

In 2021 the EU's Member States, the Commission, the Portuguese Presidency of the Council, the European Parliament and stakeholders including FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless), came together to launch the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH).

EPOCH is a landmark in European cooperation on homelessness. It is the first dedicated policy initiative coordinated by the European Commission on the issue. It is part of the Action Plan to deliver on the European Pillar of Social Rights. It is important to stress that responsibility for tackling homelessness remains primarily at the national, regional, and local levels. EPOCH simply seeks to coordinate and support the efforts of cities, regions, national governments, and stakeholders, in line with subsidiarity.

The establishment of EPOCH represents a turning point in how we collectively address the homelessness crisis in Europe. It provides an opportunity to reframe our approaches to homelessness. Most importantly, it establishes a common European goal of ending homelessness in Europe, which would mean:

- no one sleeps rough for lack of accessible, safe, and appropriate emergency accommodation
- no one lives in emergency or transitional accommodation longer than is required for the successful move-on to a permanent housing solution
- no one is discharged from any institution (e.g. prison, hospital, or care facility) without an offer of appropriate housing
- evictions should be prevented whenever possible and no one should be evicted without assistance for an appropriate housing solution, when needed
- no one is discriminated against due to their homelessness status

To reach these objectives, EPOCH promotes prevention and integrated, housing-led approaches.

EPOCH has 3 workstreams: evidence, finance, and exchange. These workstreams aim to improve policy and practice by making evidence available, mobilising EU funding and finance and sharing knowledge and experience. A key focus of EPOCH's work so far has been national homelessness strategies.

# EDITORIAL



By **Ruth Owen**, Deputy Director, FEANTSA

This edition of *Homeless in Europe* explores themes of reflection, collaboration, and progress in depth. Evident throughout each article is the need to remain critically engaged, open to learning, and willing to adapt our strategies to meet the evolving needs of the people we aim to serve.

We begin with an article from Yves Leterme and Patrick Develtere, Chair of and Advisor to the Steering Board of EPOCH, respectively. Here they offer a detailed overview of the origins and goals of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness. Launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the platform has united EU institutions, member states, and civil society in a common mission. Their article highlights the advances made in areas like data collection, mutual learning, and funding mechanisms, and the importance of this cross-border cooperation.

Following this we have articles from two Member States involved in EPOCH. From the French perspective, Clara Perez reflects on the progress made through EPOCH thus far. Her article discusses the advancements in collaboration and awareness, while pointing out the challenges that remain in making the platform's resources accessible and operational across member states. Clara calls for improved data-sharing mechanisms and expanded access to resources, underscoring the need for enhanced mutual learning between countries.

Henrique Manuel Marques Joaquim discusses Portugal's leadership role in launching EPOCH and the Lisbon Declaration. Henrique highlights the success of Portugal's Housing First model and its integrated approach to homelessness, while acknowledging the challenges that remain. Expanding local partnerships and ensuring that homelessness prevention strategies are robust and effective will be key to ensuring success across Europe.

Following this, we turn to an article that examines the broader issue of housing as a fundamental right. Mari Carmen Barrera Chamorro, Vice-President of the Workers Group of the European Economic and Social Committee, stresses that while rising housing costs and speculative markets continue to make access to affordable housing difficult, the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness is pushing for strong tenant protections and the adoption of the Housing First model across Europe. Ensuring that every person has access to affordable and stable housing is a matter of social equity.

Next, we look at the mutual learning arm of EPOCH, EPOCH Practice. Saoirse Browne provides the introduction to this initiative. EPOCH Practice is funded by the ESF+ and coordinated by FEANTSA. It was launched in early 2024 for an initial 2 years. With its focus on mutual learning and capacity-building, EPOCH Practice provides an essential space for learning. This article outlines how webinars, training sessions, and study visits are used to foster an exchange of knowledge crucial for finding long-term solutions to homelessness. As there is much scope to improve current policy and practice, homelessness is a field where the potential impact of learning is huge.



Finally, representing the EPOCH Practice Experts by Experience group, Silvia Busi reminds us that the fight against homelessness must engage with the knowledge and perspectives of those immediately affected. Through their lived experiences, these experts can shape policies and services to truly reflect the needs of those most affected. The reflections of Khadim Diagne, a member of the group, helps highlight how solutions to homelessness must involve those who have experienced it firsthand, fostering empowerment and inclusion in decision-making processes. Peer advocacy and support are essential tools for creating meaningful change.

Nearly four years have passed since Member States and European Institutions committed to ending homelessness and to making significant progress by 2030. We are halfway there, and we are not on track. The establishment of EPOCH, and the activities already underway are real achievements. But they will not deliver the change we need. The European Union is at the beginning of a new political mandate. We must continue to work together, listen to those with lived experiences, change policies and practices, mobilise resources, and start to deliver on our shared vision of a Europe where no one is left without a home.

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