to decent and sanitary housing, as well as the basic services necessary to live normally having regard to local circumstances (electricity, water, heating, etc.)” [objectives in the fight against Social exclusion and the eradication of poverty](#), as finalised by the Council (Employment and Social Policy) on 17 October 2000 pursuant to the instructions of the Lisbon and Santa Maria da Feira European Councils.

³ Representing the social affairs ministries from 27 countries

⁴ In order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union recognises and respects the right to Social and housing assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources, in accordance with the rules laid down by Community law and national laws and practices.



Example of EU cooperation to tackle against homelessness and housing exclusion

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"⁵. 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."

What can you do?

Advocacy

- Advocate for the European Commission to monitor the 2010 joint report agreement by Member States to have a homelessness strategy.
- Advocate for a stronger political commitment: Contact your elected representative at local, regional and national level and challenge them on their policies linked to homelessness and housing deprivation. Make them accountable to their promises.
- Advocate for a better understanding of homelessness and housing exclusion: better data collection at national level and a common definition enabling comparison of policies
- Calls on your National government to ask the Council to agree on an EU-wide commitment to end street homelessness by 2015;
- Calls on your government to support any initiative to develop an EU framework definition of homelessness, gather comparable and reliable statistical data, and provide annual updates on action taken and progress made in Member States towards ending homelessness;
- Advocate for our common policy objective as presented in the Eurodiaconia policy position.

Exchange of Best practices

- Share your experience of best practice. Give us examples of your successful (or not) actions, so that we can learn from your experience
- Tell us about your needs. Whether you need innovative ideas or partners for a project, please share your challenges with us

Partnership

- Be involved in the OMC process. Make yourself known not only for your activities, but also for your policy positions. Share your knowledge and expertise.
- Monitor the evolution of demand for housing, homeless services and energy poverty. Keep you authorities and Eurodiaconia secretariat informed.
- Relay information on your work and challenges to Eurodiaconia secretariat

⁵ 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](#)



What is Eurodiaconia doing?

Eurodiaconia secretariat has started to work on the issue of homelessness and housing exclusion. From this first step, we hope to be able to go further in our understanding of Eurodiaconia member's work, to enhance the exchange of best practices between members, and linking the European Union to the concrete challenge of our members on the field. If you are interested to work on this issue with Eurodiaconia, please let us know.

Eurodiaconia secretariat especially aims to:

- Promote partnership and exchange of best practices
- Develop a better understanding of concrete needs of members and link those into EU policy developments

Specifically, in terms of policy, we have identified the following areas of interest at EU level:

In relationship to **Homelessness**: the need for the elaboration of a common EU definition of homelessness and of indicators of measurement. These two elements would establish the possibility to compare data and existing policies between member states, not in order to simply "name and shame" failing policies, but rather in order to look at successful policies to tackle homelessness. This effort toward a common definition is essential, as the sort of definition adopted will trigger different policy responses, for instance through training and reinsertion program, or rather addressing the broader causes such as unemployment or the housing market.

Regarding **Housing Exclusion**, there is a need to design policies facilitating access to affordable and quality housing. The Social Situation Report revealed that Europeans spend on average one-fifth (19%) of their disposable income on housing costs (i.e. rent and mortgage payment, but also repairs, maintenance and energy), a larger share of their income than 10 years ago. Moreover, those at risk of poverty tend to spend more and as this amount can go easily above 40% for them and still often to not have access to quality housing. Inadequacy of accommodation can be measured through "material deprivation" analysis.

Further information and links

[European Union website on Social inclusion](#)

[FEANTSA](#) - The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless

[ETHOS](#) – The European Typology of Homelessness and housing exclusion developed by FEANTSA

[Peer review and policy assessment on Homelessness and housing exclusion by the Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion and Assessment in Social Inclusion](#)

[The Social Situation in the European Union 2009](#)

[Study on Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level](#), January 2007

[Research on how to measure extreme poverty in the European Union, by the Social Policy Unit of the University of York](#)

[2010 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, and its supporting documents](#)

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