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PRESS RELEASE
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Over 350 participants join forces against homelessness at the FEANTSA Forum 2024 in Vienna

On the 17th and 18th of June, stakeholders in the fight against homelessness across Europe met in Vienna for the FEANTSA Forum 2024. Organised by FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, in partnership with BAWO, the Austrian national umbrella organisation of NGOs working in homelessness, this conference was set to be the largest and most impactful yet.

The Forum is our annual flagship event to discuss the latest practices, strategies, research, services, and policies in the fight against homelessness. This year's event attracted our highest attendance ever, with over 350 participants and an extensive waiting list. The significant turnout reflects the heightened awareness and urgency surrounding the issue of homelessness, driven by the ongoing cost of living crisis, rising housing costs, and alarming homelessness statistics across Europe. Last September, the 8th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe estimated that at least 895,000 individuals are homeless in Europe on any given night¹. Unfortunately, the phenomenon is still increasing in most Member States.

The conference is particularly well-timed, taking place just one week after the EU elections. According to the Parliament's Spring 2024 Eurobarometer, the top priorities for European citizens during the electoral campaign were the fight against poverty and social exclusion (33%), public health (32%), and support for the economy and job creation (31%)². With homelessness being an extreme form of poverty and social exclusion, the FEANTSA Forum addresses a top concern for Europeans.

This edition of the FEANTSA Forum has been highly anticipated, as Vienna is known for its strong public housing policies. However, social housing alone does not end homelessness, as Elisabeth Hammer, chairwoman at BAWO, noted:

'Austria is an interesting case when it comes to homelessness: Vienna is often cited as a role model for social housing – and I do agree with that. Yet, 20,000 people are registered as homeless in Austria, 10,000 of which are in Vienna. This is an alarming figure – and it shows that affordable housing alone does not end homelessness. The key is housing inclusion: as the homelessness sector, we have to call for suitable criteria and tailor-made policy solutions to

¹ <https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2023/09/05/report-8th-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe-2023>

² <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3272>

make sure these homes are actually accessible for those most in need. There are reasons for optimism: Vienna increasingly centres its approach around Housing First, and a government-funded project currently establishes the model nation-wide in collaboration with the limited-profit housing sector and with very promising results.

But we can't ignore the warning signals either: the current economic situation puts pressure on the housing market in all of Europe. Meanwhile, progressive ideas on social policies are facing political backlash. I am therefore happy to welcome over 350 experts on homelessness to the FEANTSA Forum in Vienna at this timely moment. Let's use this opportunity to amplify our call for ending homelessness!

During the two-day conference, attendees engaged in numerous sessions that tackled a range of pressing issues within the homelessness sector. On the 17th of June, they could choose between 18 site visits around the city of Vienna, including a centre for women, parents, and girls; an emergency shelter for youth; an integral health centre for people experiencing homelessness; and many more. Additionally, working spaces were available for networking and collaboration. On the 18th of June, sessions covered key topics such as the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and energy poverty, the use of artificial intelligence to improve homelessness services, and the importance of alliances between the social and housing sectors to promote Housing First initiatives. The FEANTSA Forum programme was designed to spotlight marginalised individuals and brainstorm tailored, inclusive solutions, with sessions addressing the challenges faced by Roma communities, trans individuals, and unaccompanied minors.

The European Platform on Combatting Homelessness took centre stage during the closing panel, with the presentation of the OECD Toolkit outlining the nine building blocks for how States should approach ending homelessness. EPOCH was also addressed by FEANTSA's former president Kjell Larsson, from Sveriges Stadsmissioner, during the opening speech of the Forum:

'Reflecting on the past four years, I am immensely proud of what we have achieved together. One of the most significant milestones has been the Lisbon Declaration, which was the start of EPOCH, our collective commitment to ending homelessness by 2030. This ambitious goal has driven many of our initiatives and inspired new strategies, as it also did in my home country, Sweden, where we have since 2022 the first concrete homeless strategy, and we have seen the same progress in other EU member states.'

FEANTSA's General Assembly and Administrative Council were also held in Vienna during the FEANTSA Forum 2024. Jules van Dam, Director/Chairman of Stichting De Tussenvoorziening, was elected as the new president for the 2024 – 2026 period:

'I'm proud to become the new president of FEANTSA. Together with the other country representatives and the staff, I'll be working hard to help end homelessness in Europe. The FEANTSA Forum in Vienna has been very interesting, with a lot of attention on the necessity and impact of housing in all its facets to end homelessness.'

FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. We are the only European NGO focusing exclusively on the fight against homelessness. Working with over 130 member organisations from 27 countries, our goal is to end homelessness in Europe. FEANTSA's members are predominantly NGOs working with homeless people, but also other stakeholders involved in the fight against homelessness such as public authorities, social housing providers, foundations, and research entities.

BAWO – housing for all is the Austrian umbrella organisation for NGOs working in homelessness. Its 56 NGO member organisations and 96 individual members share one vision: a society without homelessness. Such a society will need to provide housing for all - affordable, permanent, and inclusive. To bring this vision to life, BAWO regularly collaborates, develops concepts and ideas, raises awareness, and engages with key stakeholders. Housing for all means eradicating homelessness.