



Press Release
World Habitat Day 2006

For immediate release

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From hope to homelessness

FEANTSA warns: Increasing number of migrant workers from new EU Member States destitute and homeless

On World Habitat Day 2006, FEANTSA warns that the free movement of workers in the enlarged EU will lead to homelessness if no urgent measures are taken to secure the right to social security and social support of migrant workers from the new EU Member States.

The situation in Ireland and the UK, which opened their borders for all European migrant workers immediately after EU-enlargement, demonstrate that workers from the new Member States have become particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Some of them could not find suitable employment or lost their jobs. They have become homeless because they have no income and are not entitled to social security benefits during the initial years of their stay in the host country. Similar developments are likely to occur in other European countries that recently opened or will soon fully open their labour markets to workers from the new Member States.

FEANTSA therefore calls on EU policy makers to take the necessary measures to prevent homelessness amongst migrant workers from the new EU Member States. The EU should ensure that all EU migrant workers have access to the same rights and benefits as nationals. The free movement of workers, which is one of the fundamental freedoms of the EU, must not become a poverty trap for EU citizens who are hoping to find a better life abroad.

FEANTSA wants to highlight that the vast majority of workers from the new Member States who moved to the EU-15 after enlargement are employed and are making a significant contribution to the economy and the community life of their host country.

However, some people have not been able to find proper employment immediately. Many are employed in difficult circumstances. Their precarious employment situation has reduced their options on the housing market considerably. People from new Member States are one of the fastest growing groups amongst users of food handouts. Many of them live in very inadequate housing such as squats or are sleeping rough.

Research suggests that almost none of these people had any prior experience of homelessness. They are relying on homeless services due to their limited access to rights, social benefits, and support. This situation puts a lot of strain on homelessness services which are not adapted to their specific needs. **Homelessness service providers are concerned that without urgent action a new group of long-term homeless people will emerge.** The process of exclusion is very difficult to reverse once people are experiencing homelessness and start accumulating problems.

The European Union promotes worker's mobility as a means to raise employment levels in Europe. This policy will only be effective, if all EU migrant workers have equal access to rights and benefits in the different Member States. The EU must ensure that the free movement of EU citizens does not become a journey into homelessness.

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