



Députée au Parlement Européen
Sylvie Goulard

President Juncker
Rue de la loi 200
B-1049

Brussels, 5th May 2015

Subject: **The right to exist**

Dear President Juncker,

On 21st April the Intergroup Fighting Against Poverty in Defence of Human Rights organised a meeting on the issue of increasing levels of homelessness in the EU and discussed what can best be done at the European level to help.

This meeting was organised, after exchanges with NGOs working on this issue, to follow up on the demand by the European Parliament for the European Commission to develop an EU homelessness strategy, and involved a dialogue between MEPs and NGO representatives.

Some key points were raised:

- Having an address is much more than simply having a place to live; without an address one is often denied access to the labour market and medical care. To quote Juan Jiménez, who has experience of living in poverty "**if you do not have a home then you almost don't exist.**" This is an area where the Commission must do everything possible within its remit to ensure that all of Europe's citizens have the right to exist. This is the responsibility of the whole College.

- **Homelessness strategies need to be conceived, developed and implemented with the participation of those concerned.** Anyone who thinks that these people have nothing to contribute and have no idea of the systemic problems which caused their poverty and/or homelessness are mistaken. These people are an essential resource, with expertise and opinions, who should be included in the decision making process.

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- Although it is clear that national homelessness strategies are the competency of the Member States, there are **concrete actions** which the Commission could undertake in order to ensure that national strategies are as effective as possible: **facilitating the exchange of best practises between Member States**, to ensure that lessons learnt are shared and the more effective policies known about.

- Homelessness **strategies must not be created in a silo**, it is unacceptable to have some policies, certain economic policies for example, which increase poverty and homelessness, and then to have a homelessness strategy in parallel to deal with the problems created. **A holistic approach to policy making is required.**

- There is a real **problem with statistics concerning the issue of homelessness and poverty**. In the long-term, it would be very useful for all Member States to work from the same statistical base with common and comparable statistics. This would contribute to overcoming the current lack of reliable European level statistics concerning this issue. A concerted effort needs to be undertaken immediately to monitor developments in homelessness throughout the Union. The current work undertaken by FEANTSA with the development of the ETHOS typology could be further developed.

- **Homelessness is increasing** within the European Union, and the **profile of those who are homeless is changing** too: the number of young people, women, families and migrants who are homeless is increasing, and thus policies need to be adapted to appropriately tackle the problem.

- **Almost 50% of Member States have developed homelessness strategies**, which is a positive sign, but at the same time the criminalisation of homelessness is increasing in many Member States. The Commission must not turn a blind eye: all Member States must respect their obligations as members of the Union.

- European funds exist to help fight against poverty. However often **the application process to access the funds is prohibitively complicated**, which prevents some associations applying or means that applications are not accepted because of an administrative error in the application. The rules concerning the **use of these funds are very restrictive**, and thus can often not be used. A balance must be found between transparency and accountability and the ability for funds to reach those who need them most.

Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states that "Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected." As a college of commissioners you have a responsibility to all of Europe's citizens to develop a clear European strategy on homelessness, to create value added where it is appropriate and to help the Member States to help their homeless in the best and most appropriate way.

The European Parliament has asked you to act. Europe's citizens are waiting.

Please find attached a list of demands for action at the European level to help fight the increasing problem of homelessness in the European Union.

I am of course at your disposal to further discuss these issues with you.

Yours sincerely,



Sylvie Goulard,
President of the Intergroup Fighting Against Poverty in Defence of Human Rights



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The Intergroup Fighting Against Poverty in Defence of Human Rights

Key action points to be undertaken at EU level to fight against homelessness

- Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union states that "The Union shall combat social exclusion and discrimination." **As a College, the Commission must ensure that it protects its citizens from social exclusion and discrimination** and ensure that they all have "the right to exist"¹.

- **Homelessness strategies need to be conceived, developed and implemented with the participation of those concerned.** These people are an essential resource, with expertise and opinions who should be included in the decision making process.

- **Statistics must be harmonised at the European level**, to allow accurate data collection concerning the number of homeless people in the European Union, and to enable Member States to effectively compare policy initiatives and results. A concerted effort needs to be undertaken immediately to monitor developments in homelessness across the Union².

- **Policies need to be conceived holistically and not in silos**, it is unacceptable to have policies which create homelessness and then a parallel homelessness strategy to deal with the damage created by other policies. The Commission must pay great attention to this issue in the Country Specific Recommendations within the framework of the European Semester.

- EU action with a clear added value and which does not infringe on subsidiarity is the **facilitation of the exchange of best practices between Member States**. The situation is getting ever more serious, with increasing numbers of homeless people, with diverse profiles, in the European Union. Time and expenditure can be saved by learning about the experiences of other Member States and the efficiency of policy decisions can be increased.

The Commission's work should include regular exchanges at the European level between policy makers and those living in poverty, to ensure that their expertise are utilised and that their expectations and requirements are met. This needs to be a much more profound and frequent exchange than the annual meeting of people experiencing poverty.

- The problem of the **criminalisation of homeless people** is increasing. The Commission must not turn a blind eye to this phenomenon, and must oblige all **Member States to respect their obligations as Members of the European Union**. Human Dignity is outlined in article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

- A balance must be found between transparency and accountability and the ability for European funds to help fight against poverty and homelessness to reach those who need them most. The **application process for European funds needs to be simplified** to ensure that even small associations have the capacity to access the fund and **the eligibility criteria revised** to ensure that they respond to the real needs in the Member States, while ensuring sufficient transparency to prevent fraud.

¹ Juan Jiménez, ATD Fourth World Spain: "having access to housing represents much more than simply the place where one lives. Without housing and an address it is very difficult to enter the labour market and to have access to health services, to have the right to exist. The reality of our societies is that without a fixed address one almost does not exist." (Meeting of the intergroup fighting against poverty, Brussels, 21st April 2015)

² Much useful work has been undertaken by FEANTSA in this field with the development of the ETHOS typology: <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article120>