

FEANTSA STATEMENT

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## FEANTSA Welcomes Common Ground on the Fight Against Homelessness in La Hulpe Declaration

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 2024, the Belgian Presidency hosted a high-level conference in La Hulpe on the Future of Social Europe. The aim was to reaffirm the European Pillar of Social Rights and its 20 principles as a compass to guide EU and national policies on equal opportunities, access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. Priority 19 of the Pillar addresses homelessness and housing assistance.

The La Hulpe Declaration, signed by the European Parliament, European Commission, the Belgian Presidency on behalf of 25 EU Member States, as well as stakeholders, expresses continued commitment to the Pillar, to the EU's Porto Targets to tackle poverty, and to prioritising a 2025 revision of the Action Plan for the EPSR. It outlines priorities for implementing the Pillar, and provides a basis for continued work to implement the EPSR in the next mandate.

The La Hulpe process was not plain sailing. Council negotiations were challenging, and the proposed text of the Declaration changed significantly. Much of the detail, especially in relation to social protection, did not make the final version. Alarmingly, Sweden and Austria declined to sign, along with Business Europe. This reflects the current political context, which in the run up to European elections, makes consensus on the social dimension of the European project difficult to achieve.

In this challenging context, FEANTSA welcomes the Declaration's recognition that homelessness remains an issue in many Member States, warranting continued action to eradicate it. The declaration calls for integrated strategies to address homelessness, and the promotion of a Housing First approach. It also recognised the importance of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness. The Platform is the EU's first ever policy initiative on homelessness, launched in 2021 to help deliver on a joint commitment of all Member States and EU institutions to work towards ending homelessness by 2030. The Platform aims to support the improvement of policy and practice to address homelessness. So far, action has been developed on improving data and evidence, mobilising EU funding and finance, and mutual learning to improve policy and practice.

The current reality is that homelessness is rising in most European countries. La Hulpe provides a basis for EPOCH to be further developed in order to support Member States, national, regional and local authorities, and stakeholders to turn the tide.

Laying out his vision for Social Europe, Nicolas Schmit spoke of a Europe where "homelessness will become a rarity. No one will fall between the cracks – the safety nets in place will quickly scoop them up and help them back on the right path. The Housing First approach will become the norm". FEANTSA supports this vision and stands ready to work with Members States, EU institutions, and stakeholders towards it by ensuring that EPOCH becomes a real motor of progress.