



United Kingdom 2004

## Street homelessness eradication strategies

Comment Paper,  
FEANTSA





## I. SHADOW PEER REVIEW

### *Aims and Procedures of the Shadow Peer Review*

FEANTSA has conducted a Peer Review of the UK Rough Sleepers Strategy (1999-2002) by circulating a summary of the Rough Sleepers Strategy (RSS) and a questionnaire to its Members asking them for feedback and evaluation of:

1. The aims and results of the RSS
2. The transferability of the RSS in their different national contexts

The EU-level Peer Review on the RSS has inspired FEANTSA to carry out a “shadow” peer review alongside the official EU Peer Review. The RSS was selected by the European Commission as an example of good practice in the area of Social Inclusion for its integrated approach to tackling rough sleeping, and is currently being evaluated in the framework of the EU Social Inclusion Peer Review Programme 2004.<sup>1</sup> The peer review process is taking place over the next few months. Firstly, the Thematic Expert on the Peer Review team prepared a discussion paper. National delegations then circulated their comments on the discussion paper to the team. The team will then meet on 5 and 6 May in London, bringing together European Commission experts, national representatives and experts from the host country (UK) and 7 “peer” countries (Denmark, Finland, France, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania and Sweden), and European and national stakeholders who are experts in the field of homelessness (including FEANTSA). Finally, an evaluation report will then be prepared following the discussions during the Peer Review meeting.

FEANTSA has replicated this process through a “shadow” peer review at *stakeholder* level by collecting the opinions of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) which are generally important actors in implementing any homeless strategy and have extensive experience of working closely with rough sleepers. The methods used in the FEANTSA peer review were similar to the EU Peer Review, although involved many more countries.<sup>2</sup> The Peer Organisations welcomed FEANTSA’s suggestion to assess the effectiveness and transferability of the RSS through peer review methods, and to encourage the dis-

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1 [www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net](http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net)

2 Portugal, Czech Republic, Finland, England, Denmark, Hungary, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Ireland, Germany, Spain, Netherlands



semination of good practice between NGOs. The issues of rough sleeping have been well-researched and are well-known – a thoughtful evaluation based on a comparative analysis of national practices in Europe is therefore timely and useful.

### *Main findings*

The feedback gathered during this peer review exercise has created awareness of the innovations and lessons learnt from the RSS. This should enable countries across Europe to draw relevant information and adapt it to their respective national contexts and needs. The findings have highlighted the following elements:

1. The strong points of the RSS:
  - Targeting rough sleepers
  - Inter-agency working
  - Meeting the target
  - Homelessness legislation
  - Full involvement of national and local government.
  
2. The points to be strengthened in the RSS:
  - Targets and Monitoring
  - Regional focus
  - Hostels
  - Social interaction
  - Preventive aspect
  
3. The determining factors in the transferability of such a Strategy in other national contexts:
  - The national support provided by the Rough Sleepers Unit
  - The political perception of homelessness
  - The size of the rough sleeping population
  - Strong local authorities
  - Strong voluntary sector
  - Funding
  - The nature of homeless policy.



## II. PEER EVALUATION

### A. *Strong points of the Strategy*

#### **Targeting rough sleepers**

Focusing on rough sleepers was perceived as positive since it concentrated resources on the most extreme category of the homeless population which needs immediate help. There is moreover a general feeling among the peer organizations that a targeted approach towards rough sleepers was an advantage since it provided a clear and measurable focus. It would have been hard to generate so much energy and focus for a wider brief. It was specific enough that it could be led by a 'task force' – the Rough Sleepers Unit. This would have been more difficult to sustain if the brief had been wider – it would have been easier to lose within wider housing or social service responsibilities. However, it was generally agreed that targeting the population of rough sleepers should only be a first step in tackling homelessness. The limited focus was effective as a way of realising a commitment to achieve a step change within a short space of time. The test will be in sustaining a more broadly based programme.

#### **Inter-agency working**

The ultimate goal of the RSS was long-term resettlement and reintegration of rough sleepers into society. Emphasis was therefore placed on a range of actions wider than housing, which were supported by regular inter-agency work pulling together actors from Contact and Assessment Teams (CAT - see below), the police, hostels, social services, health services, housing services, Tenancy Sustainment Teams (TST).

The starting point of the RSS are CATs which carry out street work with rough sleepers, assess the problems of each individual, and refer them to the appropriate services. All peer organisations agreed on the need to understand the specific needs of a rough sleeper in order to use the resources of the RSS in an effective way. Simply providing a roof is not enough. Some rough sleepers are not ready to cope with accessing building-based services and cannot cope with crowds, noise or even with buildings or institutions. Some need health treatment for addiction and mental health issues. Some need to acquire independent living skills in order to sustain a tenancy and avoid being trapped in a cycle of rough sleeping and temporary accommodation.



The cooperation between different agencies and different professional groups and volunteers provided the flexibility needed to meet the specific needs of individuals sleeping rough.

### **Meeting the target**

The RSS aimed to reduce rough sleeping in England to as near to zero as possible and set a target of reducing the population by at least two-thirds by April 2002. This target was achieved. Some peer organizations did not consider the target ambitious enough considering it ethically incorrect to set a target which still allows some people to sleep rough. Others however considered the target realistic given the proportion of rough sleepers who have psychotic and psychiatric illnesses sometimes resulting in an inability to cope inside a building.

The 2003 Housing Investment Programme published in September 2003 showed the number of people sleeping rough on any one night in England has been reduced by 73% since 1998. This is a reduction from the baseline figure of 1,850 in June 1998 to the lowest recorded level of 504 rough sleepers in June 2003. The target reflects a commitment by an in-coming government to tackle entrenched social disadvantage, to use 'joined up government' to cut across departmental resistance and inaction, and finally to use targets and hard measurements to ensure measurable achievements.

### ***Legislation***

The fact the initiative was handled nationally and underwritten by primary legislation meant that there was consistency and accountability within the implementation of the Strategy. In the Housing Act 1996<sup>3</sup>, Part VII specifically covers homelessness, eligibility for assistance and duties to provide accommodation in England and Wales. The Homelessness Act 2002<sup>4</sup>, the most important piece of legislation on housing and homelessness since the Housing Act 1996, then passed into law early in 2002. The RSS clearly prepared the ground for legislation, both politically and practically. The Act constitutes the main part of the government's new strategy for tackling homelessness. It gives greater protection to those with a priority need for housing, such as families, and gives people more choice in the housing they receive. It extends the priority list to include 16 and 17 year olds and 18 to 21 year olds leaving care, as well as those fleeing violence. It also requires all local authorities to carry out a homelessness review, develop a strategy for their area to prevent homelessness, and

3 Housing Act 1996. <http://www.homelesspages.org.uk/subs/subjects.asp?sbid=12>

4 Homelessness Act 2002. <http://www.homelesspages.org.uk/kwds/keywords.asp?kwid=291>



provide accommodation and/or support for people who are or may become homeless. Such developments should further extend the role of local authorities in tackling rough sleeping and give voluntary agencies and others actors a framework within which to challenge and hold account local authorities.

### **Cooperation between national and local level**

Success of the RSS derives from effective cooperation between both national and local levels of government. All local initiatives were part of a national strategy coordinated by a special Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU). The RSU provided both funding - a budget of almost £200 million (€288 million) over three years - and strategic leadership. The involvement of a national authority should guarantee continuity so that measures are carried out equally across the country. It is especially important for the provision of services to be equally organized by all local authorities since migration is an important element of rough sleeping.

Local authorities, supported by adequate national funding, were in a position to take on a leadership role in implementing policies for rough sleepers. Many believe that the strong role of the local authorities was essential to the success of the strategy and major advances have been made where they have taken a stronger lead. This also allows for flexibility according to regional/local needs. The needs of a capital city will be different to a regional town and this should be accounted for in the approach of the actors concerned. The involvement of local authorities is fundamental in terms of counting and monitoring the numbers of rough sleepers. In the RSS, counts were based on the number of people sleeping out on a single night, rather than the number who sleep rough over the course of a year. These counts were conducted by local authorities and voluntary sector agencies. Counting and data collection, in order to be reliable and comparable, must be done on a local scale but on nationwide implemented data collection systems.

#### *B. Points which need strengthening*

##### **Targets and Monitoring**

A fixed target like the reduction of the rough sleeping population by two-thirds produces a strong political imperative to show success. Everyone involved – government politicians and officials, the local authorities and voluntary agencies charged with implementing the initiatives – had strong reasons to be able to show that they had succeeded.



The target was met. However, *less rough sleepers* does not necessarily mean *less homeless* people. Where do these people go once off the streets? Such people often circulate between shelters, prisons, and hospitals, in which case they are still considered homeless and at risk of returning to the streets. The target of reducing the number of rough sleepers is therefore far from satisfactory – the aim is not to hide these people, but to help them reintegrate society. Many feel that the RSS target led to somewhat rushed and even coercive approaches to ‘assisting’ people with entrenched problems, rather than working at the speed that was right for the individual.

It would be more appropriate to have longer-term targets, as well as figures on health, resettlement, reintegration in order to monitor the paths followed by rough sleepers once off the streets. Such targets are also necessary to maintain quality services in all aspects of the RSS. Evaluation of the RSS revealed gaps in pre-tenancy support due to confusion regarding the division of responsibilities in this area (between CATs, TSTs, hostel staff, etc).

It is important to develop regular monitoring tools in order to fully understand the phenomenon and ensure services are correctly implemented. This can only be done effectively by implementing data collection systems with the help of local authorities and services providers. Measures should be taken to harmonise the nature and kind of data collected at local level, thus leading to a set of comparable figures and statistics on a regional, national and even European level.

### **Regional focus**

Certain peer organizations have emphasized the need for a national, local, *and* regional focus when tackling rough sleeping in order to take account of migration in the homeless population. Many homeless people have rather weak or variable geographical links. Similarly, people with specific problems (e.g. those leaving prison, trying to come off drugs, victims of domestic violence) may need to move away from their traditional area in order to make a new start. In these cases, a regional perspective is essential. One area where there is a big gap is in London, where there is the absence of an effective regional perspective. There are 33 separate authorities in London and a regional body without strong powers, the Greater London Authority (GLA). The GLA has no direct responsibility for housing or homelessness and there is no regional body charged with developing a London-wide homelessness strategy. Significant new initiatives need to have a regional or sub-regional, rather than a local focus.



## **Hostels**

According to many organizations, the hostels are the weak link in the RSS. The rough sleeping population is very varied and complex, and appropriate hostels are the crucial first step towards recovery. Particular attention should be devoted to the creation of specialised hostels for men only, for women only, or for families only in order to provide secure environments to favour recovery. Moreover, mainstream hostels should be equipped with specialised services for specific target groups : for young people aged 15 to 20, for old people, for people leaving prison or drug/alcohol addiction programmes, for ex-prisoners, for immigrants, for people with mental health issues. Some of the members of this particular segment of the homeless population do not necessarily agree to live in dormitories or hostels with other people and that is also one of the reasons why they live in the streets. Custom-made solutions with lots of support are required.

## **Social Interaction**

Attention was drawn to the crucial need for rough sleepers to create social networks as an important element in reconstitution as individuals – just as important as having a roof or employment. Rough sleeping is the ultimate form of social exclusion and people involved in this field of work should deal, first of all, with the fact that these people have no family and/or social affiliation. This is considered an important aspect of reintegration in to society and yet is not taken into account in the RSS. Although social contact is covered to a certain extent through the street work carried out by CATs which work very closely with rough sleepers, this cannot replace an action dedicated solely to supporting the development of social networks.

## **Preventive aspect**

Rough sleeping is of course the most severe manifestation of homelessness and the targeted approach of the RSS has yielded positive results. To widen the area of focus for one group would maybe have weakened the impact of the RSS. However, to treat it alone is to deal just with the symptom and not the underlying cause. The risk of homelessness can affect many people who have accommodation. Rather than simply responding to the crisis situations of rough sleepers, it is necessary to anticipate such situations by preventing rough sleeping in the first place by targeting those who live in hostels or other temporary,



unstable accommodation, those living in prisons or institutions, those threatened of eviction, those who live in unsafe family environments, etc. Many of these people can find themselves on the street from one day to the next which inevitably saturates existing crisis services.

This then suggests the need for similar organisations or departments to focus on other risk areas through a preventive strategy which will complement the crisis and resettlement services provided through the RSS. Prevention services are required in a wide range of fields such as debt (prevention of a debt culture), education (supporting measures for vulnerable parents; alphabetisation of school leavers, etc), health (substance abuse programs; information/education on contagious diseases such as aids, hepatitis, tuberculoses, etc), employment (vocational guidance and training; empowerment measures for the most vulnerable etc).

The concerns of the peer organizations are reflected in the Homelessness Act 2002 which requires local authorities to produce a homelessness strategy that addresses the *prevention* of homelessness and the procurement of sufficient accommodation to meet needs. Nevertheless, there are strict eligibility criteria for local authority homeless services - local authorities now have a duty to house those who are “unintentionally” homeless and in priority need. This distinction between “intentionally” and “unintentionally” may provide a pragmatic approach to tackling homelessness, but it is agreed that such a distinction should be phased out since no rough sleeper genuinely *chooses* to be on the streets.

### III. TRANSFERABILITY

To place the Rough Sleepers Strategy in a European context is a challenge given the diversity of institutional arrangements and cultural differences between the peer countries, which create further difficulties for the transferability debate.

The aim of this exercise is not to produce strict guidelines for the replication of the RSS in other European countries. Rather, the aim is to put forward elements of the RSS which contributed to the success of the Strategy, and thereby enable other EU countries to draw information and adapt it to their own objectives and needs in the area of homeless policy. While taking into account emerging local challenges, European countries are encouraged to take into account innovations and lessons elsewhere.



This peer review exercise has drawn attention to certain elements which can be considered as determining factors in the success of the RSS: the national support provided by the Rough Sleepers Unit, the political perception of homelessness, the size of the rough sleeping population, strong local authorities, a strong voluntary sector, funding, the nature of homeless policy.

### *Rough Sleepers Unit – national support*

The Rough Sleepers Unit had a country-wide responsibility which was very productive in ensuring the initial agenda got pushed forward rapidly. The setting up of the Social Exclusion Unit - and within it the Rough Sleepers Unit to tackle the most extreme form of homelessness - guaranteed funding and political support to implement the Strategy effectively. There are countries where the creation of such a unit would also be possible, like in Ireland where a Social Exclusion Unit already has a homeless strategy. Or in Hungary where units specialising in single homeless and homeless families already exist in the Ministry of Health, Social and Family Matters. However many European countries have no distinct body at national level which takes the lead in implementing policies for the homeless.

### *Political perception of homelessness*

The presence or absence of a department specialized in tackling rough sleeping or homelessness is necessarily linked to the political perception and subsequent definition of homelessness. The UK political perception of homelessness is such that it is wide enough to be divided into different sub-groups, such as rough-sleepers, those in hostels, short-term accommodation, bed & breakfast accommodation and more importantly those at risk of becoming homeless, for which specific policies are being developed. This UK notion of homelessness has allowed for an integrated framework where different homeless sub-groups are targeted in one all-encompassing strategy. However, this approach may not work in other national contexts which have more narrow definitions of homelessness, or no definition at all as is the case in Luxembourg, the Czech Republic and Portugal, where the political perception of the problem is quite different. Transferring the RSS in such countries may result in concentrating efforts on rough sleepers only and consequently narrow the scope for tackling other existing forms of homelessness. Rough sleeping must be seen as one category within a wider framework for combating homelessness.



### *Size of the rough sleeping population*

In Ireland and Denmark, the rough sleepers are just a small category of the homeless population. In Finland, the number of homeless people living outdoors are decreasing steadily - Helsinki has around 5000 homeless people of which those living on the street are now estimated to be only 40-50. There are therefore many "homeless" and very few "rough sleepers". In such countries where rough sleeping is a marginal problem, a strategy like the RSS with a wide range of actions focussing only on rough sleepers may not be the most appropriate solution. In other countries like Hungary, where estimations of the number of rough sleepers show figures as high as 15 000 for a winter night in the whole country (the total population of the country being a bit over 10 million inhabitants), the integrated approach of the RSS could be more effective (as long as it is perceived as part of a broader framework to tackle homelessness).

### *Legislation*

The added advantage for the Rough Sleepers Unit was the place of and implementation of specific Government legislation to support their work. For an integrated homeless strategy to work, a broad legal framework needs to exist as is the case in Denmark, Finland, France and Ireland. There are countries where the homeless population is mentioned in a broader framework like in Hungary (Law on Social Affairs) and Italy where the homeless population was mentioned for the first time in a national framework law (L.328/2000) on social assistance. However, a broad legal framework dedicated entirely to the issue of homelessness is the only way to develop effective strategies to tackle homelessness.

### *Local authorities*

As the RSS matured, the need for strong local authorities became evident and responsibility shifted to the local level (Homelessness Act 2002). Local authorities are now bound by law to draw up homelessness strategies and provide the adequate services to people in need.

If local authorities provide good services, they will attract homeless people. It is crucial to have a clear distribution of competences at all levels of policy-making and avoid any blurring of responsibilities regarding the formulation and imple-



mentation of all policies related to homelessness (housing, social assistance, health). In the UK, local authorities are perceived as the appropriate level to implement homeless policies. However, certain countries may require regional level strategies according to their institutional contexts. Under current legislation in Denmark, the implementation of homelessness strategies is mainly carried out by the counties (there are 14 Danish counties) which finance 50% of all homelessness strategies (the State finances the other 50%). In Belgium, the voluntary sector is currently working on a proposal for a Flemish (regional) strategy against homelessness which contains an important role for local governments.

The general trend amongst the peer organizations shows that, even in countries where legislation obliges local authorities to provide services for the homeless, service provision is not implemented equally due to lack of resources and lack of punitive measures for authorities which do not apply the law. Services vary geographically and are more effective in bigger cities where there are higher concentrations of rough sleepers and where the voluntary sector is stronger. Others believe the quality of homeless services generally depends on the strength of civil society in the area, as well as the “traditional attitude” towards this section of the population. In a nutshell, initiatives to tackle homelessness are often left to the goodwill of municipalities and other governmental and non-governmental groups.

### *Strong voluntary sector*

Reduction of homelessness requires a great deal of cooperation between authorities and NGO service providers. Indeed, the implementation of the RSS would not have been possible without close cooperation with the voluntary sector.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the role of the voluntary sector has been reinforced through the Homelessness Act 2002 which has given voluntary agencies and others a framework within which to challenge and hold local authorities accountable. In many countries, the NGO sector is involved in both the preparation and the implementation of homeless strategies. The Irish voluntary sector is fully involved with the implementation of the local homeless action plans since each local authority has to establish a “homeless forum” comprising of local authorities, the health boards and relevant voluntary agencies. The Irish voluntary sector is also to be involved in the review of the National Homeless Strategy which is to begin in the near future.

5 Voluntary sector : NGOs, Charities, etc, with paid and non-paid staff.



### *Funding*

From 1990 to 1998, £250 million (€360 million) was spent on the London Rough Sleepers Initiative. The RSS had a budget of almost **£200 million (€288 million) over three years**. This includes £34 million (€49 million) already committed for work in 33 English towns and cities outside London (selected as 'hot spots' on the basis of street counts held twice a year). The financial resources provided for the RSS were generous compared to the sums allocated in other countries. Suffice to compare, for example, the financial resources available in Italy: between 2000 and 2002 in Italy, €30 million were allocated over three years for crisis services (€10 million distributed every year to all 103 provincial capitals). In other countries, homelessness is simply not a priority and funds are channeled elsewhere.

### *Nature of homeless policy*

Strategies for combating homelessness throughout Europe include prevention, crisis services, post-emergency services, resettlement/reintegration services, occupational and professional training services, "empowerment"-training, accompanied housing etc. The nature of homeless policy in a country will inevitably affect the transferability of the Rough Sleepers Strategy, considered by most peer organizations as a "first step" in a more broad and integrated strategy providing a wide range of services for the homeless.

There are countries where this all-encompassing approach is well-adapted, as is the case in Scotland which has opted immediately for a wider approach with an integrated initiative to reduce rough sleeping. It is interesting to note that this strategy has progressed without establishing targets for rough sleeping, but rather with a commitment to ending the need for anyone to sleep rough.

It is crucial to examine the *reasons* for the presence of a rough sleeping population in a given country. There are countries where such an approach may be too developed and where strategies providing more simple and straightforward solutions may be more appropriate. In Hungary, attention was drawn to the lack of available social housing and residential homes for elderly or people with mental health problems. Homeless services can accommodate a maximum of around 8.000 people. Many of the homeless should be accommodated in elderly residential homes or in psychiatric institutions, etc. This would significantly



contribute to the reduction of the number of people sleeping rough. In this case, the solutions are to be found in increasing social housing rather than a step-by-step approach starting specifically with rough sleeping. The RSS provides a wide range of street, health, housing and reintegration services. For such a strategy to work in another national context, such services would have to be already in place. This is not the case in a number of European countries.

The RSS focuses on the reintegration of people who are in a crisis situation. However, some European countries already have fully developed crisis services and tend to implement homeless policies which consist rather of preventive schemes targeting vulnerable groups at risk of becoming homeless and developing better social housing.

#### IV. FOLLOW-UP

Most peer organizations believe the principles of the Rough Sleepers Strategy are an example of good practice in many respects and can be a good basis for development towards a comprehensive approach to fighting homelessness. In other words, the RSS is perceived as a first step in a longer process. But in order to build the next steps in the process, any strategy targeting rough sleepers should ideally already be part of a broad and integrated framework tackling the wider aspects of homelessness.

The RSU has now evolved into the Homeless Directorate (HMD),<sup>6</sup> which operates from the Office of the Deputy Prime-Minister (ODPM). The political commitment now encompasses all groups who are considered homeless i.e., rough-sleepers, those in hostels, short-term accommodation, bed & breakfast accommodation and more importantly those at risk of becoming homeless. The Homelessness Act 2002 constitutes the main part of the government's new strategy for tackling homelessness whereby all local authorities in England have had to produce homelessness strategies by end of July 2003 to help to sustain reductions made in rough sleeping, end the appropriate use of B&B for homeless families with children and prevent and tackle homelessness. To this end, the government has published two key resources outlining the new strategy and also providing guidelines for local authorities: *More than a Roof: A Report into Tackling Homelessness*<sup>7</sup> and *Homelessness Strategies: A Good Practice Handbook*.<sup>8</sup>

6 [http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_homelessness/documents/sectionhomepage/odpm\\_homelessness\\_page.hcsp](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/sectionhomepage/odpm_homelessness_page.hcsp)

7 [http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_homelessness/documents/page/odpm\\_home\\_601520.hcsp](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_601520.hcsp)



Moreover, the preventive aspect has been reinforced by a Bill introduced in to Parliament on 8 December 2003. This Bill will help the most vulnerable and help create a fairer and better housing market, but will also strengthen the Government's drive to meet its 2010 decent homes target.<sup>9</sup> The Government re-stated its objective that all social tenants should have a decent home by 2010 and set two delivery targets: to reduce by a third, by 2004, the number of social housing properties which fail the Decent Homes standard; to have all social rented homes meeting the Decent Homes standard by 2010.

## **ANNEX 1: PEER ORGANISATIONS**

A.C.I.S.J.F - Henrique PINTO	henrique.pinto@forum.pt
Armáda spásy - Neil DAVIES	dirilaptop@volny.cz
BAGWOHNLOS - Thomas Specht-Kittler	BAGWOHNLOS@aol.com
The Connection at St Martin's - Bill WILLIAMS	Bill.Williams@cstm.org.uk
Confédération Caritas Luxembourg – Rene KNEIP	rene.kneip@coldmail.lu
Depaultrust - Una BARRY	Una.Barry@depaultrust.org
FAPIL - Jean-Michel DAVID	jean-michel.david@fapil.dyndns.org
FIOpsd - Stefano GALLIANI	albpop@tin.it
FNARS - Michel MERCADIE	michel.mercadie@wanadoo.fr
ICSH - Donal MC MANUS	donal@icsh.ie
London Housing Federation - Kevin IRELAND	kevin.ireland@lhf.org.uk
Hungarian Maltese Charity Service- Boroka FEHER	mmszbp@hu.inter.net
Nadeje - Ilja Hradeck	hradecky@nadeje.cz

8 Homelessness Strategies: A Good Practice Handbook. [http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_homelessness/documents/page/odpm\\_home\\_601517.hcsp](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_homelessness/documents/page/odpm_home_601517.hcsp)

9 Decent Homes. [http://www.go-london.gov.uk/housing/decent\\_homes.asp](http://www.go-london.gov.uk/housing/decent_homes.asp)



Projekt Udenfor - Preben BRANDT	preben.brandt@udenfor.dk
Prohabitatge - Xavier MESTRE	prohabitatge@prohabitatge.org
ReFoMix - Péter BAKOS	peter_bakos@refomix.hu
SBS §94 - Arne JACOBSEN	aja.kollegiet@hjemlos.dk
SMO Centraal Bureau - Jurgen FEUERRIEGEL	smo.centraal@worldonline.nl
Steunpunt - Danny LESCRAUWAET	Danny.Lescrauwaet@steunpunt.be
St Mungos - Andy SHIELDS	AndyS@MUNGOS.ORG
Y-Saatio - Y-Foundation - Marcus WECKSTROM	marcus.weckstrom@ysaatio.fi

## **ANNEX 2: RSS QUESTIONNAIRE**

### QUESTIONNAIRE

- The RSU Strategy specifically targets rough sleepers. Do you consider it an appropriate manner to tackle homelessness? Or should it go beyond this?
- Do you think this initiative should be handled at national level or local level to be as efficient as possible?
- What should the RSU Strategy aim to achieve? Prioritise the following options:
  1. To develop a better understanding of the extent and nature of the problem,
  2. To curtail the number of people sleeping rough in a concrete manner
  3. A first step to address the problem
- Do you think the RSU Strategy would work in your country? Why?
- If not, what kind of obstacle would make it impossible to put into practice?

For more information, please contact Liz Gosme  
liz.gosme@feantsa.org