European Platform on Combatting Homelessness

Platform Meeting - 24 June 2022

Discussion Note on agenda point 4

Exchange on way forward: timeline and suggestions on specific topics

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This note is presented **one year after the launch** of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH) under the Portuguese Presidency of the Council at a conference in Lisbon on 21 June 2021.

The note provides some **points for discussion** among the Platform members about the current state of play of the EPOCH strategy and the way forward. The points raised and the suggestions made are based on the experiences of one year of work of the Platform and the ideas brought forward at the occasion of activities or meetings. Elements of the note were first presented and discussed during the EPOCH Steering Board on 2 June 2022.

Broad support

There is a broad support for the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness. Witness to this are: the unanimous adoption by Member States of the Lisbon Declaration; the active engagement of Commissioner Schmit and the Presidencies (PT, SI and FR); the dedicated team at DG EMPL; the two meetings at Ministerial level; the unanimous endorsement of the governance and work programme; the active participation in the Steering Board; the Work Programme; etcetera.

The Work Programme 2022-2024

There is a real engagement of all parties concerned to back and implement the **Work Programme 2022-2024.** The Work Programme was adopted in February 2022 at the Ministerial Meeting of the Platform, under the French Presidency. Stakeholders insist on the principles of subsidiarity and additionality. The programme is a joint, multistakeholder effort to end homelessness by 2030 from a functional zero[2] perspective, realized in an interactive way by as many actors as possible. The

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[1] This document reflects the views of the author only. The Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

[2] There are two options to "ending homelessness": (a) An "**absolute end**" to homelessness whereby nobody is homeless anymore as from a certain point in time, and the risk of becoming homeless, in any form it can take (sleeping on the street, relying on temporary shelter with a friend,…), is completely excluded; (b) A "**functional zero**" homelessness, where it becomes a manageable problem and the policy measures, the available resources and services are appropriate and sufficient to deal with the homelessness problems. Reaching functional zero implies that stakeholders have and apply the tools necessary to make homelessness rare and exceptional.

programme is more than the sum of the activities already planned or in the pipeline of the stakeholders concerned.

The work programme foresees the following work packages:

The European Commission will

- support monitoring of homelessness, through the European Semester process and the Social Protection Committee, with a view to provide a quantitative and qualitative assessment of progress made,
- strengthen analytical work and data collection in order to promote evidence-based policies and initiatives addressing homelessness,
- support mutual learning of good practices for combatting homelessness and explore further the implementation of successful existing models,
- promote the use of EU funding by the Member States to support inclusive policy measures aiming at combatting homelessness,

Other EU Institutions and bodies will

- take an active part in and host meetings of the Platform (European Parliament),
- promote and support policies aiming at reducing poverty, especially among children and ending homelessness by 2030, and therefore, building on the actions announced in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, continue to work towards comprehensive European anti-poverty policies, pursuing the UN SDGs and helping achieve the EU 2030 headline poverty target,

National, regional and local authorities will

- promote the prevention of homelessness, access to permanent housing and the provision of enabling support services to the homeless,
- involve all relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of these policy measures,
- support policy measures with adequate funding and, when appropriate, make use of EU funding as a lever to improve the way they address homelessness,
- share good practices in combatting homelessness, and the way they can be implemented

EU Level civil society organisations and social partners will

- actively engage their members in the activities of the Platform,
- continue to support their members in their efforts to combat homelessness and facilitating mutual learning and developing evidence on the best ways to end homelessness

Presidencies of the Council will

- convene and chair at least every second year Ministerial meetings of the Platform,
- convene on a regular basis additional meetings of the Platform,
- support the efforts of all stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations, to combat homelessness

The EPOCH's strategy is about solving the problem of homelessness, not about managing it better. This implies also attention for prevention, for affordable housing, non-discriminatory practices, for follow-up on housing-led projects, for transition strategies from shelter systems to housing-first models, etcetera.

The strength of EPOCH is related to its multistakeholder approach, the common mission and determination of the various stakeholders who together take ownership of the platform. It is essential to mobilise and share as much as possible the expertise and experience of all stakeholders that already have very valuable experience, including the relevant services of the Commission, Member States and social NGOs together with academic experts. Their joint work, including with the broader EPOCH community will not only help to scale-up current projects and programmes, but equally to expand these initiatives and to engage in strategies that are even more effective.

Suggestions from the Ministerial Meeting, Paris, 28 February 2022

A few suggestions that could be relevant for the work of the Platform, as per the author's understanding of the proceedings: The Platform and its programme are timely; there is a sense of urgency

- The Commission has a key role in stimulating and facilitating actions and policies as well as in the coordination of the Platform activities
- Access to funding for the national and local stakeholders (cities, municipalities, Social Economy actors, NGOs, …) will be key to the success of the Platform as well as funding for the operations of the platform itself
- Thought should be given to special funding mechanisms for homelessness solutions
- The ETHOS Light definition is an excellent reference already used by many stakeholders for policy making and counting
- Policies and national plans of several Member States (FI, DK, IE, DE, …) can be a very good inspiration for other MS, as well as national experiences in using European funds (e.g. IT)
- Existing expertise and knowledge (in MS, civil society, …) should inspire and drive the work of EPOCH
- Mutual learning should be demand-driven and tailormade; learning initiatives should as much as possible have mixed audiences/participant groups
- Work should be made of intersectionality and mainstreaming. Links with the Semester exercise and the Social Economy Action Plan are important
- It is advisable to work out a more detailed timeline so that all participants would be aware of the EPOCH calendar

The way forward: Five points for discussion

- There are currently three main work strands in the work programme: (1) mutual learning; (2) access to funding; (3) measurement and monitoring. For each work strand, several key stakeholders are taking a variety of initiatives or work on specific projects. These key stakeholders could be brought together in three **functional/ad hoc meetings or temporary task forces** so that they can exchange insights and experiences. Stakeholders (Commission, civil society …) organizing mutual learning activities can share amongst their group their respective calendars as well as the conclusions of their ML activities. Other technical meeting(s) could include, inter alia, a focus on exchanging information and drawing up strategies for financing homelessness projects and solutions (with the involvement of the Commission, EIB, CEB…). Something similar could be thought of for the measurement and monitoring work strand (involving EU, OECD and MS statistical and social science experts).

- The Lisbon Declaration has been signed by the European Commission, the European Parliament, EU consultative bodies, all the Member States and relevant EU level civil society organisations. A **mechanism** for new parties (municipalities, cities, regions, NGOs …) **to sign the Lisbon Declaration**, including a way to follow-up on it, could be developed. The ambition for this should be to broaden the support base for the Platform and for the fight against homelessness.
- Further efforts could be made to develop a **strategy to raise more attention** to the problem of homelessness and EPOCH with a number of MS, organisations and institutions. Notwithstanding the broad support for the Lisbon Declaration and EPOCH we know that there is still important resistance or hesitance to put (the fight against) homelessness on the table and to engage in it.
- Together with the different stakeholders and in a collective way, Platform members could also invest more in **public communication** about the problem of homelessness and the role of EPOCH. In a number of MS and regions communication strategies on homelessness have been developed and rolled-out. Some civil society organisations also have experience that can be built on.
- And finally, a learning process to **draw lessons from non-EU countries** could be developed**.** There are other non-EU countries (UK, Norway, US, Canada, Japan …) that have positive and negative experiences in the fight against homelessness. It would be important to draw lessons out of them. OECD, academics involved in research on homelessness and some civil society organisations could be helpful in this.

Timing

These suggestions to reinforce the effectiveness of the Platform need time to be discussed, to be thought through, to mature and to be made concrete. Sufficient time is needed to consider these suggestions, therefore they could be tabled again during our Platform meeting in the second half of the year for decision(s).