

EPOCH PRACTICE – ADVANCING MUTUAL LEARNING AND EVIDENCE BUILDING

Launched in January 2024 and coordinated by FEANTSA, EPOCH Practice aims to end homelessness in the EU through mutual learning and capacity-building. This article outlines the goals and mechanisms of EPOCH practice, including webinars, study visits, and training sessions, all targeting EPOCH Members and broader stakeholders. With advisory groups, including those with lived experience of homelessness, EPOCH Practice fosters collaboration to develop sustainable, inclusive solutions for homelessness by 2030. By creating spaces for dialogue and knowledge-sharing, EPOCH Practice aims to move from managing homelessness to finding long-term, sustainable solutions.



By **Saoirse Browne**, EPOCH Practice Project Officer

BACKGROUND

In January 2024, EPOCH Practice was officially launched. Led by a small, dedicated coordination team, it marks the transition of the Platform's mutual learning and evidence building activities from the European Commission to FEANTSA. The project is co-financed by the European Union; the French Interministerial Delegation for Accommodation and Access to Housing; the King Baudouin Foundation, Belgium; and the Council of Europe Development Bank. The project has an initial two-year timeline.

EPOCH Practice's activities focus on learning and capacity building to support progress towards the goal of ending homelessness in the EU. The primary target audience for the project is EPOCH Members, who signed the Lisbon Declaration in 2021. However, the project provides ample opportunity for the broad inclusion of FEANTSA members, civil society organisations, national, local and regional authorities, and European Union bodies. At the root of EPOCH Practice is the belief that the solution to ending homelessness does exist and can be best achieved by sharing with and learning from each other.

STEERING & CONSULTATION

The project is guided by three different advisory groups who meet at regular intervals. The first, the **Advisory Board**, is made up of the project's funders, the Chair of the EPOCH, and the German Federal Ministry for Housing. The Board provides expert steering, guidance, and recommendations on EPOCH Practice's proposed work programme and activities. The **Expert by Experience** group is composed of ten people with lived experience of homelessness. This group was recruited to reflect, to the extent possible, the diversity of gender, nationality, sexual orientation, and migration status within the population of people experiencing homelessness. The group met in-person in Brussels in April 2024 for an in-depth review of the project's activities and decided to meet online at regular intervals to continue their input. The Expert by Experience group represents one of the core principles of the project: the participation of people with lived experience is vital in ensuring that changes to homelessness systems meet the actual needs of people experiencing homelessness. The third group, the **Expert Committee**, is discussed below.

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WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

- **Webinars**

At the time of writing, EPOCH Practice has organised three webinar events. The first webinar focused on recent homelessness data from the United States and the insights that Europe could draw in comparison, led by Dr. Dennis Culhane. Dr. Culhane explored the causes of rising homelessness in the U.S. and the relationship to recent U.S. policy interventions. The second webinar discussed the exercise of voting rights and citizenship for persons experiencing homelessness, within the context of the European elections. It included a presentation from Focus Ireland on their *Voter Registration Drive* campaign. The third webinar spotlighted homelessness in rural areas, focusing on presentations, service provision, and policy recommendations in Belgium and the U.K. It included a case study of implementing Housing First in rural England, and the creation of a best practice guide for local authorities in isolated geographies. All of the webinar recordings can be located on the FEANTSA website.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- **Open Call**

Currently accepting submissions, the *Open Call for Inspiring Practices* seeks to locate a minimum of twelve inspiring policies, services, or practices across diverse aspects of homelessness including, but by no means limited to, housing, health, migration, peer work, and empowerment. The projects can vary in scale, timing and location.

The submitted practices will be screened and selected by a dedicated Expert Committee, composed of five experts from academia, civil society, and peer work. The chosen practices will be platformed by EPOCH Practice through the dissemination of concise briefs, and thereafter a published compendium, to members of the Platform and the wider audience of stakeholders involved in combatting homelessness. The Open Call is accepting submissions until 30th September.

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COMING UP

- **Community of Practice**

The EPOCH Community of Practice (CoP) is designed for Member State delegates, generally high-level national civil servants, to engage in a genuine exchange of challenges and solutions encountered in policy work towards ending homelessness. In September, representatives of twenty Member States will congregate in Lisbon for the first in-person meeting. The event will include a keynote presentation of new research on the state of play of national homelessness strategies in the EU Member States and a focus on the strategic direction of the EPOCH in light of the new EU political mandate.

- **Study Visits**

The first of three study visits also takes place in Lisbon, directly following the CoP. The study visit is open to applications from a broad array of stakeholders involved in the fight against homelessness, who can disseminate their learnings within their national contexts following the session. Organised in conjunction with the Lisbon municipality and the Portuguese Institute of Social Security, the trip brings participants to the city's homelessness services to explore practices implemented in the field. The Lisbon study visit will be a hands-on, dynamic field trip to a variety of services, including those specialising in women's homelessness and pioneering harm reduction. It will also include policy presentations from the national and municipal authorities and panels on housing-led and housing-first approaches. The study visit brings together a broad array of stakeholders in a practical setting to facilitate the exchange of best practices. While the Lisbon study visit is fully subscribed, the second EPOCH Practice study visit will open for applications in the first half of 2025.

- **Trainings**

Another key EPOCH Practice learning activity is the provision of training to stakeholders. The first training session will provide an introductory foundation to women's homelessness. It is designed for NGOs and local, national, and European policymakers, and will focus on connecting data and research to gender-informed homelessness policies and services. The training aims to give practitioners and policymakers the basic tools they need to best address the unique and intersectional experience of homelessness for women. It will be delivered in collaboration with experts from Housing First for Women Berlin. While the first training session is fully subscribed, it will be followed by an event in the European Parliament on women's homelessness on 5th November. If you have an interest in attending the Parliament event, please contact us via epoch.practice@feantsa.org



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CONCLUSION

EPOCH Practice undertakes to gather the evidence and tools to best equip Member States to combat homelessness across Europe, with due respect for differing national contexts. Our guiding belief is that collaboration and knowledge exchange must be effectively instrumentalised to achieve the Lisbon Declaration’s ambitious 2030 goal. EPOCH Practice is demand-led, continually seeking the opinions and requirements of social workers, civil servants, experts by experience, researchers and civil society. To that extent, EPOCH Practice relies upon the strength of community building and stakeholder input. The transition from managing homelessness to solving it throughout the Union will only be achieved if we successfully work together and share in both our successes and our challenges.

To stay up to date with EPOCH Practice’s activities, we invite you to subscribe to our bi-monthly newsletter.