

tegic follow up of the progress already made on homelessness at EU level.

Addressing homelessness is currently established on the EU agenda as a political priority, but further work is needed to transform this into effective action for better policy development. The Joint Report of the Commission and Council on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2009 stated that *'sustained work is required to tackle homelessness as an extremely serious form of exclusion.'* Furthermore, the OMC on social protection and social inclusion had homelessness and housing exclusion as a thematic priority in 2009. This meant Member States submitted national reports on homelessness and housing exclusion, on which the European Commission and Council will provide a first analysis in its 2010 Joint Report. The European Consensus Conference on Homelessness comes at precisely the right time to facilitate effective, concrete follow up of this Joint Report. In addition, in April 2008 the European Parliament adopted a Written Declaration on Ending Street Homelessness, calling on the Commission to develop a European framework definition of homelessness, gather comparable and reliable statistical data, and provide annual updates on action taken and progress made in Member States.

## 2010: A key moment for homelessness in Europe

Homelessness is widely recognised as one of the most extreme and damaging forms of poverty and social exclusion. It is a reality faced in all European countries, and violates fundamental human rights. A growing number of member states as well as regional and local authorities have established, or taken steps towards establishing homelessness strategies in recent years. In doing so, they demonstrate clearly a recognition of the need to confront homelessness as an urgent social priority.

2010 is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. The key objectives of the year are to raise public awareness and renew the political commitment of the EU and its Member States to combating poverty and social exclusion. 2010 is thus a potential turning point for policy progress on homelessness – a unique opportunity for EU level action to facilitate more effective policy development.



## Partners

A range of actors are co-operating on the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness:



The European Commission



The Belgian Presidency of the EU  
(Represented by the Belgian State Secretary for Social Integration and the fight against poverty)



The French Government  
(Represented by the Government Commissioner for Homelessness)



FEANTSA  
(the European Federation of National Homelessness Organisations)



Le Front Commun des SDF en Belgique



European Consensus Conference on Homelessness

9-10 December 2010



# European Consensus Conference on Homelessness 2010

This leaflet outlines a process taking place in 2010 which aims to facilitate more effective homelessness policies in Europe. This process – the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness – seeks to establish common understandings on fundamental questions about homelessness, which can provide a basis for future policy progress. The consensus conference itself is taking place in Brussels on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> December 2010 and is preceded by a unique preparation process.

The European Consensus Conference on Homelessness is organised by the Belgian Presidency of the EU, together with the European Commission. FEANTSA (the European Federation of Organisations Working with the Homeless) is co-ordinating the process and the French Government, who have already organised a national consensus conference on homelessness, is a key partner.



## An innovative tool for more effective homelessness policies in Europe

The European Union provides a framework for policy development and coordination between the Member States on issues relating to poverty and social exclusion through the OMC (the soft law method used to promote cooperation between EU countries on issues which are not exclusive competencies of the EU). Consensus conferencing could be a valuable instrument for the OMC on social protection and social inclusion, both in the area of homelessness and more broadly. It is consistent with the principals of the OMC in that it is an innovative, action-orientated and participatory tool, which actively incorporates diverse stakeholders and on-the-ground realities and is consistent with the subsidiarity principle.

While the consensus conference methodology has been widely used in the fields of technology and health, it has only recently been applied to social policy and to homelessness. In 2007, France carried out the first national consensus conference on homelessness, paving the way for a national homelessness strategy. The European Consensus Conference on Homelessness in 2010 is the first ever consensus conference on a social issue at European level.

The European Consensus Conference on Homelessness and its outcomes could make the OMC framework for transnational monitoring and mutual learning on homelessness more effective; maximising its potential to facilitate progress on homelessness in the Member States by creating a solid frame of reference against which to measure progress and identify good practice. This could lead to more str-



## The Consensus Conference Methodology

Consensus conferencing is a unique, flexible, and robust tool for facilitating progress on issues where a lack of shared understandings blocks policy progress.

A thorough preparatory phase is essential in laying the ground for a consensus conference. A preparatory committee – PrepCom – is responsible for this. The PrepCom for the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness includes representatives of all the principal stakeholders in the field of homelessness – NGOs, researchers, public authorities, people with direct experience of homelessness and representatives of neighbouring sectors such as social housing. The PrepCom is geographically balanced, integrating representation of diverse Member States within the EU. A broad spectrum of understandings on key issues in homelessness is present within the PrepCom.

The PrepCom works together over approximately 12 months to identify key questions about homelessness on which there is a lack of consensus and which are important for policy progress

on homelessness in Europe. These questions become the focus of the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness. The PrepCom selects a range of experts and an independent jury to participate in the event. At the conference the experts are heard on each of the key questions by the jury, which consists of eminent European figures with expertise in the social domain. Based on the input of the experts, the jury produces a consensus in the form of a written report. The report is then widely disseminated and provides a basis for future policy development on the issue of homelessness in Europe. The work of the PrepCom and the jury is facilitated by a specially commissioned piece of research that summarises the existing state of academic knowledge on homelessness.

The consensus conference is open to all interested parties and a key aspect is that the voice of homeless people is represented. A transnational project to facilitate the contribution of homeless people is a central part of the preparation of the consensus conference.

## TIMELINE FOR THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS CONFERENCE ON HOMELESSNESS 2010

This timeline shows the key moments in the consensus conference process, alongside key European events during 2010.

