

Press Release



Rough sleeping kills all year long

FEANTSA calls on policy makers to end street homelessness by 2010

'Homeless at risk this winter', 'Morte de froid', 'Twee daklozen vriezen dood', 'Il freddo uccide un clochard cingalese', 'Obdachloser Mann erfroren'¹. Headlines on rough sleepers freezing to death can be read all over Europe during the winter months, urging policy makers to respond with 'winter emergency plans' and prompt and outreach help to the victims of the cold.

FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) welcomes every effective measure preventing human beings from freezing to death. We stress, however, that there are many other factors explaining the unacceptably high death rate amongst rough sleepers in all European countries.

FEANTSA therefore calls on all policy makers to:

- Develop a holistic approach to homelessness, focusing on re-integration in which the importance of housing measures is recognised
- Follow through on the commitment of European Social Affairs Ministers to treat homelessness as a priority² and set a European objective to end street homelessness by 2010.

People experiencing homelessness have a much lower life expectancy than the general population. A recent survey shows that the life expectancy of people experiencing homelessness in the United Kingdom is 42 - less than the average life expectancy 150 years ago.³ Rough sleepers suffer all year long and the risk of dying is not substantially higher during the winter.

People reduced to live on the streets have different profiles and face various problems. A better understanding of the changing profile of rough sleepers is vital in order to put in place lasting solutions. Street homelessness does not correspond any longer to the clichéd image of the middle aged white male with severe alcohol problems. Women, immigrants – especially those with precarious legal status such as asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, young people, and families have to choose the street as a last *resort*. Many European countries have still not developed services adapted to the specific needs of rough sleepers.

Living on the street is not a free choice but the result of both individual and structural factors.

Individual factors such as mental health problems, severe addiction or criminal record play an important role in the pathways to street homelessness. However, rough sleepers cannot be held personally accountable for their situation. An increasing number of people live on the streets because of *structural* factors such as the increasing house prices or high unemployment rates.⁴ Society therefore bears at least part of the responsibility.

Rough sleepers have the right to lead a life in dignity and to be integrated in society. Crisis intervention should be the start of a reintegration process. It should provide access to a range of support services, such as housing, employment and social support. However, employment alone cannot be the solution for reintegrating rough sleepers. There is an emerging common understanding that access to decent and affordable housing is the key element in the reintegration process.⁵

Street homelessness is an unacceptable though ongoing human rights violation in all European member states. Concerted action of all relevant stakeholders is crucial to ensure that every human being in Europe can opt for a safe and adequate place to live in the future.

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¹ Daily Mirror, 23/11/2005; Libération, 28/12/2005; De Standaard, 28/11/2005; Il Giornale, 23/1/2006; Stuttgarter Zeitung, 21/1/2006.

² In 2005, the EPSCO Council identified the treatment of homelessness as a priority of EU's anti-poverty policies.

http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/lsa/84176.pdf

³ It is probable that the life expectancy of rough sleepers is even lower. S.O.S. Sick of Suffering, St. Mungo's report into the health of homeless people, November 2005. <http://www.mungos.org/news/Reports/Health%20Report%20Nov%202005.pdf>

⁴ Recently, the French press reported that employees of the municipality of Paris had to sleep rough because they could not afford any housing. AFP: Agents de Paris SDF: la CFTC fait plusieurs propositions à M. Delanoë, 12/12/2005.

⁵ Pilot programmes throughout Europe have demonstrated the success of the "housing first" approach. In Ireland, for instance, the number of rough sleepers has been reduced substantially thanks to the integrated method applied FEANTSA National Report on Social Emergency and Crisis Intervention in Ireland, 2005.

http://www.feantsa.org/files/urgence_sociale/rapports%20nationaux/Ireland_EN.doc