

Irish Homeless Policy Group Opening Statement to Joint Committee on European Union Affairs

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Thank you for the invitation to meet with you today to discuss the role that Ireland can play during its Presidency in advancing European collaboration to end homelessness.

Commission President von der Leyen in her recent State of the Union address acknowledged that over 1 million people are homeless in the Union on any given day. She recognised that despite housing being a European social right, the housing crisis has become a broader social crisis for Europe.

We in the Irish Homeless Policy Group are faced with this crisis, first hand, every day.

While we acknowledge that the solutions to reduce, and ultimately, end homelessness will be implemented at local and national levels, their success will be shaped and enhanced by decisions made at EU level.

Today, we hope to convey three key messages.

- 1. Firstly, Ireland should use its Presidency to place homelessness back at the centre of the European agenda and to secure renewed political commitment to the goal of ending homelessness by 2030.**

One of the most significant EU-level developments on homelessness occurred during the Portuguese Presidency in 2021, when every Member State, including Ireland, signed the Lisbon Declaration, committing to work towards ending homelessness by 2030.

Since the 2021 Lisbon Declaration, we have seen a number of important “firsts” at EU level. The launch of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH); the first ever European Affordable Housing Plan; the first European Homeless Count; a Special Parliamentary Committee on the Housing Crisis; the appointment of the first EU Commissioner for Housing; and the establishment of the European Housing Advisory Board.

The Lisbon Declaration marked a milestone; for the first time, the European Commission dedicated an initiative specifically to addressing homelessness. While this may appear too hopeful to some, we- along with our colleagues across Europe- believe we can make considerable progress towards ending homelessness by the end of the decade if we invest wisely in the right public policies.

2. The Irish Presidency provides a rare opportunity for Ireland to lead on one of our most pressing national challenges.

Five years on from the Lisbon Declaration, we are now at the halfway point to our 2030 ambition.

A key opportunity to recommit to this goal this will be advancing the *EU Council Recommendation on Housing Exclusion* at a Ministerial Meeting in November which will be led by Minister for Housing James Browne.

The Commission has produced a draft proposal which is currently under consideration by Member States and sends a strong political signal. However, the Irish Presidency should take the lead in strengthening the draft in two significant ways. Firstly, it is important the word ‘homelessness’ is used in the Council Recommendation title as well as the less familiar technical term ‘housing exclusion’. Secondly, it is important to use the Recommendation to recommit to EPOCH – the primary mechanism for moving towards our 2030 goal.

3. Finally, we wish to recognise the significant progress we have seen on housing and homelessness at an EU-level in recent years, but also that we need to go further in ensuring housing reaches the most marginalised.

All the EU initiatives on housing mentioned earlier respond to the growing challenge of unaffordable and insecure housing for millions of Europeans. Significantly, each of these initiatives includes a section on homelessness, a welcome recognition of the link between economic questions related to housing and their social consequences. While more needs to be done to develop this homeless dimension of the housing crisis, we want to acknowledge the work which Irish MEPs put into achieving what is there.

Despite progress and enhanced collaboration over the last 5 years, we have continued to see homelessness increase in Ireland and across most other Member States.

A central pillar of the European Affordable Housing Plan is the ‘removal of barriers’ to increase housing supply. While this is a familiar policy direction in Ireland, and of course necessary, our experience shows that increasing supply on its own is not sufficient to reduce homelessness. When representatives from our Group met with Irish MEPs and EU Commission staff in Brussels last November, we highlighted the need for policies that ensure new housing reaches marginalised people who are trapped in homelessness. As the European Commission noted in its most recent Country Specific Report on Ireland: *“To reduce homelessness, priority should be given to those already in emergency accommodation or at risk of becoming homeless.”* This policy insight must be at the heart of housing and homeless policies at every level.

Furthermore, both the Affordable Housing Plan and the Country Report recognise that the housing crisis does not affect all people equally and that some groups, including

migrants and ethnic minorities, are disproportionately impacted by homelessness. Clear EU recommendations and guidance can play a vital role in encouraging Member States to protect fundamental aspects of the EU, including Freedom of Movement and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

In conclusion, we urge Government to use the opportunity of the Irish Presidency to renew the European commitment to ending homelessness, strengthen cooperation between Member States, and ensure that the ambition of the Lisbon Declaration becomes a reality. The draft Council Recommendation set out some specific ways in which this can be achieved which we are happy to expand on during today's discussion.

Thank you again for your invitation to appear today and we look forward to discussing these issues further with you.

About The Irish Homeless Policy Group

The Irish Homeless Policy Group is made up of organisations which work in the sphere of housing and homelessness. The Group is a collective of policy staff in organisations providing direct housing supports, policy work, advocacy, and legal interventions for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We believe that homelessness is largely preventable and solvable, and that those delivering homeless services are best placed to contribute to developing effective solutions, in partnership with government and local authorities.

The Group has established several initiatives to address common challenges; elevate the voices and experiences of the people our organisations work with; and, critically, to put forward policy solutions that we believe can reduce, and ultimately end, homelessness.

Many of the organisations which are members of the Group are also members of FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless.)

Organisations involved with the Irish Homeless Policy Group include: Cope Galway, Crosscare, Depaul Ireland, Focus Ireland, The Irish Refugee Council, Novas, Respond, Threshold, Simon Communities of Ireland, Dublin Simon Community, SVP, the Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, the Irish Council for Social Housing, Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice.

Additional resources:

- [TENTH OVERVIEW OF HOUSING EXCLUSION IN EUROPE 2025](#)
- [FEANTSA Analysis of the Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Housing Exclusion](#)
- [Ministerial meeting on Combatting Homelessness and meeting of the members of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness \(EPOCH\)](#)
- [European Commission- Ireland 2026 Country Report](#)
- [Migrants more likely to be working than Irish-born, but many experience poverty and high housing costs](#)
- [Literature review on the fiscal impact of immigration](#)
- [The International Court of Justice's 2012 Jurisprudence](#)
- [REGULATION \(EU\) No 492/2011 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL](#)