



Kick Off of the Rights First Project

March, 11th, 2022

Bruss'help and its partners marked the occasion with a kick-off conference on the Rights First Project.

Rights First calls for stepping out of our comfort zone and for revealing good practice to build rights supports that enable vulnerable people to start a new life. The focus is on guaranteeing a minimum income, housing and employment so that people can have a decent life and regain their dignity. Here is a summary of the main points.

The current context in Brussels confirms the need for a collective and effective dynamic through structural partnerships to enable people to get out of a spiral of eternal emergency and successive temporary solutions. The cooperation agreement between the Regions on homelessness (12-05-2014) advocates the search for new effective solutions and the exchange of good practices.

In 2019, Belgium also participated in a peer review exercise with other EU members, which concluded that it should have:

- A proactive and participatory approach;
- A simplification of administrative procedures while avoiding discriminatory or stigmatising situations;
- A prevention policy against causes leading to poverty must also be favoured by promoting the return to housing such as "Housing First".

The creation of a European Platform against Homelessness (2021) and the subsequent drafting of its action plan (2022) reflect the general concern about homelessness in Europe and the need for solutions at European level. The PPS-SI (Federal public planning service for social integration) is responsible for representing Belgium in this process and is already preparing for the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2024. The European Commission is committed to investing in monitoring homelessness through data collection and sharing of good practice to ensure progress through the European Semester process and the Social Protection Committee.

The objective of the European Social Fund+ call for projects to which Rights First responded is to support projects that propose an integrated approach and innovative ways of responding to Principle 141 of the European Social Rights Framework. Because of its target audience, Rights First also contributes to the 19th principle². In its experience, the European Commission has found that the integrated approach of combining an independent and dignified living situation with access to housing or access to rights or employment works.

¹ Action Plan on the European Social Rights Base, "14. Minimum income: Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services. For those who can work, minimum income benefits should be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market.", [COM \(2021\) 102 final](#), March 2021.

² Action Plan on the European Social Rights Floor" 19. Housing and support for the homeless: a. Access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need. b. Vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction. c. Adequate shelter and services shall be provided to the homeless in order to promote their social inclusion.", [COM \(2021\) 102 final](#), March 2021.

Rights First is inspired by the Skylight project run by Crisis in the UK and the Insula project run by San Joan de Deu in Barcelona. Both have developed a holistic approach providing structural solutions for people experiencing homelessness.

Crisis advocates assessment to meet immediate needs. Case management monitoring and recording is also essential to examine and analyse the pathways of individuals, often involving several sectors. Carried out with different partners, this allows for intensive or more structured support to be prioritised, progress to be observed and ways of thinking to be challenged.

The Insula project follows the logic of Housing First. While promoting the autonomous or community-based approach of its users, it provides support with the help of five partners in their social and personal development through an integrated approach. The support, organised in several phases, is intensive at the beginning but is increasingly spaced out until full rehabilitation in society is achieved.

The Rights First project is also interested in this holistic approach to facilitate the re-establishment of social rights for homeless people in an irregular administrative situation in Brussels.

It is a unique opportunity to reconsider the current process of supporting vulnerable people and policies to facilitate access to social rights. Innovation being the key word of this project, it will propose new partnerships and new ways of facilitating integration policies in the framework of a post ante and ex post evaluation following the pathway of 375 people. At the end of the project, the aim is to simplify the administrative process in order to quickly receive an income and/or a reference address, find housing or a new job. It is essential to mention two cornerstones of this access to rights among the project partners: the public centres of social welfare (PCSW) and the regional organisation providing support to job search, Actiris.

The main message of this conference was not to look away from cries emerging from the impact of oil, migration, health, or climate crisis. We must not exempt ourselves from the responsibility of our choices. The European voluntarism on granting a protection status (opening the rights to housing, work, integration income) is a signal putting human rights at the forefront and raising the question of universalisation.

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