



Norway 2006

National strategy to prevent and tackle homelessness

Minutes

Peer Review Meeting
Oslo, 7-8 September 2006



On behalf of
European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities



Peer Review of the National Strategy to prevent and tackle homelessness, Norway, Oslo, 7-8 September 2006

Hosted by the Norwegian Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, this Peer Review examined the Norwegian strategy against homelessness and its possible transferability to other countries.

Day 1

Welcome addresses

Welcoming the participants to Norway, **Inger Lindgren** (Director General, Department of Housing and Building, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development) said she was very happy that the European Commission had decided to review the Norwegian strategy, The Pathway to a Permanent Home. The Norwegian participants hoped to learn from the discussions and the papers prepared for the review. The strategy was adopted by Stortinget, the Norwegian National Assembly, in 2004, and will run until 2007. Halfway through the strategy period, it is still too early to draw conclusions about how successful it has been. What can already be said is that it has been applied with passion, creativity and hard work by the municipalities and the other stakeholders. 133 municipalities are participating in one of the networks set up to facilitate mutual learning at the local level. In all the regions, contact forums have been set up. Some results have already become apparent. For example, evictions and applications for eviction orders decreased by 20% in 2005. She hoped that some of the activities that the participants would learn about in Norway might also be considered in their own countries and adapted to them. Homelessness is on the political agenda in Norway, and political ambition is high. Homelessness is to be eradicated. The Pathway to a Permanent Home contains goals to be reached by 2007, but the message and objectives also have to be developed beyond that date. One institution alone cannot eradicate homelessness. Collaboration among stakeholders is necessary at both the local and the national levels. One of the core elements in the strategy is making homelessness an issue to be considered within all relevant services. The Department of Housing and Building had thought it important to invite all the core Norwegian participants to take part in this Peer Review, including the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, the Ministry of Health and Care Services, the Ministry of Justice and the Police, the Ministry for Children and Equality, the Norwegian State Housing Bank (Husbanken), the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs and the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS).

Bjørn J. Pedersen (Deputy Director General, Department of Housing and Building), who chaired the sessions, explained that he has responsibility within the Department for the strategy to combat homelessness. The Department also has responsibilities towards other vulnerable groups on the housing market, such as people with psychiatric problems, drug addicts and alcoholics. He welcomed the participants and looked forward to a detailed, stimulating discussion.

Hugues Feltesse (European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) expressed deep appreciation to the Norwegian authorities for this contribution to the Peer Review programme. This was the 18th Peer Review seminar on social inclusion, and the third dealing with the very important issue of homelessness. The first, in the UK, focussed on a strategy to reduce dramatically the number of people sleeping rough and to develop connected action to tackle homelessness. The second, in Denmark, looked at a programme aimed at offering better alternative accommodation for homeless people

who had been living on the street for up to 20 years, despite government efforts to reintegrate them. He was convinced that the present review would be useful for all Member States who are trying to improve their policies for eradicating, or at least reducing, homelessness. Peer countries' papers for the seminar show that the homeless population is increasing, and becoming more heterogeneous, within Europe. The European Union is based on fundamental rights and freedoms and the principle of non-discrimination. It is a Union in which all citizens have the right to dignity, the right to be treated equally, the right to equal opportunities; a Union that strives to combine economic competitiveness and prosperity with social justice, as well as the promotion of an inclusive society. At the spring European Council in March 2006, new objectives and working methods for social protection and social inclusion were endorsed. Two of its three overarching objectives are:

- to promote social cohesion and equal opportunities for all through adequate, accessible, financially sustainable, adaptable and efficient social protection systems and social inclusion policies
- to promote good governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy.

He was confident that the content of the two-day seminar would reflect those aims, and more particularly the social inclusion strand. The Council decision emphasises that social inclusion policies are to be well coordinated and to involve all levels of government and relevant actors, including people experiencing poverty. The EU objectives also call for the efficient and effective administration of all public policies.

He recalled the three main aims of the Peer Review exercise: mutual learning, improving the effectiveness of policies and strategies in this area for all the Member States, and facilitating the transfer of key components of policies or of institutional arrangements which have proved effective in combating poverty and social exclusion. Each of the seminar participants, and particularly those closer to policy-making at the national level, bears a special responsibility as a key actor in enabling the effective transfer of policies, as a result of privileged access to information. The transfer of policy can also be supported by the wide dissemination of the results of these seminars, for example through the programme's website (www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net) and its newsletter, which provide a wealth of information. The objective of the Peer Review is not competition or a ranking of policies. However, the factors that lead to the success of a policy in one country can be replicated elsewhere, if appropriate care is taken in adapting them to different cultural, institutional and economic contexts. The Peer Review programme should be looking for success stories, or at least inspiring stories. Mutual learning and action on good practice are the *raison d'être* of the EU's open method of coordination. In addition, there are two other instruments already in operation. One is the transnational exchange programmes supporting the exchange of good practice among partners in a given thematic area in at least three different Member States, showing similar interests and policy backgrounds. 31 such projects took place in 2004-5 and 23 new ones are now being supported. The goal is to promote networking, the dissemination of information, action on good practice and the mobilisation of actors on a wide basis. There are also general reviews conducted by the Social Protection Committee after delivery of the national action plans for social inclusion. Here, the goal is to disseminate information on the challenges and strategic options in each Member State and assess how each country has managed to translate the EU common objectives into national policies. He asked for participants' collaboration in evaluating the Peer Review process by returning their evaluation forms on this seminar and also giving their feedback in an evaluation survey that would be carried out by the end of 2006.

The Norwegian strategy to prevent and combat homelessness

Inger Lise Skog Hansen (Researcher, Institute for Labour and Social Research (FAFO), Norway) recalled that the current national strategy is the continuation of a national engagement that started in 1999. The first initiative was Project Homelessness, a trial project limited to the seven largest municipalities. The national strategy was the subject of a white paper presented to parliament in 2004. After its adoption, it was launched under the title *The Pathway to a Permanent Home*. In 2005, various voluntary organisations of poor and homeless people set up a Poverty Camp outside the hotel where the three parties which, in 2006, constitute the Norwegian government were negotiating a joint governmental declaration. The three party leaders, currently the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, visited the camp and assured the participants that poverty and homelessness were important issues for the new government. Subsequently, in the governmental declaration, they stated that they would eradicate poverty and homelessness within four years. Ten years ago, neither poverty nor homelessness figured in official discourse in Norway. In the 1990s, awareness of inequality problems grew. The first national survey of homelessness was conducted in 1996, and estimated that there were 6,200 homeless people. Homelessness was placed on the national agenda by the Equalisation Report in 1999. This assessed income distribution and living conditions. After that, poverty – including homelessness – became a political issue. At present, a report to parliament on poverty is awaited, and the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development has indicated that it will contain a section on homelessness.

The definition of homelessness used in Norway is based on the one used in the three surveys conducted in 1996, 2003 and 2005. Homeless people are defined as people not owning or renting their own place of residence, but who are referred to casual or temporary accommodation; people living temporarily with relatives, friends or acquaintances; people who are in prison or in an institution, who are to be released or discharged within two months and who do not have a place of residence; and people who do not have an arranged place to stay for the coming night. Based on this definition, the latest survey estimated that there were 5,500 homeless people. That is 300 more than in 2003, but 700 fewer than in 1996. However, these are rather uncertain estimates, based on reports from different welfare bodies. Most homeless people in Norway are not roofless. The largest group of homeless people, 42%, stay with friends, acquaintances or relatives. One-fourth of the homeless are in institutions and are due to be released or discharged within two months. One-fourth live in overnight shelters. Those without a place to stay organised for the coming night constitute a very small group: 1% of the homeless. This proportion has fallen since 2003, when it was 4%. One-fourth of the homeless people had come out of prison or an institution in the six months prior to the survey. 25% had been evicted. The latest survey confirms a strong link between belonging to marginalised groups and being homeless. 60% of the homeless have substance dependency – mainly drug addiction. Only a small proportion have alcohol problems. A growing proportion is assessed as having mental illness (38% in 2004, compared with 24% in 1996 and 32% in 2003).

The main aim of Project Homelessness was to develop models and methods to counteract homelessness, and this experience formed the basis of the current national strategy. Project Homelessness focussed on those with problems of substance abuse and/or mental illness. One of its main achievements is to have created wider acceptance of the right of homeless people with problems of substance abuse and/or mental health to have access to housing and services. Different studies have emphasised that, for major groups, preventing homelessness is a question of providing housing and adequate help and services. Others have focussed on the need for better understanding of the clients within the welfare system. The main ideology within Norwegian housing policy is that everybody should be able to own their home. The public rental sector in Norway is very modest – less than 3% of the housing market. The government policy set out in the white paper was that everyone should have access to adequate and secure housing. However, there is no

real definition of what that means. What is said is that an adequate dwelling should, as a minimum, ensure safety and satisfy the inhabitants' fundamental needs with regard to safeguarding health and life, personal hygiene and rest. It is also stated that what is considered adequate will vary between individuals. Regarding secure housing, there are some legal protections both for the owners and for the tenants. The main measure for achieving this vision of adequate and secure housing is to stimulate a well-functioning housing market. At the same time, the government does admit that some groups are at a disadvantage within that housing market. It has helped with measures both to secure access to housing and, in some cases, to sustain that access.

Several underlying prerequisites within the current strategy can be traced back to Project Homelessness:

- Everybody should have adequate and secure housing and nobody should be excluded due to substance abuse, mental disorders, lifestyle etc.
- Tackling homelessness is a question both of housing and of support.
- Everybody should have permanent, long-term housing.
- The coordination of services and efforts is strongly emphasised.

Project Homelessness contributed to a paradigm shift in the approach to homelessness in Norway, and the national strategy is in many ways the result of that shift. For the first time in a document on housing policy, homelessness is related to the overall situation of the housing market. It is seen as an issue not only of providing people with access to housing but also of giving them support to keep their housing on a long-term basis. So it is a question both of housing policy and of social policy. The national strategy also represents a shift from an individual approach to a more structural approach to homelessness - from being preoccupied with individual characteristics to focussing on social structures. This goes together with a shift from singling out specific target groups to focussing on the different factors that could weaken a person's position in the housing market.

The strategy does not go into how the municipalities are to do the job. There are no instructions or specific guidelines, but rather an encouragement to develop strategies adapted to the local situation. One key word in the strategy is "collaboration". It involves many different stakeholders at the central, regional and local level. At the central level, it is grounded in government and parliament and currently involves five different ministries. Since the launch of Project Homelessness, Husbanken has been the agency responsible for coordinating the work on homelessness. It also builds competence and provides advice. Both Husbanken and the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs provide funding for follow-up on the strategy. KS has signed an agreement with the government to follow up on the strategy at the local and regional level. At the regional level, the State has many representatives that are stakeholders in the strategy – six regional Husbanken offices, county governors, correctional services, regional health enterprises (concerning the treatment of psychiatric disorders and drug dependency) and the enforcement officers. The most important stakeholder is the 431 municipalities, but voluntary organisations also play a role in delivering housing and services to homeless people. Involving such organisations is part of the strategy. A FAFO study in 2004 showed that 18% of housing and services to the homeless were produced by voluntary organisations.

There are three primary objectives in the strategy:

Objective: Prevent people from becoming homeless.

Targets: - *The number of eviction applications is to be reduced by 50 per cent, and actual evictions by 30 percent.* There are already good results in this area. Reports to Husbanken show a 20% reduction in applications for eviction orders between 2004 and 2005, and a 19% reduction in evictions. Collaboration projects have been launched between different stakeholders to establish new routines and systems in connection with persons in danger of eviction. Findings from this project show both that contacts with people under threat of eviction do reduce the number of actual evictions, and that they are often people who are in need of support but who have not previously been reached by the welfare services. Other initiatives in this field concern financial counselling. The Directorate for Health and Social Affairs coordinates a separate initiative to strengthen the local authorities' work on financial and debt advice.

- *Nobody shall have to spend time in temporary housing upon release from prison.* An agreement on local collaboration has been signed between the Ministry of Justice and Police and the KS. They also drew up a standard agreement for collaboration between correctional services and municipalities. A report to Husbanken showed that the six mayor cities and several additional municipalities are in the process of or already have concluded an agreement. A study in 2003 showed that almost one-third of those sent to prison were homeless when they began their sentence, and a recent study showed that almost two-thirds are homeless when they are released.

- *Nobody shall have to seek temporary housing upon discharge from an institution.* Several reports have documented the potential housing trap connected to discharge from institutions, due mainly to a lack of communication between the institutions and local authorities. But few initiatives have been reported in this field. There are no template agreements and the responsible ministry has not taken any initiatives. Research does show that some municipalities have managed to establish better routines concerning discharge from institutions, and there is evidence that the services provided are indeed better if there has been communication between an institution and the local authority prior to discharge. Some local projects have reached agreements with mental health institutions about counselling people with a combined diagnosis of mental illness and substance abuse, and this has produced good results.

Objective: Contribute to improving the quality of overnight shelters.

Target: - *Nobody shall be offered overnight shelters without there being a quality agreement.* The surveys showed that one-fourth of the homeless stay in overnight shelters. In 2003, the Ministry of Social Affairs issued a guide to establishing quality agreements with overnight shelters, following the discovery that standards were very poor in many of the shelters used by the municipalities. Whole families were staying in one-room accommodation in places where there was extensive drug-dealing and virtually no staff were on hand. The City of Oslo established quality agreements in 2000. After a slow start, a high proportion of the establishments used by the municipality now have agreements. The agreements cover such issues as the provision of furnished single rooms that the user is able to lock, at least one shower and two toilets for every eight occupants, cleaning, 24-hour availability of personnel and respectful treatment of the occupants. Good data are not available on this subject. However, it is known that approximately 85% of the shelters now have quality agreements. It is mainly the small and medium-sized municipalities that have not yet established agreements.

Objective: *Help ensure that homeless people receive offers of permanent housing without undue delay.*

Target: - *Nobody shall stay for more than three months in temporary housing.* The recent survey showed that there has been no reduction in the proportion of homeless people staying in overnight shelters in the period from 2003. In the revised budget for 2006, more funds were allocated to Husbanken to stimulate the development of permanent housing for the homeless in the municipalities. In a recent interview, the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development emphasised that it must become easier for drug users to find a place to stay. In Inger Lise Skog Hansen's interpretation, the Minister was in fact arguing for "housing first". Several studies show that, although Project Homelessness changed attitudes towards the right to housing and support for the most disadvantaged groups, some municipalities are still known to attach conditions to housing which, in practice, exclude a large proportion of these groups. Studies have shown that municipalities are finding it hard to achieve the goal of permanent housing, so they use temporary accommodation instead. Staff tend to explain this by stating that a large proportion of the people in temporary accommodation are unable to live on their own.

A major challenge for the Norwegian strategy is that it is totally dependent on municipalities' taking the responsibility for follow-up. There are no direct instructions on how to do this. There are, however, various means of getting the municipalities to do the job. The speaker divided these into "hard measures" (legislation, central government guidelines and the earmarking of transfers from government) and "soft measures" (stimuli and educational measures, such as funding, loans, networks and forums for communication).

There is no legal right to housing in Norway. However, among the "hard measures" available, the Social Services Act does state that local authorities have an obligation to provide temporary housing for those who are unable to do so themselves. They must also provide housing for those who are unable to look after their own interests on the housing market, but there is no obligation on the municipalities to provide permanent housing. Homeless people and people with housing problems are, however, entitled to local guidance, information and practical assistance where needed. In addition, people needing long-term assistance from the social services are entitled to an "individual plan" which provides for the coordination of services. The Tenancy Act and the Planning and Building Act are part of the legal framework. A particularly Norwegian provision is the Housing Collaboration Act, which gives municipalities the right to buy up to 10% of the housing shares in a housing cooperative for subletting. A strong belief in municipal independence in Norway means that, although money transfers from central government are accompanied by guidelines, local initiatives beyond the legal obligations are totally up to the local authorities. The government has more direct influence on its own regional bodies, such as the county governors and the correctional services. These play an important role in stimulating local engagement.

But the "soft measures" are the foundation of the strategy. The accent is on "enabling measures" that permit local government and voluntary organisations to do the job. The agreement between the government and KS is vital in getting all local authorities involved. KS has committed itself to make the strategy known to its members and promote their collaboration. Most of the soft measures aim to stimulate communication, collaboration, mutual learning and the exchange of ideas. Several forums for regional players have been established, as have networks for the municipalities. The networks are administered by Husbanken's regional officers and the county governors. In addition, the ministries, Husbanken and the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs have commissioned research. This helps both to acquire new knowledge and to keep the focus on the strategy. A further education course on supported housing has been established in three colleges around the country, as a contribution towards ensuring good-quality services within the

municipalities. The Award for the Best Homelessness Initiative is presented to a municipality/NGO that has shown creativity and new initiatives in this field. Individual measures include loans and grants to homeless people themselves, and there are also system-oriented financial measures to help develop local plans, new housing projects and services.

Rising house prices are making it more difficult to enter the housing market. The Norwegian strategy relates to structures within the welfare system (better routines for tackling homelessness, better collaboration between stakeholders and a large-scale commitment to provide housing and services). But a fundamental question is whether homelessness can really be eradicated without also looking at structures in the housing market and being willing to interfere in that market. Without a larger proportion of public housing, it will be a challenge to meet the strategy's goals. On the other hand, eradicating homelessness is now definitely a political goal in Norway, ensuring visibility and funding. However, the strategy's success will still depend mainly on local interest and commitment. The emphasis on soft measures is a good approach, as local "ownership" ensures local engagement. However, there are a few potential problems. One is that municipalities have few resources, and may therefore not give priority to the homelessness issue. Another is that local knowledge and competence in this field are sometimes less than adequate, and this has given rise to discussion about earmarking and the need for clearer guidelines. The Norwegian strategy is halfway through its allotted time period. She therefore welcomed international comment and looked forward to the discussions.

Comments by peer country participants

Peter Juul (Ministry of Social Affairs, Denmark) asked whether, given Norway's high number of municipalities in relation to population size, any thought had been given to local government restructuring. He also wanted to know more about the reasons for evictions. In Denmark, contrary to Norway, the number of evictions is increasing. Regarding communication between institutions and municipalities, in Denmark, the municipalities retain responsibility for their citizens, even when they are in institutions or prison, so it does not come as a surprise when people are about to be discharged or released. He felt that Norway is too soft in its guidance to the municipalities. And he asked how Norway defines "poverty".

Renate Kitzman (Volkshilfe Wien, Austria) said that migrants have particular housing problems in Austria, because they do not have the same access to benefits and services. Do migrants in Norway have the same access as Norwegians to all benefits? Also, how do the Norwegians get information about people threatened by eviction? Austrian law contains two paragraphs requiring the municipality to be informed if an eviction procedure reaches the courts. This is an opportunity for contact with the people under threat.

Bernhard Mager (Social Department, Municipality of Vienna, Austria) said that, in Vienna, the authorities assess whether or not to keep prisoners' dwellings available for them while they are in prison. What happens in Norway?

Anna Qvarlander (National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen), Sweden) is working on a project very similar to Norway's previous Project Homelessness. She found the Norwegian strategy really inspiring. According to surveys, Norway has a higher proportion of people in short-term shelters than Sweden does. From the presentation, she had the impression that shelters exist in municipalities throughout Norway, whereas in Sweden they are concentrated in the big cities.

Jüri Kõre (Department of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Tartu, Estonia) noted some similarities between the homelessness situations in Norway and Estonia, but far more differences. One point of similarity between the two countries is the high proportion of drug abusers and alcoholics within the homeless population. So he asked how Norway goes about coordinating its strategies against homelessness, substance abuse and alcoholism.

Carmen Manu (General Directorate for Social Assistance Policies, Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and the Family, Rumania) congratulated Norway on its strategy and on the commitment of so many bodies to implementing it. She asked if, prior to release, Norwegian prisoners are also prepared for the labour market. To be truly resocialised, people need the prospect of a job.

Jürgen Gøddecke-Stellmann (Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning, Germany) saw many similarities between the Norwegian and German strategies. Both attribute great importance to reducing and preventing evictions, and both stress the need for quality in temporary accommodation but also in the framework for action against homelessness. Germany has legislation providing rent support for people who are on low incomes or who suddenly find themselves unemployed. One facet of the “social city” programme in which his office takes part is outreach to the most deprived areas of cities, where many people are either unable or unwilling to seek help from the municipalities. He asked if Norway has similar programmes in the deprived areas of cities.

Danica Ošljaj (Ministry of Labour, the Family and Social Affairs, Slovenia) reported that homelessness is not seen as a priority issue in her country. Ten years ago, it was not much of a problem, but recently, homelessness has been growing. Different institutions and ministries have responsibility for this question, so she was pleased to learn that the Norwegian strategy had successfully promoted collaboration. In Slovenia, the trend is more towards wanting more, smaller municipalities, with obvious implications for resources and competence. As there are so many dwellings standing empty in Slovenia, many people there, including senior politicians, wonder if homelessness is a matter of choice. She was glad that an international conference on homelessness would be taking place in Ljubljana in September 2006, as this would raise local awareness of the issue. Personally, she believed that nobody would freely choose to be homeless, but she asked the Norwegians if they had any evidence that some people prefer that lifestyle, because they are modern nomads.

Pedro-José Cabrera Cabrera (Dept. of Sociology and Social Work, University of Comillas, Spain) noted many similarities between Norway and Spain, for example regarding the percentage of home ownership. 83% of housing in Spain is owned by its occupiers. But a major difference is the welfare structures, which are a recent development in Spain and have not yet been fully built up. Also, Spain has considerable administrative barriers between social policy and housing policy. In terms of housing availability, it is difficult to set targets for tackling homelessness when Spain has about a million young people living with their parents simply because youngsters cannot find affordable accommodation. In this situation, it becomes difficult to give policy priority to the homeless. Another difficulty is that Spain has hundreds of thousands of immigrants arriving from Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. Giving them a right to housing would raise sensitive issues of citizenship. Also, Spain has a tradition of relying on voluntary and religious organisations to tackle social issues such as homelessness. It would be very difficult for Spanish local authorities to insist on quality agreements, because they would have to put money on the table.

Replying to the discussion, **Inger Lise Skog Hansen** said that research has already revealed some of the reasons for evictions in Norway. People facing eviction are usually those who, although in need of help, have not previously been in contact with the social services. Their problems are mostly financial, although

substance abuse and mental illness are also factors. Regarding municipalities' responsibility for citizens in institutions, the situation is the same in Norway as in Denmark. Municipalities do have that responsibility, but the problem is that they do not know when people are going to be discharged from institutions. At 12% of the homeless, immigrants are overrepresented within Norway's homeless population. Those awaiting residence permits or the granting of asylum are in special housing. The problems start later, but by that stage, the immigrants are entitled to all the housing and other services provided to the rest of the population. However, one issue not addressed in the homelessness debate in Norway is the very poor conditions in which many Polish migrant workers are known to live. Securing the social inclusion of released prisoners is a big challenge, and inclusion in the labour market is obviously one aspect that has to be worked on. Some prisons do have contacts with local employment offices, but much remains to be done. The bridge between prisons and the local communities is still a very unstable one. As in Sweden, the Norwegian shelters are mainly in the big cities. The smaller municipalities use campsites, hotels and boarding houses. In Norway as in Germany, financial support is available for people who need it. Especially in Project Homelessness, there was considerable emphasis on reaching out to those who needed help but who had not previously been in contact with the social services, especially those with problems of mental illness or drug dependency.

Bjørn Pedersen added that the restructuring of municipalities is not currently on the political agenda in Norway, although there are some proposals for change at the intermediate level, where counties might be replaced by larger regions. As in Austria, Norwegian courts are under an obligation to inform the social services of eviction cases.

Statements by NGOs and local authority networks

Freek Spinnewijn (FEANTSA – European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) explained that FEANTSA is the only European NGO that focuses on homelessness. Its members are national and regional organisations working with homeless people, usually through networks of hostels and shelters. FEANTSA also took part in the previous two Peer Reviews on homelessness, and has once again produced a “shadow Peer Review”. It analysed the Norwegian strategy, asked its members for their views, and produced a report which was part of the documentation for the seminar. FEANTSA was interested to note that the Norwegian strategy has quite a wide target population. This makes it more effective. He praised Husbanken's role, which he said is quite unique in Europe. He found it useful to have a single coordinating body, while at the same time ensuring that all relevant ministries are involved. The knowledge and competence concentrated within Husbanken are also important assets. On the “housing first” approach, FEANTSA's impression is that the most efficient European strategies against homelessness tend to be housing-led – with the possible exception of Denmark, where a highly effective strategy has a different emphasis. The mobilisation of local authorities is another important factor. FEANTSA has developed a list of ten approaches that need to be integrated into a homelessness strategy in order to make it effective. It needs to be evidence-based, comprehensive, multi-dimensional, rights-based, participatory, statutory, sustainable, needs-based, pragmatic and bottom-up. Many of these elements are found in the Norwegian strategy, attesting to its effectiveness. But one that does not feature prominently in the strategy is the rights-based approach (the right to shelter, assistance etc.). It is strange that the right to housing is not more strongly emphasised. FEANTSA also found that the Norwegian legal framework is quite “soft”. Local authority involvement is mainly on a voluntary basis. However, he noted that many Norwegians feel that the voluntary approach works well, so he would like more information about this. In particular, he wondered if local authorities who are strongly involved in the strategy attract more homeless people, coming from municipalities that are less involved. The only real flaw that FEANTSA saw in the Norwegian strategy concerns the night shelters, and it had noted a similar weakness during the Peer Review in Denmark. Although the strategy aims to ensure that nobody has to stay in night shelters for more than three months,

this is not being achieved in practice. Night shelters have therefore come to be regarded as a sort of solution for homelessness. Other than that, he felt that the Norwegian strategy is a very good one.

Gerhard Eitel (Vienna Social Fund, Austria) spoke on behalf of Eurocities, an organisation of major European cities. It has a social affairs forum, within which he coordinates the working group on homelessness. 12 cities in 10 Member States are represented in the working group, which has been operating since 2004. It analyses and compares the work done by local authorities to support homeless people in the cities. He distributed copies of its recently finalised first report, and drew attention to four comparison tools created by the group. The first is a table setting out all the provisions that can influence the homelessness situation in a city. Provisions both for homeless and for non-homeless people are important in this respect. For example, a good supply of easily affordable housing will obviously help to reduce the number of evictions. The second is a general overview of all the support measures running in a city to ensure that homeless people can reach the level of independent housing. The third aims to provide figures based on the first three points of the definition of homelessness developed by FEANTSA (see www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?Page=484). However, this third tool has encountered difficulties, due to the different methods of record-keeping used by the various cities. Work is underway to produce strictly comparable figures. The fourth tool analyses how the national, regional and local levels work together in each country. Using these tools, the experiences of 12 European cities are analysed in the first report. The group feels that it should help to close the gap between local policies and national and European policies in the field of social exclusion. One of the main results of its work is an integrated chain approach which can help to tackle homelessness successfully and which should also be a strategy for social inclusion in future. The involvement of national governments is very important to success at the local level. Concerning the relevance and transferability of the Norwegian strategy, the working group's experience and the three Peer Reviews on homelessness show that active involvement of the national level is possible and useful even in countries with high federal competences on social issues. In many European countries, there is little interest at the national level in the issue of homelessness. He hoped that the Norwegian government will encourage other governments to develop national strategies.

Jos Maaskant (Social Affairs and Employment Service, Rotterdam, Netherlands) put five groups of questions on behalf of Eurocities:

- Who, apart from the homeless themselves, are the main beneficiaries of the Norwegian strategy – for example, does the fact of having a national strategy make a difference in cities such as Oslo?
- As the Norwegian strategy is top-down but is based mainly on “soft measures”, could the Norwegian participants give more details of the measures available to the national authorities to ensure that the targets are being met by the local authorities? What if the “enabling approach” does not bring the results expected? What will happen if local authorities do not meet the targets set out in the strategy by the end of 2007? Will there be sanctions from national government?
- Where targets are achieved, for example a reduction in the number of evictions, how will it be demonstrated that this is a result of implementing the strategy?
- Given the very high proportion of private housing in Norway, how will the necessary supply of housing for the strategy be achieved?
- Where does the NGO sector fit into the strategy?

Presentation of the seminar discussion paper

Bill Edgar (thematic expert – University of Dundee and European Housing Research Ltd, UK) said the Norwegian strategy covers two important sets of issues. Output issues include a very clear set of targets and a focus on the prevention of homelessness. The issue of improving the quality of night shelters might need further discussion, due to different national understandings of the terms “night shelter”, “temporary accommodation” and “supported housing”. He also had some questions about the realism of phasing out temporary accommodation. Another output issue is the “housing first” approach – getting people into permanent housing, and not going through an integrated chain or a staircase of transition. This is quite an innovative approach in Europe, although it is also found in the USA and to some extent in the UK. It is not without its critics, and targets have to be looked at carefully when adopting a “housing first” approach. For example, the Scottish parliament has decided that everybody will have a right to permanent housing by 2012, and that nobody who is homeless should be without such permanent housing for more than 28 days. Where such clear commitments are given, care must be taken that targets and timescales do not raise expectations that cannot be met. The second group of issues in the Norwegian strategy concerns implementation. These process issues include those of governance. A comparison of implementation will require an understanding of whether such governance issues are different in federal countries than in unitary ones. The mechanism for coordination at national and regional level, and the role of the various agencies within that coordination, is a significant feature of the Norwegian strategy. He did not, however, agree that collaboration agreements are a “soft” measure. Procedures to facilitate inter-agency working are a critical feature in the delivery of homelessness strategies. The Norwegians have tested such agreements through Peer Review and have produced model agreements which can be adapted to local needs. This innovative idea might be transferable. Finally, as FEANTSA points out, one of the key indicators of good strategy is that it is evidence-based. There must be clear knowledge of the problems to be tackled. This point perhaps deserves further discussion, as does the need for effective monitoring of implementation.

Returning to the output issues, the Norwegian strategy is very much focussed on structural and institutional factors. It scarcely deals at all with individual social care aspects. It therefore has a housing focus. There is a clear distinction in Europe between countries that are trying to develop homelessness strategies from a social care perspective, such as Denmark and the UK, and those that are much more housing-focussed, such as Ireland, Finland and Scotland. Discussion might be needed on how far the Norwegian focus on housing is transferable to countries with a different social welfare framework. The Norwegian strategy clearly aims to support those who are vulnerable on the housing market. To that extent, it is a housing strategy more than a homelessness strategy. Scotland and Ireland, for example, have legislation specifically geared to homelessness. The Norwegian strategy is more about mainstreaming homelessness policy, by including it within housing policy, social welfare, criminal justice and so on, and then ensuring that funding flows via the structures that deal with those broader issues. Such mainstreaming is a form of good practice that fits in well with the European Commission’s social inclusion agenda. There is now greater consensus among researchers, and in political circles, that homelessness has structural causes and is not just about individual weaknesses or pathologies. It is now generally accepted that people do not choose to be homeless. More is also known about the underlying causes, which are not only a lack of housing but also problems of institutional release – including young people leaving foster parents. There is often a lack of coordination among agencies when identifying and dealing with the problems of vulnerable groups or families. The interaction at different stages of life between homelessness and other factors such as poverty and labour market capabilities is now better understood. Clearly, in the Norwegian framework, the evidence base is there to justify the particular targets chosen.

Regarding process issues, it is important that there is a national strategic policy. This is sometimes criticised as a top-down approach. However, the Norwegian national strategy has been achieved through coordination and collaboration between the various ministries, but without a statutory or legislative framework. This is different to countries like Ireland and Scotland, where the strategy is delivered through statutory obligations placed on regional and municipal authorities. Discussion is therefore needed as to whether the Norwegian collaborative approach could be delivered in other countries, even where a national strategy exists. He wondered whether the Norwegian delivery mechanisms have been discussed with stakeholders at all levels and with the NGO sector. Husbanken's role as the single coordinating agency is very important, as is its provision of advice on implementation. There are some similarities with the Homelessness Agency in Ireland. However, the Irish agency does not have the same resource base as Husbanken. Clear responsibilities need to be assigned for monitoring as well as for implementation.

Norway's political consensus on homelessness is an important factor. Other countries may not have a political consensus, but they do have political champions on this issue, which may be either a key ministry or individual campaigning politicians. The Norwegian example shows that coordination between key ministries is important. Similarly, in Scotland and Ireland, homelessness task forces were created to develop a strategy. Institutional back-up then becomes necessary – either by assigning new tasks to existing structures or by creating new ones. In the Norwegian case, the willingness of the municipalities to apply the strategy was obviously a key factor in its sustainability. Although Norway appears to have been successful in using existing legislation on social services and other issues to underpin its homelessness strategy, he was not sure that this approach would be transferable to other countries, where specific legislation might be needed. It was also important to realise that Husbanken and the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs are at arm's length from government. They have their own funds and some discretion on how they use them. Husbanken's system-level grants are very much aimed at developing the capabilities and structures need for municipalities to deliver the policy. As regards individual grants, they have the power to decide that homeless people should receive priority. This, together with a very generous level of funding compared to other countries, may be a factor in the strategy's success. The collaboration agreement between KS and the government is also a significant feature in a predominantly rural country with a large number of small local authorities, and might well be transferable to other countries, as might the regional forums, which could be particularly useful in federal countries. The soft measures described in the national presentation are important both for coordination and prevention. For many municipalities, a preventive approach to homelessness will be a new concept. They are more used to dealing with emergencies as they arise. Information and advice are a particularly important form of prevention. Soft measures are important not just for mutual learning, but also for developing new procedures and working methods at local level.

As regards the results of the Norwegian strategy so far, "headline changes" include an overall reduction in homelessness and a drop in the number of evictions. However, homelessness has risen in the small and medium-sized municipalities. This may point to a need to target these authorities in future. Monitoring needs to be accompanied by policies that are flexible enough to be adjusted in line with the findings. Repeat homelessness is not clearly addressed in the Norwegian strategy, but it is an issue that is becoming more prominent in a number of countries. This raises questions about the link between moving people into permanent housing, with support, and the use of temporary accommodation. The phasing-out of temporary accommodation may be laudable, but it may be more appropriate for some groups than for others. For example, while temporary accommodation is unsuitable for families, it may be helpful for young people who have left home.

The improvement of inter-agency cooperation is another important lesson from the Norwegian strategy. In most of the countries he has studied, such collaboration is in its infancy. In particular, the transferability of the cooperation between enforcement officers and other agencies in Norway might be examined. As in many other countries, collaboration with health service agencies seems to be less well developed in Norway. This issue needs more study. FEANTSA's general assembly in October 2006 would be focussing on this issue of health and homelessness. He noted that homelessness due to young people leaving home, to domestic violence or to the breakdown of relationships is addressed less in the Norwegian strategy than it is in a number of other countries. Relationship breakdowns are also increasing among older people in some countries, making them more vulnerable to homelessness. In short, a European overview of homelessness prevention should look at the structural and institutional causes, the targeting of vulnerable groups, the role of life-course transitions and personal crises, the quality of shelter provision, and the relationship between a "housing first" approach and the provision of temporary or alternative accommodation.

Site visits and discussion

Three site visits in the Oslo area during the afternoon enabled seminar participants to see how the Norwegian strategy is implemented locally. An introductory presentation on the City of Oslo's approach explained how it has managed to reduce homelessness by nearly 50% since 1996. The role of supported housing, preventive measures and cooperation with agencies and the State was emphasised.

One group of participants was shown the Fewer Evictions project, launched in 2004 as a collaborative effort between the city and the Execution and Enforcement Commissioner. A new cooperation model was developed, also involving private and public landlords and the Tenants' Union. Applications for eviction orders, and actual evictions, have been considerably reduced.

Another group visited an accommodation centre where they heard about the work undertaken to avoid homelessness among newly released prisoners. This entails practical cooperation between the correctional services, the social services and other key players.

In a roundtable discussion after the visits, participants expressed admiration for the Norwegian activities. However, they also had concerns about funding. Many countries, they felt, would be unable to commit the same amount of resources. The Norwegian participants confirmed that spending is high. Husbanken's administrative budget is about 40 million euro a year. However, the Norwegians also pointed out that important results can be achieved with relatively small sums. For example, small amounts of money are needed to get a municipality start working on the homelessness issue. Also, the prevention and reduction of homelessness result in major cost savings – particularly for local authorities.

Day 2

Key elements of the strategy

Inger Lise Skog Hansen said that one key element is national political commitment. This leads to national engagement on the issue of homelessness. The problem is visible, the programme is supported in parliament, and many politicians feel ownership of the topic. The second, more important element in the strategy is coordination. It involves all the key ministries with responsibilities in this field. A third element of good practice is the collaboration agreements and protocols. The fourth is the clear responsibility for coordination and implementation at all levels. While not all countries have a housing bank, the important point is to assign the responsibility for coordination and implementation to one body. The fifth element is that the Norwegian strategy has clear targets and a realistic timescale. The sixth is that the strategy is based on the available knowledge about homelessness in Norway. The agencies responsible have been active in commissioning research. In this way, it is possible to monitor progress. A new survey is planned in 2007, and in addition Husbanken has funded a new data collection system.

Bill Edgar added that the focus on the institutional population is a key feature of the Norwegian scheme that could be transferred. Another aspect is governance and the need for a key coordinating agency. In some bigger, federalised countries, this may be local or regional coordination, whereas in others it will be national. The municipal networks that are in evidence in Norway are also found in other countries. They often take the form of local forums involving all stakeholders. This is important both for raising the visibility of homelessness strategies and for embedding an understanding of the nature of homelessness. It could be adopted in other countries without the need for much in the way of additional resources. The collaboration agreements, for example between municipalities and the correctional services, have also been developed as a kind of model agreement which can also be adopted, with differences, in municipalities throughout the country. The idea of protocols on the interaction between different agencies could be transferred to other countries without there being major resource implications. The competence grants and the grants to strengthen social support are targeted to raise the capacities of municipal authorities. In the regional case, Husbanken and the Directorate of Health and Social Affairs are both providing grants that are coordinated, so that they reinforce each other. The uptake is slow. Only 60 of 400 local authorities in Norway have used these grants. However, the ripple effect is more important than the level of uptake. The targeting of grants to raise competences and skills, particularly in smaller local authorities, might be an idea to be discussed in terms of transfer.

The grants from the Directorate of Health and Social Affairs are currently being evaluated, **Inger Lise Skog Hansen** said. These grants are very often combined with the competence grant from Husbanken. They are aimed at developing social services and new ways of working with homeless people.

Quality agreements are another feature which should be discussed in terms of transferability, **Bill Edgar** felt. Such agreements exist in Norway both for the quality of accommodation and for service standards in hostels for the homeless. His overview of the literature in Europe shows that this is a very weakly regulated issue. He consulted FEANTSA members while preparing the Peer Review report and everyone who replied said that they did not have enforceable quality agreements in their countries. Sometimes, there are quality agreements between funding agencies and the NGOs who are providing the hostel services, but these often relate to health and safety issues, not to service or accommodation standards. In some countries, homeless hostels still have 100-300 beds, and people are sleeping up to 12 to a dormitory, whereas the standard being aimed at is self-contained rooms in small, 30-40 bed hostels. People who later move into independent accommodation are better able to make that transition if they have been living in smaller-scale hostels. The

quality of hostels is therefore important, but NGOs perhaps sometimes have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, rather than moving towards more expensive accommodation that is more difficult to manage. Standards for hostel accommodation are an issue that should be discussed. In Scotland, despite strong targets for reducing homelessness, it has actually increased among young people. He wondered, therefore, if the 42% of homeless people in Norway who are living with family and friends are often a hidden homeless population that is not necessarily addressed. But when housing rights issues come to the fore, this invisible homeless population may suddenly become visible in the outcomes of housing strategies. The link between indebtedness and homelessness is a further issue for examination. In the Norwegian strategy, evictions are not clearly linked to the question of indebtedness. During the Peer Review in Denmark in 2005, he had been struck by the research there showing that a high proportion of the debts owed by homeless people are to the public authorities. Similar evidence has shown up in Ireland. Finally, recurring homelessness is not an issue that is strongly in evidence in the Norwegian strategy. Repeat homelessness is above all a sign of a need for better information and advice. This should be built into municipal strategies. The Scottish legislation, for example, requires all local authorities to have a homelessness advice and information strategy.

There are some challenges for the Norwegian strategy, **Inger Lise Skog Hansen** pointed out. Addressing homelessness without also addressing housing market structures is a problem. The lack of housing was quite clear in the two Oslo projects visited by the participants. National target-setting versus local government autonomy is another issue, particularly when there is weak legislation and no clear guidelines. Everything depends on municipal budgets, and this is also a challenge for the Norwegian statutory and enabling approaches.

Bill Edgar and **Inger Lise Skog Hansen** had developed a number of questions for the participants in the workshops that would look at transferability – not necessarily in order to have every question answered, but to stimulate discussion:

- Is “housing first” achievable in other countries at present?
- Are the collaboration agreements concerning the institutional population something that could be adopted in other countries?
- Would quality agreements be a way of ensuring that funding agencies and the hostels improve standards of accommodation and service?
- Can temporary accommodation be phased out? What is its role in the participating countries and does it fulfil that role?
- Would “soft measures” (an enabling rather than a legislative approach) work in other countries? Are soft measures manageable and affordable?
- Could other countries develop a homelessness agency that could play a similar coordinating role to that of Husbanken? Is such a role possible in countries with federal structures or autonomous regions?
- Are targets a good idea? Can they be used to measure the success of a strategy? Are the timescales realistic and acceptable? Who should set them? Can they be adjusted if necessary?

Soft measures in the strategy

Mette Mannsåker (Senior Adviser, Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Norway) recalled that Project Homelessness had already shown that it was possible to house even the most disadvantaged people. So, when formulating the new strategy, the State was able to demonstrate that it was based not just on theory, but on practical experience. A second important factor is that the Social Services Act gives people a right to temporary accommodation and places an obligation on local authorities to help people into the housing market if they cannot manage on their own. Within this framework, the State's role is more to enable local authorities to fulfil this obligation, by using the competence grants and the grants from the Directorate of Health and Social Affairs. Thirdly, the local authorities are not the only ones in day-to-day contact with homeless people. Many State agencies, such as the correctional services, the enforcement authorities and the health services, are also regularly in touch with them, so working with these agencies, and involving them in the strategy, is also important. Fourthly, the goals were drawn up not on the basis of what needed to be known about homelessness but of what was in fact already known. They are goals to be agreed on, rather than being very specific about the measures to be taken. This was intentional, as the aim had been to achieve a broad consensus, and the measures themselves could more usefully be decided at the local level. The strategy is based on the understanding that homelessness is a position on the housing market. If all the agencies concerned see homelessness as an important aspect of their work, a lot can be achieved. Bringing in all these systems is also more cost-effective than focussing on housing services alone. During Project Homelessness, there was an ongoing discussion about how to build personal factors (such as drug dependency and mental illness) into a "housing first" approach. Homeless people are often labelled as not having "living skills", but this labelling is a barrier to finding the creative solutions best suited to each individual. So instead of talking about "living skills", the strategy tries to focus on the help needed in order to be housed. Denmark, with its "freak house" projects, has been a source of inspiration here. A great deal was learned through the cooperation between the five ministries, because each has a different way of conceptualising the world. In the first year, they worked together on an ad hoc basis, but now regular coordination meetings are held. Their aim is to coordinate budgeting, allocations to the state bodies and research, to follow up on research findings, and to build a common philosophy, understanding and approach. It is also important that the relevant politicians meet. This does not happen very often, but some meetings have taken place at the level of the ministers and the secretaries of state. Ministries need to remain humble, as they do not know how to face homelessness on a daily basis. Reference groups have been established to ensure feedback from the various stakeholders. Dialogue between national and local politicians is also important for building support, as is dialogue with local civil servants. So far, two Peer Reviews on the strategy have been held inside Norway itself. These have provided a lot of feedback on potential obstacles to the strategy, and have also paved the way for improvements to the legislation.

Gunnar Sveri (Strategy Office, Husbanken) emphasised that the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs is Husbanken's most important national partner in the strategy. Cooperation forums within the strategy include the municipality networks, the regional contact forums, contact committees for the cities, as well as the regional reference groups now gradually being set up. The main aim of the reference groups is to get in contact with the NGOs and other parts of the support services that were not included in the strategy. However, the NGOs have in the meantime taken on a more important role in the other forums than had originally been planned, so they do feel that they are part of the strategy. The municipalities are the main players in the strategy, but it has also brought many new players into the fight against homelessness. The regional contact forums are run by Husbanken's regional housing officers. Mostly, there is one forum per county but in one case, in the north of the country, three counties have decided to join together in one

contact forum. Some people find the number of forums at all levels overwhelming, but he feels that it is important to maintain involvement and contacts among as many people as possible. The regional forums bring together all the most important contacts within the regions, and NGOs are often invited, as are the users' organisations. Organisations representing drug users and released prisoners are particularly active in the strategy and the forums, and have received competence grants from Husbanken. The forums ensure progress and development and also arrange regional seminars. The contact committees for cities are planning a Peer Review in January 2007, on the role of the health services within the strategy. There are now 19 municipality networks, covering 132 municipalities. They were planned as a means of exchanging ideas and experience. They started by comparing statistics on evictions, but very soon got into discussions about the practicalities of social and housing work at the municipal level. These networks are regarded as a success in improving municipal measures against homelessness. Responding to the question about what can be done if a municipality does not want to get involved in the strategy, he said that, if it becomes clear from the homelessness statistics that a municipality is not making the efforts needed, the first step is to discuss the matter with the county governor. Then, the mayor of the municipality concerned is contacted and informed about the strategy. The municipality is also told why it is being informed at that particular time. It is then invited to the meetings and networks, and is told about the possibilities available for grants and housing finance. Collaboration agreements exist between Husbanken and KS, and between Husbanken and the organisation representing the housing co-operations, and another is now in preparation with the Directorate for Health and Social Services. Homelessness is one of four topics covered in these agreements.

Collaboration agreement on prison discharge

Magne Hustad (Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, KS) pointed out that Norway's smallest municipality, Utsira, has only 200 inhabitants. Homelessness there is virtually non-existent, and the same goes for most of the country's smaller municipalities. He suggested that, once local government restructuring in Denmark has succeeded in eradicating homelessness, Norway may be inclined to follow the Danish example. In February 2005, the Norwegian Justice Ministry called a meeting with the other ministries involved, Husbanken and KS. This led to the drafting of two agreements signed between the ministers and the political leader of KS in September 2005. Both are essentially letters of intent, committing KS and central government but not each and every municipality. KS is to address the homelessness issue and inform the municipalities about the strategy, while central government is to allocate funding and give priority to municipalities that are actively implementing the strategy. Both are to encourage local collaboration between the prisons, the municipalities and others taking action to combat homelessness, so as to prepare better for discharges from prison. KS and the Ministry of Justice drew up a model agreement on collaboration between the prisons and local authorities. Many such local agreements have now been signed or are in preparation. So far, the results are very good. The Minister of Local Government and KS want to expand one of the agreements signed in September 2005, and perhaps clarify some of the goals. KS wants to strengthen its efforts to build a broader platform on housing policy, including the strategy to combat homelessness; promote better cooperation between the national and local authorities; and establish a stronger presence in forums for developing local policy on housing and homelessness.

Torill Holsvik Høyem and **Marit Oxås** (both from the Correctional Services, Northern Norway) said the central agreements will be of great help to the local units, as they give guidance on how cooperation can be carried out and which rules apply. Communication between the prisons and local government has so far been difficult and episodic, and cooperation between the different administrations needs to be increased.

Local government used not to be aware of who was serving sentences, and when they would be released, and the prisons and local government lack knowledge about each other's day-to-day work. In the Northern region, all prisons will have signed agreements with local authorities by the autumn of 2006. These will ensure that inmates can plan their lives after release well before they are discharged. The agreements have led to the preparation of new routines for collaboration by prisons and local government. As a result, previously homeless inmates, often re-offenders with complex psychiatric and substance abuse problems, have now received suitable places to live. In Trondheim, for example, a collaboration committee has been established which will meet at least four times a year to ensure the local agreement is being followed. Time limits and a reporting system are being established. A "professional assembly" will ensure professional development and the exchange of information between local government and the prisons. Challenges include ensuring that prisoners serve their sentence close to their place of origin and working to improve cooperation routines between prisons and local government.

Peer country discussion of the transferability of the strategy

The seminar split into two working groups which discussed the transferability of the Norwegian strategy, before reporting back to the plenary.

One working group, while impressed by Husbanken, was concerned that, due to limited resources in some participating countries, the Norwegian experience might not be easily transferable, reported **Elisabet Aldenberg** (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden). One idea was to take parts of the strategy and start with local, less comprehensive pilot projects. The working group discussed the definition of homelessness, and found FEANTSA's definition very useful. It is important to have a baseline when beginning to work on the homelessness issue. Otherwise, hidden problems might arise. Quality standards are important, and need to be discussed, but it might be difficult to set international standards, given the differences in resources. Political commitment would be more difficult to secure in some countries than it had been in Norway. Mainstreaming might be the way forward, by including the housing issue within strategies on other questions. Politicians in other countries might be more reluctant to set the clear targets that existed in Norway, because if they were not reached, this would be seen as a political failure. The idea of specifically addressing the accommodation needs of released prisoners had been a new one to many of the participants, and they would take this point home with them for further reflection on how to tackle the issue in their own countries. Preventive measures were another issue to take home for more consideration. "Housing first" is the only way forward, in the working group's view. Housing agencies and environment ministries also have a part to play in tackling homelessness, which is not just a social issue. A major discussion was sparked by the idea that landlords should give social services prior warning when tenants are to be evicted. Some were in favour of this idea, some against, and there were doubts about the legal implications in some countries. No consensus was reached on this point. But above all, it was agreed that it is possible for even the most marginalised people to be empowered and to improve their lives.

The other working group felt that "housing first" was not the only way forward, but was definitely a good approach, reported **Freek Spinnewijn**. However, it would not be possible to pursue it in the short term in some of the participating countries. There was general recognition that institutionalised people are at particular risk of becoming homeless. Dissenters from this view were the Austrian participants, but this might be because the housing surplus in Vienna prevents this particular problem from arising. The working group agreed that European quality standards for hostels should be raised as an issue, but might be difficult to discuss in some contexts. For instance, in Sweden, the idea of "night shelters" was already taboo, so

discussing the quality of overnight accommodation would mean acknowledging something that is no longer supposed to exist. As to the possibility of doing away with “temporary accommodation”, it first had to be noted that the expression meant different things in different countries. The aim should not be so much to phase it out as to shorten the length of time that people stay in temporary accommodation. So the bottlenecks between temporary and permanent accommodation should be eliminated as far as possible. There was general agreement that some “soft measures” are transferable, and that funding is not really the issue here. Local forums based on the Norwegian model could spell significant progress in other European cities, and this was something that might be promoted by the European Commission. It was generally recognised that one single agency should take the lead in the fight against homelessness. This was not incompatible with federalised or regionalised national structures. The idea of targets had met with greater or lesser degrees of scepticism, depending on the scale of the homelessness problem in the country concerned. The important thing was to measure the progress achieved, and targets could always be adjusted if they were found to be unrealistic.

Relevance and key learning elements for peer countries and stakeholder representatives

Freek Spinnewijn believed the European Commission should promote a proposal that every Member State develop a comprehensive homelessness strategy at national or regional level, as appropriate. That useful recommendation would reflect the decision of the Ministers of Social Affairs when they met in March 2005. They agreed on six priorities for EU anti-poverty policies, one of which was tackling homelessness. Asking them to develop a homelessness strategy, within the framework of the national action plans or outside that framework, and then give the Commission the role of monitoring progress on that strategy, would follow clearly from that unanimous Council decision.

Anna Qvarlander wondered how the Norwegians managed to secure the political commitment to combat homelessness in the first place, before they drew up the white paper. **Bill Edgar** said the previous research and learning processes had undoubtedly played an important role in this. **Bjørn Pedersen** added that the process in Norway had begun with the realisation that homeless people were the country’s most needy group, and the parliament’s consequent decision to launch Project Homelessness. **Ellen Elster** (Directorate of Health and Social Affairs, Norway) pointed to earlier research on homelessness and a white paper dating back to 1982 which contained quite concrete proposals for dealing with homelessness and a definition quite similar to the present one relating to a person’s position on the housing market. But she could not explain why the issue suddenly took off during the 1990s. **Elisabet Aldenberg** said homelessness was still treated more as a social issue, so she had been inspired to hear the Norwegians define homelessness in terms of position on the housing market. But she was not sure whether the Environment Ministry in Sweden would want to take the lead on combating homelessness issue. **Carmen Manu** (Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family, Romania) did not think it would be either politically or financially possible to emulate the Norwegian strategy in her own country in the near future. They would have to go step by step and try to prioritise some projects before finally arriving at such a strategy. **Freek Spinnewijn** warned against overcomplicating the homelessness issue. If too many dimensions are attached to it, it becomes difficult to address.

Bill Edgar pointed out that, in many countries, the spreading of responsibility for the homelessness issue across a series of ministries and agencies creates difficulties. Could any lessons on this be learnt from Norway, or did other countries’ forms of governance make a similar solution impossible? **Pedro-José Cabrera Cabrera** felt that Spain might be able to adopt parts of the Norwegian strategy at the local and

regional levels, particularly the soft measures. It is crucial to be able to show Spanish politicians concrete examples, from other countries, of a strategy successfully combining social policy with housing policy.

The Norwegian strategy has achieved a great deal, **Bjørn Pedersen** said. However, it has not so far reached into the health side of the issue, perhaps because the health services have a different way of thinking. He wondered if any other countries have experience of dealing with the health aspects. **Carmen Manu** said that, in her country, doctors and health staff are wary of becoming involved in social work. This makes it difficult to cover the medical aspects of social inclusion. **Bill Edgar** reported that Scottish legislation now requires all health boards to provide an annual health and homelessness action plan to the Secretary of State, and to review it every two or three years. However, his research suggests that these plans exist on paper only. They do not change practice very much, but at least they have opened up a dialogue, and the health services now take part in the homelessness forums. In the Netherlands, he added, many of the homeless strategies derive from health legislation. **Jos Maaskant** confirmed that there have been various Dutch attempts to integrate the activities of social and medical services. Social services have put a lot of work into convincing the health services that a social presence can assist the treatment of people in healthcare institutions. It may take up to a year and a half to get this message across, but after that the social services get in and move up. Perhaps the Norwegians should avoid a top-down approach to this problem, and tackle it instead at the grassroots, taking the needs of the client as the starting point. It is important to establish a triangular relationship in which the social worker, the health worker and the client are equals. While agreeing with that approach, **Freek Spinnewijn** warned against the medicalisation of homelessness. This is often driven by funding criteria. But he noted that Australia includes health elements in its definition of homelessness. **Renate Kitzman** said that Austria builds special accommodation, containing about 40 small apartments, for elderly homeless people. Doctors visit twice a week to ensure healthcare. For rough sleepers, a doctor provided by Caritas accompanies social workers on their rounds. In addition, some doctors and dentists provide free care to the homeless. **Bill Edgar** confirmed that a number of countries link medical care to their provision of special accommodation for homeless people. **Sophie Schleinitz** (Germany) said the German approach is similar to the Austrian one. Certainly, getting medical care to homeless people entails getting health workers to go where the homeless are. Preventive aspects are also important. Organisations working with homeless people are better able to anticipate health problems. **Freek Spinnewijn** said many countries lack structural measures to ensure healthcare for homeless people. NGOs may not have campaigned strongly enough on this particular issue in the past, but this is now changing. He drew attention to the health-focussed FEANTSA conference to be held in October 2006, and offered to send invitations to those interested. **Ellen Elster** felt that this is mainly a structural problem of how to communicate with the health services. In Norway, homeless people like all other people have a legal right to healthcare, but hospitals are well aware that some of those whom they treat, particularly for drug abuse or mental illness, have nowhere to go when they are discharged. Healthcare provision for homeless people often works well, but it is the cases of dysfunction that hit the headlines. **Jürgen Göttsche-Stellmann** said the comprehensive body of legislation and regulations on social welfare in Germany might lead people to believe that nobody need be homeless. And yet Germany has homeless people. The problem is not the structures, but the fact that homeless people in low-income areas sometimes do not trust the institutions of the State. Welfare structures in Europe are generally good, but the real question is how to reach out to people living on the fringes of society. **Hugues Feltesse** said that France has action plans for coping with anybody who has problems of access to healthcare. Hospitals are required to have special organisational structures for dealing with social cases. Nonetheless, NGOs still note major deficiencies in healthcare for the disadvantaged, and regularly alert public opinion to this situation. So the situation is similar to that in Germany – on paper, everything is taken care of, but in practice, it does not always work that way. **Bill Edgar** noted that even the apparently simple matter of coordinating to ensure

that people do not end up on the streets after discharge from hospital seems to be a problem. Did any of the participating countries have experience of this aspect? **Carmen Manu** pointed out that the lack of coordination on this issue meant that many disadvantaged people discharged from hospital soon have to be readmitted for further medical care. So she wondered whether non-coordination with the social services may, in the final analysis, actually place an extra burden on the medical services.

The causes of homelessness may vary from one European country to another, **Pedro-José Cabrera Cabrera** felt. In Spain, for example, strategies for coping with homelessness are strongly linked to the question of illegal immigration. This is making it more difficult to rally public and political opinion in favour of measures for the homeless, such as housing provision. A similar conceptual problem appears to exist in other European countries and this should perhaps be a topic for future European discussion.

A good definition is the baseline for good policies against homelessness, **Freek Spinnewijn** insisted. He suggested that the FEANTSA definition could be promoted by the EU as the basis for national strategies. This could increase the effectiveness of the follow-up to this Peer Review. **Gerhard Eitel** added that Eurocities finds the FEANTSA definition very helpful in preparing comparable statistics. **Bill Edgar** said that a register of all organisations dealing with the homeless is a way of ensuring the quality of services but also of facilitating the collection of reliable statistics.

Summing up the debate, **Bill Edgar** said that among the elements that participants would be taking home from the discussions was the idea itself of having a national strategy, with clear targets and a mechanism for implementation and coordination. Specifically, the collaboration agreements and quality standards may be ideas that are directly transferable – at the local level if there is no national strategy. He hoped that lessons could also be drawn from this Peer Review by the Norwegian hosts and by the EU. In particular, what he had been hearing about city-based projects in Germany made him wonder whether the EU structural funds, and particularly the European Social Fund (ESF), could not be put to better use, notably in the newer Member States.

Bjørn Pedersen had found the Peer Review a very interesting way of looking at homelessness policy. It was based on mutual learning and he had learned a lot. He hoped that others had done so, too. Norway's own two Peer Reviews of the collaboration agreements with the correctional services and the action to reduce evictions had been positive experiences and had actually stimulated more municipalities to become involved. The review on evictions had also led to new draft legislation, so he believed that Peer Reviews could bring concrete benefits. He thanked all the participants and congratulated them on their grasp of the Norwegian strategy.

Hugues Feltesse thanked the Norwegian authorities for their excellent preparation of the seminar and for their hospitality, and all the speakers and participants for their professionalism. Lessons to be drawn at the European level include the need for statistics. Investment is needed in the identification of the different levels of homelessness. Here, the Norwegian practice of conducting a one-week survey every two years might serve as a model. A Commission-sponsored study by Dundee University, with the cooperation of FEANTSA, will be building statistical capacity on housing deprivation and homelessness in the Member States, in a cross-country perspective. So a good working definition and typology are definitely needed at the European level. The social inclusion programme for 2007 might well encompass further work on the statistical aspects. The present Peer Review had also shown clearly that a national strategy can be much more than words, that it can have direct practical implications. EU Member States learn from this in terms of drawing up their own homelessness strategies. In particular, the prevention of homelessness is an issue that needs to be addressed, and the Norwegian experience provides valuable lessons here. Quality

standards for social services of general interest, namely to prevent homelessness or to deal with homelessness, might be needed throughout Europe, and a Communication from the Commission has already raised this issue. The mainstreaming of housing and homelessness issues is obviously needed in Member States. On mental health, the Commission is currently preparing a European strategy, within which the issue of social inclusion issue, among others homelessness, might be addressed. Another lesson from the Norwegian experience is that a coordinating body is needed to monitor implementation and organise various kinds of cooperation, although the different institutional frameworks in each country mean that this principle will require some adaptation. The Commission always stresses the importance of inter-agency working. Clearly, too, the Norwegian experience shows that, as well as legal provisions, strong soft measures are needed. He had been pleased to learn that it was the experience of the Peer Review in London that had convinced the Norwegians to conduct Peer Reviews of their own. The setting of clear targets is an aspect of the Norwegian strategy from which the Commission can draw lessons. Such targets might not be too difficult to define at the European level. This should be thought about in the near future. On governance, the Peer Review meeting in Paris had produced the key phrase “what matters is the way”. That way is a supportive approach with political commitment; soft measures; and adequate funding. He pointed out that EU structural funds now include provisions to support the rehabilitation of housing in Member States whose GNP is at least 15% below the EU average. The ESF can also provide support for professional capacity-building in the new Member States, and this might also be of interest in terms of an enabling approach. Awareness-raising efforts in the Member States could draw upon the Norwegian experience with local forums. Networking should also be supported at all levels. He thanked the Norwegian hosts for all the lessons learnt. The fight against homelessness should be given clear priority at the national levels as well as European level.