



Advocacy for better policies to prevent and end youth homelessness

Report of the study session organised by

FEANTSA Youth in co-operation with the European Youth Centre of the
Council of Europe

European Youth Centre Strasbourg, 8 - 14 March 2015

FEANTSA¹ Youth is a growing network comprised of over 60 people from more than 30 organisations from 20 European countries that work to prevent young people from becoming homeless and that support young people who are homeless. The members of this network are organisations that work directly with young people, either as single-focus organisations, through specific programmes for young people, or through their general services, or are young people themselves – students, researchers, lawyers, etc.

FEANTSA Youth was established to facilitate working together on: policy initiatives, sharing experiences and working towards common objectives including:

- developing innovative approaches to supporting young people in social exclusion
- training young people in organisations to be advocates for better policy based on social rights
- share best practice on prevention of homelessness of young people
- share best practice on communicating with young people about their rights
- develop policy recommendations for FEANTSA on youth issues, and in particular contribute to recommendations on how to prevent homelessness

FEANTSA Youth bridges issues, in particular access to rights and prevention of homelessness amongst young people in Europe and provides an avenue for young professionals to develop their knowledge and skills and share their specific expertise with others, as well as contributing to advocacy at European level.

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¹ FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless, was established in 1989 as a European non-governmental organisation to prevent and alleviate the poverty and social exclusion of people threatened by or living in homelessness.

FEANTSA currently has more than 120 member organisations, working in close to 30 European countries, including 25 EU Member States. Most of FEANTSA's members are national or regional umbrella organisations of service providers that support homeless people with a wide range of services, including housing, health, employment and social support. They often work in close co-operation with public authorities, social housing providers and other relevant actors.

FEANTSA works closely with the EU institutions, and has consultative status at the Council of Europe and the United Nations. It receives financial support from the European Commission.

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Introduction

This report gives an account of the various aspects of the study session, which brought together 37 participants from over 20 countries to share and improve their advocacy skills. The aim of the study session was to ensure that participants had an understanding of how to advocate with and for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, at an individual level, within their organisations and on a political level in their communities and in Europe. Advocacy experts shared their experience, participants used small group sessions to consider how to integrate human rights into their work, and how to develop advocacy plans, and at the end of the study session, FEANTSA Youth decided that they are ready to work together to create coordinated advocacy actions across Europe. This report was produced by and is the responsibility of the educational team of the study session. It does not represent the official point of view of the Council of Europe.

Who are we?

FEANTSA's Youth Homelessness Network renamed itself during the 2015 study session on advocacy. Now called FEANTSA Youth, this network is comprised of young people, as well as 'older' people who work on youth homelessness issues, from over 60 organisations from 25 European countries that work to prevent young people from becoming homeless and that support young people who are homeless. The members of this network come from organisations that work directly with young people, either as single-focus organisations, through specific programmes for young people, or through their general services, as well as individuals from other sectors including architects, researchers, etc.

The FEANTSA Youth network allows organisations to work on issues that cross over, beyond the 'homeless service' sector. Young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness can slip through the cracks and fail to find the right 'homeless' service they need. Working in coalition with other sectors, including education, housing, healthcare, children's services (child protection or care services) is essential to prevent homelessness amongst young people and to support those young people who are homeless. FEANTSA Youth is growing and building its contacts both at European and local level – it is a space in which members can learn and share with each other, but also work together towards common goals. In this way, FEANTSA Youth also provides an avenue for young professionals and volunteers working in homeless organisations and elsewhere to develop their knowledge and skills.

FEANTSA Youth has expanded its membership over the past few years, thanks to a large degree to the wonderful opportunity to meet during the study sessions in 2014 and 2015. The participants in the study session are committed to working within FEANTSA Youth on common projects and initiatives, including promoting tools for preventing youth homelessness and building capacity on how to advocate for and with young homeless people. This study session in March 2015 provided FEANTSA Youth with the opportunity to bring together 40 participants (including a preparation team and course director) to work and learn together. As this report will demonstrate, FEANTSA Youth used this opportunity to build on its successful and positive first study session in 2014 at the European Youth Centre in Budapest.

Objectives

The objectives of the study session were to ensure that participants would:

- develop an understanding of human rights advocacy:
 - consider how to advocate for and with a young person.
 - reflect on what advocacy can mean within an organisation.
- draft advocacy plans to take back to their communities, understand how to use knowledge and insights from front-line work with young people as building blocks for advocating with young people for better policies and practices;
- reflect on tools and examples of empowerment and participation of young people in homeless services;
- build coalitions and partnerships across different sectors: e.g. schools, youth groups, etc., to talk about homelessness and prevention of homelessness;
- learn about human rights education, so that advocacy can be founded on understanding of human (social) rights, e.g. the right to work, to social support, to education, etc.;
- consider how to create campaigns to challenge bad youth and homeless policies, to challenge human rights violations and to promote good policies and practices, including human rights based approaches².

The study session provided FEANTSA Youth with an opportunity to consider and work towards some of its longer term objectives. For example, one long term objective for FEANTSA Youth is to raise awareness about taking a rights based approach and to ensure good practice within homeless organisations. The study session provided members of FEANTSA Youth with crucial training to allow them to build their skills to advocate for policies that are grounded in a rights-based approach, at the level of service provision, as well as at policy level (organisational or political level).

During the session, participants were able to relate their own experiences of working from a rights based approach with the others. Some participants used this open forum to talk about the difficulties of making the shift to a rights based approach.

Lasse from the Red Cross in Oslo, Norway talked about his role as an IT manager for services for homeless people and youth at a shelter. He reflected that some of the practices and policies in use do not actually respect people's rights to privacy, amongst others. He pointed out human rights training is important for all staff working in service organisations, not just front line workers or managers.

² Unfortunately, services provided to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness do not always consider the human rights of the young person. While it is rare for rights to be explicitly violated, it is also unusual for social workers, housing workers, and other support workers, to consider the rights that a young person has and put them at the centre of finding a solution to their housing or other problems. This study session asked participants to reflect on whether the services and policies they know and work with respect human rights, and to consider what it would mean to shift to a human rights based approach if necessary.

Another long term goal of FEANTSA Youth is to build partnerships and work towards ending homelessness rather than *managing* homelessness. Over the course of the study session, members of FEANTSA Youth, who come from different kinds of organisations (public authorities, NGOs, academia, legal system, etc.) continued to strengthen their connections across different sectors, as well as across Europe. For participants who work on homelessness from different perspectives – for example architects and social workers and lawyers and campaigners – meeting informally in the evenings, as well as working together in the sessions – provided a unique space for building relationships across sectors that will grow over time, and hopefully strengthen FEANTSA Youth members’ work to prevent homelessness.

During the first session when participants talked about their expectations for the study session, Andi from Austria gave the group an example of how useful being part FEANTSA Youth was for him in his work:

Last year, a family from outside of the EU had come to seek shelter in Andi’s organisation in Austria. The family had previously been receiving benefits in Norway, and the Austrian government wouldn’t grant them access to social benefits without proof that they family was no longer receiving benefits in Norway. Working with government translators and departments would have taken weeks, but Andi was able to contact Dorina, who worked at the Red Cross in Oslo. Dorina provided him with a translation of the documents, which were accepted by authorities in Austria, and the family was able to access the housing and benefits they needed.

We worked towards another goal during the study session: consolidating FEANTSA Youth’s understanding of its capacity for advocacy – at local, national and European levels. Participants demonstrated that they have skills and some experience in this area, but most importantly, that this is an area in which they want to learn and grow together as a network, as was demonstrated by the enthusiasm for planning joint advocacy and other coordinated projects in the near future.

Participants

Participants came from a variety of professional backgrounds including:

- Students (anthropology, women’s studies, sociology, law)
- Social workers from: homeless services – both NGOs and public sector social services, migrant services, housing services, etc.
- Volunteers (in homeless services)
- Youth workers
- Policy professionals: advocacy, campaigning, network and coalition building, government ministry worker
- Legal academics specialising in human rights law and homelessness

- Researchers in housing and social policy and homelessness
- IT specialist
- Peer workers – young people who have experience with homelessness who support young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- People who have experienced homelessness

We had close to 100 applicants for the 35 places. A very high proportion of the applicants were very well qualified. We were able to use quite strict selection criteria, which resulted in a well-balanced (geographic, gender, range of professions and experience, etc.) group that worked very well together over the course of the study session. We had more women than men (28 women, 10 men) and the average age of the participants was 27.

While some applicants had indicated that their English was not particularly strong, they proved to be perfectly capable of speaking in both the small group working sessions and plenary sessions, as well as interacting during the informal moments.

We had a very good balance of participants who had attended the study session in 2014 and new comers to the FEANTSA Youth Network. The whole group formed very quickly – there were no ‘cliques’ from the previous year, and no ‘national’ or linguistic groupings.

Learning

Over the course of the study session, participants worked in groups, engaged with experts and shared their own experiences. Stimulated by interventions by several speakers, participants developed their understanding of the following:

- how to advocate for better policies – prevention of youth homelessness, reduction of homelessness, strategies to promote access to affordable housing – with examples from local, national and European levels;
- the importance of ensuring a rights based approach to tackling homelessness, and in particular, advocating for better policies;
- the value of exchanging practice and experience in supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and preventing homelessness;
- issues relevant across Europe: Housing First³ as a housing solution for young people, prevention of youth homelessness, migration, LGBTQ issues, gender issues, social inclusion, etc.

Advocacy at European Level

Freek Spinnewijn – director of FEANTSA

Freek Spinnewijn, director of FEANTSA, provided an insightful presentation on what policy influencing and lobbying really looks like at the EU level when it comes to social issues. Participants appreciated Mr. Spinnewijn's frank and often funny presentation which challenged them to consider how they can influence policy in their own local and national contexts, as well as demystifying the processes in Brussels. His presentation was cited as one of the most useful external interventions in many of the evaluation forms.

After outlining how FEANTSA works, its areas of expertise, etc., Freek spoke forthrightly about how the EU institutions react to attempts to influence their work on poverty and homelessness. While some of the institutions are open and supportive of a European strategy to end homelessness, however, the European Commission withholds its support for an EU wide strategy to tackle homelessness. Freek pointed out that the Commission usually uses superficial arguments and claims that its support of ad hoc projects and FEANTSA is enough – there is lack of political will within the Commission to coordinate more work.

Freek explained that because of this hesitancy on the part of the European Commission, and because homelessness is not an area in which the EU has legislative power, that one has to be quite strategic when trying to lobby on social issues.

He revealed to the participants that trying to influence EU social policy is difficult and that is not easy to motivate the various players:

³ Housing First is an approach which seeks to find independent accommodation for people as quickly as possible. Other support services are provided around the housing. In traditional 'staircase' models of responding to homelessness, people are judged as 'ready' for housing, often only after complying with participation in programmes, becoming sober, etc. Several excellent definitions of Housing First can be found on the internet:

<http://homelesshub.ca/solutions/housing-accommodation-and-supports/housing-first>

- The European Parliament -

- A strategic partner/target for lobbying, because MEPs are aware of “bad will” from the European Commission

The EP can organise useful events (hearings), as questions, host informal meetings, etc.

Lobbying goal: to integrate homelessness in areas where EP has more power

- Council

- Goal is to get the issue of homelessness as serious issue on agenda

- Presidencies, Bi-lateral pressure, Alliances,...

- Use Council Comitology

- SPC – Social Protection Committee

- European Commission

- Goal: find individual allies in DG EMPL to get references to homelessness in documents

- Cabinet of the Commissioner – often has the most power

- The frequent rotation of staff in the unit responsible for homelessness makes it difficult to communicate the importance of the issue

- Generate internal pressure by being in contact with other areas of the Commission, whose work has an impact on homelessness (Justice – free movement, Youth – Youth inclusion strategy, Youth Guarantee, etc.)

- Goal – influence or use the press

- Difficult in an EU context – there is no EU-wide media; countries are not very interested in what happens in Brussels...

This was followed by a short discussion on the trends in youth homelessness across Europe, and then a group discussion on the FEANTSA Youth network, as well as human rights instruments that can and should be employed in advocacy to end and prevent youth homelessness.

Advocacy at European level using European human rights instruments

Régis Brillat - Head of the Secretariat of the European Social Charter⁴ of the Council of Europe

How does one take a rights based approach? Can we really apply the values, principles and letter of the Revised European Social Charter in our daily work?

Regis Brillat presented the role of the Social Charter and its complaint mechanisms (collective complaints and annual reporting) and their possible role in advocacy work on youth homelessness, access to social rights (including the right to housing, etc.). Mr Brillat's thought provoking presentation led to an interesting discussion with participants, many of whom were being introduced to the Charter for the first time. Others, however, knowing the Charter and being aware of the collective complaints relevant to housing and homelessness and youth issues, had excellent questions which led to an interesting discussion about the impact of decisions both from the European Committee of Social Rights and the European Court of Human Rights.

What was really happening in 1950 – 1950?

Why weren't social rights included in the scope of the European Court of Human Rights?

Europe was divided into two blocs and Western countries were concerned that more countries would become communist, in particular Greece. This worry led the founders of the Council of Europe to adopt three pillars: Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law to ensure that democratic systems would prevail.

Which is why the Social Charter was adopted as a separate protocol, which has made it difficult to implement.

Mr Brillat explained the process of submitting a collective complaint, as well as the steps that the European Committee of Social Rights follows once a complaint has been deemed admissible. Several participants had detailed knowledge of collective complaints, others were more aware of how the European Court of Human Rights operated, but all were keen to see how a complaint could improve the situation of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in their countries.

Highlights from the presentation included a breakdown of how many complaints have been submitted, and against which countries:

⁴ The European Social Charter is a Council of Europe treaty which guarantees social and economic human rights. It was adopted in 1961 and revised in 1996.

113 Registered complaints

| | | |
|------------------|----|-----------------|
| France : | 31 | □ On average : |
| Greece : | 16 | |
| Portugal : | 11 | |
| Italy : | 10 | 6,64 |
| Belgium : | 8 | Complaints/year |
| Finland : | 8 | |
| Ireland : | 8 | 13 in 2012 |
| Bulgaria : | 6 | 16 in 2013 |
| Netherlands : | 3 | 10 in 2014 |
| Sweden : | 3 | |
| Croatia : | 2 | |
| Slovenia : | 2 | |
| Norway : | 2 | |
| Czech Republic : | 2 | |
| Cyprus : | 1 | |

Mr Brillat also used the complaint submitted by FEANTSA against The Netherlands to illustrate the first ever use of Rule 36 which called for an immediate measure. The complaint argued that the right to access to shelter was denied to people based on the use of 'local connection' criteria which allowed shelter providers to deny people access to emergency accommodation. The complaint also argued that there were not sufficient places/services for women and young people in particular. Because of the risk that many people faced, since they were denied shelter, FEANTSA, along with the Dutch lawyers working on the complaint, requested an immediate measure that the Dutch government cease the activity – denying access to shelter – even before the European Committee of Social Ministers came to their final decision on the merits of the case.

Regis Brillat explained the conditions required for granting a request for immediate measures, *and* highlighted that this was the first application, and that it was successful.

This example led to an enthusiastic discussion of the political impact of collective complaints, particularly in The Netherlands, where NGOs came together to launch a campaign to guarantee all people resident on the territory – including undocumented migrants – the right to 'bed, bath and bread'.

Eliza, Dorieke, and Yara, the Dutch participants, commented on the impact of the decision, both in terms of national politics, but also on local practice and public opinion to service providers and migrants.

A campaign, coordinated by service providers, local authorities and churches, was launched to provide 'Bed, Bath and Bread' – i.e. the provision of emergency shelter. This campaign helped NGOs to pressure the government, and to respond to the growing need.

Laetitia from Belgium raised the issue of undocumented minors. Citing the collective complaint, DCI vs Belgium (69/2011). Laetitia explained that though there are laws designed to ensure that the rights of undocumented minors are protected, the laws are not being applied. She explained how the collective complaint had helped her organisation and others to push for better implementation and resources in order to do their jobs properly. The decision from the European Committee of Social Rights makes for useful reading: https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/Complaints/CC69Merits_en.pdf

This discussion on the European Social Charter helped participants understand that human rights instruments can seem distant from their daily work, but that, with knowledge of the processes and the importance of using evidence in their advocacy work, they can indeed use these tools to affect the direction of local and national policies and practices.

Translating human rights values into instruments and tools

Anca Sandescu, external educational advisor, Youth Department, Council of Europe

The presentation of the Council of Europe and the Youth Department concentrated on clarifying the structure and activities of these bodies, particularly how human rights values and concepts are translated into instruments and tools that can be used by everybody, youth included, in improving the rights situation in their context. It aimed at highlighting the link between youth led social change and the human rights framework that is set in place at European level. The participants were also introduced to the Enter! Project, which focused on responses of the youth sector to the social rights abuses of young people from disadvantaged neighborhoods. The Enter! Recommendation, which includes specific provisions relating to housing, was presented and participants were encouraged to work with authorities in developing or adapting policies that tackle homelessness. Several participants (mostly from Western Europe) shared some good practices of involvement into policy consultations. The Hungarian participant also presented a good practice involving cooperation and exchange of know how between different sectors in Hungary.

Homelessness as a human rights issue

Samara Jones, course director, FEANTSA

Having an overview on advocacy at European level as well as how the European Social Charter works in practice, it was important to consolidate the human rights foundation of our study session. The presentation focused on clarifying how and why homelessness needs to be framed in a human rights context and how the right to adequate standard of living is much more complex than the state providing a roof upon people's heads.

By providing an overview of the definition of human rights – inalienable/universal, interconnected, and indivisible, as well as explaining that rights come with responsibilities for

both the individual and the state, the presentation encouraged participants to consider whether their organisations/work places approached their activities from a rights perspective.

Samara also pointed out how the mechanisms that accompany human rights treaties, can be useful tools when doing advocacy. For example, the national reports that governments have to submit on articles of the Revised European Social Charter, or the reports that are submitted as part of the UN's monitoring process, can be useful moments to intervene with advocacy by:

- Trying to influence government reports to ensure they have appropriate information and data
- Drafting shadow reports to reflect a reality that a government may not want to report on
- Reporting on/raising awareness about the international human rights institutions (Council of Europe, UN) evaluation of the governmental reports. If governments are not living up to their responsibilities, this can be highlighted as a reason for changing and improving policy and practice
- Developing strategic litigation campaigns to challenge laws using jurisprudence or human rights obligations as the basis of your argument

The presentation also pointed out that when someone is homeless, his or her rights are being violated. A person who is homeless cannot enjoy the:

- Right to life, freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment
- Right to housing
- Right to privacy
- Right to freedom of movement, of association, expression
- Prevents access to any number of rights: education, employment, health

The presentation was interactive with many participants highlighting some of the dilemmas existing in the field regarding human rights. The discussions focused on clarifying the added role of the State in protecting and upholding social and economic rights and how these rights differ from political and civil rights as well as the challenges that exist in implementing them.

The presentation laid the foundation for more in depth food for thought to be explored in next days, aiming not only at opening "Pandora's boxes" but also in opening channels for acquiring skills and tools for a human rights approach to homelessness.

Using research and coalitions to advocate for political and legal change

Stephen Gaetz – Director of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, professor at York University, Canada

Dr Gaetz led two sessions over the course of the second day of the study session. His presentations focused on the power of advocacy to change policy and practice and inspired the participants to ask many questions. Participants worked in small groups as part of Dr Gaetz' presentations, and were able to discuss possible advocacy strategies.

Stephen Gaetz' presentation set the stage for deep discussions on how to tackle difficult questions and issues.



Participants were challenged to consider these questions for young people in their national context:

At what age are you legally entitled to:

- Get housing
- Vote
- Get married
- Quit school
- Drink
- See a doctor on your own
- Drive a car
- Have consensual sex
- Obtain welfare

the homeless hub

The discussion was oriented around how best to support young people to access their rights, with also ensuring that your own services refrain from violating rights, and ideally, promote a rights-based approach in their practices and policies.

Using excellent visuals – please find them in the annex – Stephen highlighted the issue of LGBTQ young people who are homeless in Toronto, Canada’s biggest city.

- “A high percentage of people who are homeless happen to be LGBTQ2 because they got kicked out of their house, or maybe they lost their job, or they live in a small town, then they can’t pay their rent and where else can they come, but Toronto?” – anonymous homeless youth
- 1 in 5 homeless you in the shelter system identify as LGBTQ2, which is more than twice as many who identify as LGBTQ2 in the general population
- Is there a safe place to go? LGBTQ2 youth are at higher risk due to homo-transphobia in the home or at school and then go onto face discrimination in the shelter system

Speaking specifically to the health implications of LGBTQ2 youth, Stephen went on to say:

- LGBTQ2 youth are at higher risk of suicide and mental health difficulties than heterosexual and cisgender youth
- Shelter staff have indicated a need and desire for formal anti-homophobia training and training on LGBTQ2 culture and terminology
- Many LGBTQ2 choose to sleep on the streets rather than in shelters where their needs are not met, which puts them at a much higher risk of becoming a victim of discrimination/violence

Following a discussion about LGBTQ youth and associated issues in Toronto, participants watched a film that told the story of a LGBTQ young person in Toronto who faced discrimination both at home (a key trigger for becoming homeless) as well as in the support services: [Teal's Story](#).

Working in small groups, participants responded to a scenario in which they had to consider the causes, and possible solutions to the problems that Teal faced in her search for support and housing.

In the second half of the presentation, Stephen Gaetz used two examples from his work in Canada to bring together a coalition of organisations from different sectors to try change policy and law.

Influencing policy:



The first example was a campaign to repeal the Safe Streets Act of Ontario. This law, which effectively criminalises the life-sustaining activities of people who are homeless, is disproportionately used as an excuse by the police to hassle (and occasionally harass) young people (who may or may not be homeless). This example illustrated how a public policy or law, which might not be intended to target homeless people, can give discretionary power to authorities that can be used to fine, punish, or push homeless people out of public spaces. The campaign also used evidence as the basis of the advocacy, as well as the argument for bringing a wide range of groups together. Research had demonstrated that the Safe Streets Act was not working, building a strong coalition meant that the campaign was able to challenge the law in court – all the way up to the Supreme Court of Ontario.

Participants were challenged to think about the measures and laws, as well as the practices in their own communities which might criminalise homelessness.

Criminalization of Homelessness

- 1) Enactment of new laws and statutes that are intended to curtail or restrict the activities of people who are homeless.
- 2) Disproportionate and discriminatory enforcement of existing laws and ordinances.
- 3) Manipulation of the physical environment to restrict its usage by people who are homeless.
- 4) Increased surveillance and policing of public and semi-public spaces by police and private security.

Participants were asked to engage with the issue by agreeing or disagreeing with the statement: “Homeless People are Usually Criminalised”

Here is a sample of the responses:

Agree:

Eliza (The Netherlands): 80% of young people who are living on the street end up turning to crime

Emma (Scotland): Public opinion surveys in the UK have shown that the public think that homeless people are criminals.

Pauline (France): Society criminalizes homeless people because they think it is a ‘life choice’ to be homeless.

Anne (Denmark): Homeless immigrants are treated as criminals – and some have no choice as they are denied services and their rights.

Jitska (Czech Republic): Local politicians invent arbitrary laws to prevent homeless people from sleeping, sitting, drinking outside – to keep them out of popular public spaces.

Karolina (Czech Republic): If people cannot afford to pay to meet their basic human needs, they are forced to beg, which puts them into a dangerous grey zone, and criminalises them.

Andi (Austria): Policy makers take decisions away from homeless people.

Steffan (Austria): Young people who are homeless have never been given the chance to dream and plan.

Kirsty (Scotland): Police harass or target homeless people, including at homeless drop in centres.

Carl (Sweden): EU migrants do not have rights and are criminalised for certain behaviours. Homeless people, who are Swedish nationals, have access to benefits (income) and do not have to turn to crime.

Josipa (Croatia): homeless people are victims of criminalisation. For example, a murder was committed and the police came to the homeless shelter and demanded that all of the homeless people in the shelter submit to a DNA test to prove that they were/were not guilty. The police tried to blackmail the homeless people and harass them into giving the samples. The shelter tried to protect their clients.

Lisa (Ireland): Our organisation has trained new police officers. It has been effective to talk to the police at a very early stage.

Disagree:

Steffan (Austria): If you criticise the government on this, the response is that homeless people should work to get themselves out of poverty.

Silvia (Italy): The government feels that homeless people should just 'accept' the situation and be grateful for any charity they receive. They have no choice. They should have choices.

Need more information:

Laetitia (Belgium): It depends what 'criminalised' means

By looking at the topic of criminalisation of homelessness, participants had to consider whether homeless people in their cities face the same problems, the same violations of rights. Following this discussion, participants were asked to rank human rights in a diamond exercise. The discussion following this exercise demonstrated that participants found it very difficult to rank rights, and there was a discussion about the interdependence of rights. Most of the participants considered that rights cannot be considered one superior to another but that they all need to be secured and protected by the state. They raised issues of human dignity and wholeness which can be only realized through understanding that the fulfillment of each human rights depends, in different degrees, upon fulfillment of other rights. They also had a rich discussion on political vs social rights, with most of them agreeing that rights are indivisible and they have to be taken together in order to ensure the whole human identity.

Stephen Gaetz' second example was a campaign and a coalition with an even bigger goal: ending youth homelessness. This is a goal that all countries can aim for – and achieve. The example from Canada, can serve as inspiration for other countries. The presentation took participants through the steps of building and implementing an advocacy campaign:

Our vision is simple:

Youth homelessness in Canada can be ended if:

- The general public and decision-makers understand that youth homelessness can and must be ended.
- All responses to youth homelessness, including Housing First, must be conceived, planned and implemented based on the needs of the developing adolescent and young adult.
- Communities, government, organizations and interested individuals work together to support change
- Necessary resources – including affordable housing and youth focused supports – are in place to implement solutions to youth homelessness.
- Young people are engaged as active partners in developing solutions to youth homelessness



A single vision - Bringing actors together:

Coalition to END YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Cultivating a national coalition of stakeholders across sectors to mobilize for systems alignment/integration & policy change

- Youth Homelessness on agenda of decision makers
- Youth Homelessness on public agenda
- Working to align interested funders with our national vision to Prevent, Reduce & End youth homelessness

Determining and then communicating the key elements:

Key elements of a strategy to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness:

1. Communities adopt *strategic and coordinated plans* to prevent, reduce and end youth homelessness aligned to broader strategies to end homelessness.
2. Coordinated and integrated '*systems of care*' are in place to ensure young people have access to the necessary youth specific supports they need to move forward with their lives.
3. Models of support are based on the *needs of developing adolescents and young adults*.
4. *All levels of government work together* to align policy and funding to support an end to youth homelessness
5. *Research, data gathering and information sharing* support the planning, implementation and evaluation of solutions.

Building action plans based on:



Ensuring that coalition members understand their role – both as an actor, and as an advocate for the campaign/action:



And, crucially, ensuring that the advocacy is not *for* youth, without youth:



This example and the exercises in small groups following the presentation, gave participants the opportunity to consider whether or how they might engage a similar dynamic at local or national level in their communities.

Clementine from France shared an example of a coalition of homeless organisations that she coordinates. These national organisations are trying to work together in a new way – to speak with a single voice rather than be divided (and weakened) by trying to advocate on their own. One major success was their advocacy campaign to tell the government that homeless services would not accept government funding for ‘winter emergency plans’. There is agreement across the homeless service sector that this is a futile policy – to open extra beds in the winter and then be forced to evict people on 31 March. So, instead, the sector spoke with a single voice to say no, that they wouldn’t open extra beds, unless they were permanent...and unless there was more permanent housing made available.

Using Human Rights to Advocate on Homelessness

Mike Allen – President of FENATSA, director of Advocacy at Focus Ireland

Mike Allen's presentation distilled the essence of advocacy for policy change and perfectly synthesized the ideas that had been building up over the course of the week. His guidance on how to build advocacy campaigns, and most importantly, the follow up after a campaign, served as the lead in presentation for the participants to develop their own advocacy plans.

Recommended resource: Advocacy initiative website – www.advocacyinitiative.ie – tools for planning, evaluation, etc.

Individual advocacy - Personal vs self

Advocacy on an individual level means supporting one person to access their own rights. This can take the form of helping someone to know where to go – for example, supporting a young person to apply for housing benefits, or funding they can use for education and training. This kind of personal advocacy is most effective when it in fact empowers the individual to advocate for her or himself, rather than advocating on his or her behalf.

What does this kind of advocacy look like in practice? How can people working with young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness ensure they are supporting the development of self-advocacy?

- E.g. in the disability sector – advocacy that starts with individual advocacy for people to help get access to their rights, can in fact be disempowering; it is better, to develop 'self' advocacy where people learn how to get access to their rights on their own.

Organisational advocacy – it is crucial to get support from the organisation to get the change you need, to do the work you want to do. And whilst this is crucial, it is not always easy. Some organisations are keen on innovation and change, whereas others might balk at changing the way in which they work. Using examples and evidence is a useful way to convince colleagues and supervisors that a new, human rights centred approach can work for the organisations and the people they serve.

Example: Housing First for Young People

Lisa is very keen to convince her organisation to start using a Housing First approach for young people. Over the course of the study session, participants and experts gave her some tips on how to convince her organisation to make this shift:

- Examples and experience from Canada: Stephen Gaetz suggested using the studies and experience from Canada where Housing First for young people has been tested and found to be very effective in preventing young people from becoming homeless.
- Dorieke, from The Netherlands, is involved in research projects on Housing First, and suggested that FEANTSA Youth could apply for funding to research and test Housing First for young people in Europe.

Consider what you are trying to achieve: what do you want to change with your advocacy?

You have to know what a 'win' looks like. When will you know that your advocacy campaign or action has been successful? When will you stop your advocacy campaign? ... even if you don't win. These are crucial considerations, which often, we do not take the time for at the beginning of advocacy campaigning, which can lead to problems later on.

Crucial words when building and implementing advocacy plans:

influence – this is when we are trying to change the way things are moving

decisions – this is when we are trying to change decisions

systems – this is when we are trying to influence decisions that are made in systems

Advocacy is a morally neutral term – which means that you can describe advocacy for homeless people as social justice advocacy...to help define what we do as different from tobacco lobbying, for example.

Distinguishing between your tools and your objectives is essential, and not always easy. For example: What does it mean to take a human rights approach to advocacy?

Is human rights really the objective? Probably it is better to think of human rights as the framework from which you approach all of your work:

So, what does it mean to take a human rights approach?

Example: an organisation doing a soup run for homeless people sleeping rough and a Housing First organisation.

Both projects could be working on a human rights basis. A soup-run to people sleeping rough is responding the need of people for access to shelter, to food, to life.

The second example, using a Housing First approach is also obviously based on the right to housing.

However, though both organisations are responding to a violation of human rights – or the lack of access to human rights, they could both be working **without** taking a human rights approach. They could both be working from a charity approach, and rather than empowering and supporting people to access their own rights, they could be 'providing' for them.

Equally, just because you use human rights, doesn't in itself resolve the problem of homelessness or make for a more efficient policy. This means that it is important to remember that lobbying is a tool –an important part of advocacy, like public demonstrations, social media campaigns, etc.

How do you respond to someone who says that human rights are not a useful tool – that it is idealistic and not realistic? Here are some helpful tips:

- Break up the answer – there are many steps along the way to ending homelessness, so by applying a human rights approach and effective advocacy – demonstrate the changes in a person’s life, or parts of the system are changing
- Use good arguments to respond to these questions – which you are likely to be asking yourself as well
- So it’s helpful to remember in a campaign or advocacy project – what ‘winning’ looks like – you need to know what that is before you start, so that you can celebrate and acknowledge what you did achieve. If not, you can get stuck in a rut where you never see the progress you are making...

Advocacy at work – what do these tools look like in practice?

Emma Dore (Shelter Scotland) and **Jonathan Shimels (Medecins du Monde, Strasbourg)**, as well as **Mike Allen** and **Stephen Gaetz**, contributed with very valuable advocacy experience during a panel discussion in the form of a ‘fishbowl debate’ aimed at inviting participants to share from their own experiences both challenges and mistakes as well as good practices. The method was used primarily to create an atmosphere of peer-to-peer learning, where everybody could actively listen and reflect on experts input and contribute specifically to five questions that were raised.

Outcomes/follow up

FEANTSA Youth used the opportunity of the study session to reflect on future plans for the network.

There was a strong consensus to continue to work together and to apply for other funding (study sessions and other projects) as more resources will allow the network to achieve the goals it is setting for itself.

While there are a wide range of issues that FEANTSA Youth wishes to pursue, the consensus from the feedback indicated a desire to focus on:

- strengthening the network, applying for projects, applying for study session on advocacy and prevention;
- using virtual communication tools to work together on projects/ideas;
- applying for research funding for the network;
- using contacts in the network to cooperate on transnational issues, using the network members as resources for questions .

This table contains a full list of future issues and activities that were put forward by participants as their ‘top 3’ items for FEANTSA Youth to follow up:

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| Coordinated activities such as coordinated advocacy campaigns , common actions e.g. right to housing for young people, awareness raising, e.g. on world homeless day |
| Common vision, strategic plan, a charter, develop an identity |
| Toolkits (Housing First, etc.) |
| Coordinated research project |
| Share data and good research, including case law |
| Information sharing - info about all projects members are involved in – ideas bank (advocacy campaigns, etc.), translations, participation practices |
| Social media presence, webinars |
| Study session, special project, annual meetings, Erasmus + projects e.g. on advocacy (Erasmus +) e.g. to include how to apply for EU projects together (in coalitions) e.g. Exchange of experiences through trainings and study visits Networking – preparation and/or participation and hosting visitors |

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| Training |
| Translations |
| Establish structures of responsibility |
| Crowd funding/funding |

Conclusions and recommendations

The study session revealed that there is an appetite for knowledge and for joint action to prevent and end youth homelessness. Participants from FEANTSA Youth were able to discover and explore existing tools and learn from experts and their peers. This is fertile ground for joined-up, European wide advocacy action, both within the organisations that participate in FEANTSA Youth, and actions designed to raise awareness amongst the public. There is also enthusiasm to start working on building broader coalitions – at all levels: local, national and European.

This study session introduced FEANTSA Youth to advocacy tools, to the breadth and depth of the experience within the network, and the shared desire to do more: to challenge the status quo on managing homelessness and take action to really end and prevent it.

Recommendations for FEANTSA Youth

- continue to build and strengthen the network, including developing a strategy (with areas of thematic focus, etc.) for the next 2 – 5 years
- consolidate working methods for establishing joint-activities including applying for research projects, project funding, future study sessions
- plan and implement a coordinated advocacy action in 2016
- develop FEANTSA Youth's social media and web presence
- continue to advocate for the prevention of youth homelessness at European, national and local level
- incorporate a human rights approach into the work of FEANTSA Youth
- sharing human rights know how with FEANTSA Youth members
- advocating for a human rights based approach to homelessness within all member organisations as well as with third party relevant actors in the field.

Work towards these recommendations and other suggestions that arose during the study session will be led by members of FEANTSA Youth. FEANTSA will continue to provide staff time for the development of the organisation, several FEANTSA Youth members have also agreed to take on new, specific roles, which will help the network as it works to achieve its goals.

Resources

PowerPoint presentations: available on www.FEANTSA.org

- Introduction to the Council of Europe – Youth Department (Anca)
- Introduction to social rights (Samara)
- Influencing social policy at EU level (Freek)
- Social Charter and housing rights (Regis Brillat)
- Advocacy – tools for changing policy: building coalitions & campaigns (Stephen Gaetz)

Dignityland – game – instructions and links (<http://enter.coe.int/fre/Enter-Dignityland!-A-game-on-social-rights>)

Teal's Story (included in Stephen Gaetz's presentation) - [Teal's Story](#)

Appendix 1. Draft programme

Sunday, 8 March 2015

Arrival of participants

18:30 Dinner

20:00 Welcome evening

Monday, 9 March 2015

09:30 Official opening of the study session, introduction, aim and expectations

11:00 Break

11:30 FEANTSA's Youth Homelessness Network in the European context

Freek Spinnewijn, Director, FEANTSA

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Dilemmas: Homelessness as a human rights issue

16:00 Break

16:30 Introduction to social rights

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Intercultural evening

Tuesday, 10 March 2015

09:30 Using Human Rights instruments to effectively advocate

Regis Brillat, Secretariat of the European Social Charter

11:00 Break

11:30 How do you take a human rights approach to homelessness?

Dr. S. Gaetz, Professor, University of York, Canada

13:00 Lunch

14:30 How do you take a human rights approach to homelessness - continued

16:00 Break

16:30 How to reconcile the tensions between human rights and social services?

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Organisations Café

Wednesday, 11 March 2015

09:30 Study visits : L'Etage and Medecins du Monde

13:00 Free afternoon

Thursday, 12 March 2015

09:30 Enter Dignityland! Exploring social rights in practice

11:00 Break

11:30 What is Human Rights Advocacy?

13:00 Lunch

14:30 Human Rights Advocacy – challenges and good practices from the field

Emma Dore, Shelter Scotland

Anne Sjogren, Rosengrenska, Swedish Red Cross

Mike Allen, Focus Ireland

16:00 Break

16:30 Human Rights Advocacy – challenges and good practices from the field-continued

19:00 Dinner out in Strasbourg

Friday, 13 March 2015

09:30 FEANTSA Youth Homelessness Network – planning for the future and reflections on last year

11:00 Break

11:30 Designing advocacy actions: participants plans for a human rights approach to homelessness

13:00 Lunch

14:30 A glimpse into the future: discussing next steps and opportunities

European Youth Foundation and other opportunities of the Youth Department in the field of education and training

16:00 Break

16:30 Evaluation and closing session

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Goodbye party

Saturday, 14th March 2015

Departure of participants

Appendix 2. List of participants

Participants

AUSTRIA

| | |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stefan Janker | Caritas Vienna, JUCA - House for young homeless people http://www.caritas-wien.at/ |
| Andreas Wimmer | Salvation Army Austria |

BELGIUM

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|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Laetitia Van der Vennet | Platform: Minors in Exile http://endchilddetention.org/ |
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CROATIA

| | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Josipa Vucica | Association MoSt http://www.most.hr |
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CZECH REPUBLIC

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jitka Modlitbova | Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Department of Social Inclusion www.mpsv.cz |
| Karolina Hrdá | Student at Charles University www.cuni.cz |

DENMARK

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Anne Kirkegaard | Projekt Udenfor www.udenfor.dk |
| Martin Berthelsen | SAND – The Danish National Organisation for the Homeless http://www.sandudvalg.dk |

FINLAND

| | |
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| Mari Hulkko | NAL - Finnish Youth Housing Association www.nal.fi |
| Pasi Ojala | Ysaatio www.ysaatio.fi |

FRANCE

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pauline Carriot | Architecture & Développement http://www.asfint.org/ |
| Elisa del Chireco | L'Etage www.etafe.fr |

GERMANY

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| Petra Schweiger | Project Frostschtzengel http://frostschtzengel.info/ |
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GREECE

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Argyro Dimopoulou | ARSIS-Association for the Social Support of Youth www.arsis.gr |
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HUNGARY

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| Balint Csata | Budapest Methodological Centre of Social Policy and it's Institutions (BMSZKI) www.bmszki.hu |
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IRELAND

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|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lisa O'Brien | Focus Ireland www.focusireland.ie |
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ITALY

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|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Silvia Stefani | Construire Bellezza Member of Fio.PSD www.fiopsd.it |
| Irene Pastore | Association Volontarinstrada Member of Fio.PSD www.fiopsd.it |

LITHUANIA

| | |
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| Dovile Gailiute | Mykolas Romeris University www.mruni.eu |
| Ruta Kundrotaita | VA "Caritas" Consultation centre for Convicts www.caritas.lt |

THE NETHERLANDS

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dorieke Wewerinke | Netherlands Centre for Social Care Research, Radboud University Medical Centre http://goo.gl/ubluCa |
| Yara Hummels | Humanitas Onder Dak www.humanitasonderdak.nl |

NORWAY

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|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lasse André Lyngaas | Oslo Red Cross www.rodekors.no |
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ROMANIA

| | |
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| Monica Breazu | Casa Ioana Association www.casaioana.org |
| Mirela Paraschiv | CICADIT (Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Research on Territorial Dynamics), University of Bucharest |

SERBIA

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|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Marko Tomasevic | klikAktiv - Center for Development of Social Policies |
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SLOVENIA

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| Anja Pirec Sansoni | |
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SPAIN

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|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gabriel Boldao del Castillo | Social integration unit, Barcelona City Council |
| Garcia Noemi | RAIS FUNDACIÓN www.raisfundacion.org |

SWEDEN

| | |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Tetyana Zhyla | Crossroads project – Gothenburg City Mission |
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| | http://www.stadsmissionen.org/department/crossroads-goteborg/ |
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“The FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA”

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|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Deniz Memedi | Center for Intercultural Dialogue www.centerforinterculturaldialogue.org/ |
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UNITED KINGDOM

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|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Emma Dore | Shelter Scotland www.shelter.org.uk |
| Kirsty Watson | Streetwork www.streetwork.org.uk |

Preparatory team

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|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Carl Wirehag | Crossroads project – Gothenburg City Mission, Sweden http://www.stadsmissionen.org/department/crossroads-goteborg/ |
| Clementine Siquin | Collectif des Associations Unies, Paris, France www.facebook.com/pages/Collectif-des-Associations-Unies www.fap.fr |
| Dorina Damasa | University of Oslo, Norway www.uio.no |
| Allison Calder | The Rock Trust, Edinburgh, UK www.rocktrust.org |
| Samara Jones | Course Director - Coordinator, FEANTSA Youth Homelessness Network, Brussels, Belgium www.feantsa.org |
| Anca Sandescu | Educational Advisor, Council of Europe |

Lecturers

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dr. Stephen Gaetz | York University, Toronto, Canada www.yorku.ca |
| Anne Sjögren | Rosengrenska -Red Cross, Sweden www.rosengrenska.org |
| Mike Allen | Director of Advocacy, Focus Ireland www.focusireland.ie |

Guest speaker

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| Freek Spinnewijn | Director, FEANTSA www.feantsa.org |
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