

6 MARCH 2017

## NOT IN THE NAME OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICES!

Homelessness services must not be involved in unnecessary and harmful European measures against irregularly residing third-country nationals.

On Thursday the 2nd of March, the European Commission published a recommendation on making returns of irregularly-residing third-country nationals more effective<sup>1</sup>. Through the measures included in this document, the Commission aims at developing an integrated and coordinated approach that would enable Member States to carry out return procedures more swiftly and increase the number of returns.

The approach taken by the Commission to better implement the *Returns directive*<sup>2</sup> raises several concerns regarding the respect of fundamental rights safeguards. Instead of encouraging Member States to find sustainable, cost-effective and rational solutions, the Commission opts for a strategy that does not take into account the solidarity principles on which the European Union claims to be founded. Rather than, for instance, proposing ways to regularise those irregularly residing migrants who work without a contract and are often exploited by unscrupulous employers, the Commission asks Member States to increase the use of their resources to locate and apprehend irregularly residing third-country nationals and to hire additional staff at external borders to immediately determine if a third-country national cannot be granted international protection and should subsequently be pushed back.

Among other measures, the Recommendation calls on Member States to mobilise medical and social services in return procedures and in the dissemination of information on voluntary return and assisted voluntary return programmes. These measures push Member States to engage service providers, including homelessness services, in activities they should not be responsible for and that confront them with a dilemma where providing support might lead to the deportation of individuals in need. This strategy risks exacerbating a climate of populism and xenophobia and contributing to mutual mistrust between migrants and homelessness services, as well as other fundamental services.

Therefore, FEANTSA calls on the EU Commission:

- To better define what role social and health services should have in return procedures and not to involve them in activities that jeopardise their solidarity and human rights principles, such as providing information that might lead service users to be deported or refusing support to individuals

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<sup>1</sup> Commission Recommendation on making returns more effective when implementing the Directive 2008/115/EC

<sup>2</sup> Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals

- To guarantee access to basic services and facilities to all, regardless of administrative status
- To design coherent and balanced migration policies that take into account all perspectives, particularly those of people who for several reasons might be irregularly residing in the EU and whose social inclusion would be socially and economically advantageous for all.

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#### Notes for editors:

1. **FEANTSA** is the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless. It is an umbrella of not-for-profit organisations which participate in or contribute to the fight against homelessness in Europe. It is the only major European network focusing exclusively on homelessness at European level