



## European Homeless Mobile Citizen Network

The right to free movement is one of the fundamental rights of EU citizens

# Homelessness among Mobile EU Citizens

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*How to better understand the problem and  
find solutions*



Erasmus+



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Vilniaus  
arkivyskupijos  
„Caritas“



STOWARZYSZENIE  
**monar**

# WELCOME

Dear Colleague,

Welcome to this toolkit for organisations who provide services for mobile EU citizens who are homeless in a Member State of which they are not nationals.

We have created this toolkit because, like you, we believe that it is important to understand why mobile EU citizens can become destitute and to share the solutions that are available to them and to services working with them.

The toolkit was created through a collaborative effort that brought together contributions from organisations and local authorities working with homeless people in 6 different EU Member States and from the European federation of homelessness service providers, FEANTSA.

We hope you find this toolkit useful.

*Kind regards,*

## ERASMUS PLUS Project: 'European Homeless Mobile Citizens Network'

Coordinator: Caritas Vilnius	(Lithuania)
Caritas Diecezji Kieleckiej	(Poland)
Casa Ioana	(Romania)
FEANTSA	(Belgium)
Homeless Unit of Copenhagen	(Denmark)
MONAR Association	(Poland)
PRAKSIS	(Greece)
Taff Housing	(United Kingdom)

Focus Ireland, Projekt Udenfor and Gothenburg City Mission also contributed to the development of the project and the production of this toolkit.

Written by Mauro Striano (FEANTSA) and proofread by Suzannah Young

# 1. Extent of Homelessness Among Mobile EU Citizens

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At the end of 2012, according to Eurostat data, 2.8% of EU citizens - 14.1 million people - resided in Member States other than those of which they were citizens. According to a 2010 Eurobarometer survey, 10% of people polled in the EU replied that they had lived and worked in another country at some point in the past, while 17% intended to take advantage of the right to free movement in the future. Most mobile EU citizens have permanently established a new life abroad, thus contributing to the wealth and growth of the host society. However, there is a small but significant proportion of EU citizens for whom moving to another Member State has become a poverty trap. A significant number of the users of homelessness services in several big cities in Western Europe are mobile EU citizens.

Collecting data on the extent of homelessness among mobile EU citizens is challenging for several reasons. Firstly, Member States do not all collect data on homelessness in the same way and use varying definitions of the target group; thus, results are not always comparable. Secondly, administrative data on homeless people are inherently limited in quality because they only include those people who have been in contact with services and this may lead to populations who avoid homelessness services, such as people with an irregular residence status, being underrepresented in estimations. Thirdly, information on nationality is not always collected. Thus, while it is relatively easy to get information about the proportion of migrants among the homeless population, it is much more challenging to know exactly how much of that proportion is made up of mobile EU citizens.

## *1.1 London, UK*

When an individual is contacted by outreach teams or other services working with rough sleepers in London, their details are entered into the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database. According to CHAIN, 7,581 people slept rough at some point in London during 2014/15 and, where nationality was recorded, 43% of people sleeping rough were UK nationals and 36% were from Central and Eastern European countries.

## *1.2 France*

In 2012, the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) counted 81,000 homeless people in the country, of which 47% had French nationality and 53% were foreigners. 22% of these foreigners were mobile EU citizens and this means that around 9,500 homeless people were mobile EU citizens.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, according to data collected in 2010 by outreach organisations, 40% of homeless service users in Paris are young people from Eastern Europe.

## *1.3 Italy*

In Italy, the second national census on homelessness, carried out in 2014, showed that there were 50,724 homeless people (people actually using homelessness services, therefore excluding many rough sleepers) in the country at that time. 58.2% of them were foreign nationals.

In the first census on homelessness, carried out in 2011, an estimated 47,648 homeless people used a soup kitchen or night-time accommodation service at least once in the 158 Italian municipalities in which the survey was conducted. 59.4% of them were foreign nationals. 11.5% were Romanians.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.insee.fr/fr/ffc/ipweb/ip1455/ip1455.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.istat.it/en/archive/92503>

## 1.4 Denmark

Detailed data are available in Denmark from the national homelessness counts. These show that 81% of homeless people in Denmark are Danish, while citizens of other Nordic countries account for 2% and other non-Nordic EU Member States account for a further 3%.<sup>3</sup> However, street-count reports by the City of Copenhagen's Homeless Unit and Projekt Udenfor NGO show that almost all those who sleep rough on the streets of Copenhagen are mobile EU citizens.

## 1.5 Ireland

In 2011, a slightly higher proportion of the usually resident homeless population in Ireland was non-Irish (15 per cent or 553 people) compared with the general population, where the proportion was 12 per cent. Among the non-Irish homeless population, UK nationals were the largest group, accounting for 139 persons.

## 1.6 Netherlands

According to the *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* (Central Statistics Office), in 2012, more than 27,000 people were homeless in the Netherlands. Half of them had a foreign background and 40 percent had a non-western background. Nearly half of all homeless people in the Netherlands are in Amsterdam, Utrecht, The Hague and Rotterdam.<sup>4</sup>

### Case Study: Meet K. from Poland

#### Provided by Focus Ireland

K. came to Ireland in 2004. He says he came here to get away from a difficult situation in Poland and to find employment and make a fresh start here. In 2005, he was self-employed as a painter; he set up this business with a friend and was renting accommodation in the private sector. In 2007, the business partnership broke down. From 2007 to 2014, K. worked a variety of casual jobs, including as a street artist. While this has brought him enough income to support himself, he says that he still uses and needs to use homeless day services for food, etc. He applied for social welfare but was refused as he has not made enough tax contributions.

K. states that he worries about how he will pay his rent every month as he struggles to make enough money from his casual jobs. He would like to register as self-employed again in future and try to pay some tax every month with the hope that this will assist him with an application for social welfare.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/feantsa-studies\\_04-web2.pdf](http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/feantsa-studies_04-web2.pdf) p. 68

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2013/52/27-thousand-homeless-in-the-netherlands>

## 2. Reasons Why Mobile EU Citizens Become Homeless

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### *2.1 Administrative reasons*

When EU citizens move to another Member State, there might be a few administrative formalities they have to follow. For periods of residence longer than three months, Member States require mobile EU citizens to register with the relevant authorities, i.e. municipalities. According to EU law, in order to register as a worker or as a self-employed person, EU citizens must present a valid identity card or passport and a confirmation from their employer or a certificate of employment, or proof that they are self-employed. If they are students, they have to provide proof of enrolment at an accredited establishment and proof of comprehensive sickness insurance cover. When they are economically inactive, they are required to provide proof that they have sufficient resources not to become a burden on the social assistance system and have comprehensive sickness insurance cover. Unawareness of the procedures to follow, a lack of clarity about what needs to be provided, a lack of language skills and a lack of support are all reasons why a EU mobile citizen may not register properly in the host state, therefore jeopardising her or his situation in the host state and making her or him more vulnerable to destitution and homelessness.

### *2.2 Precarious employment and lack of jobs*

The search for employment is the main factor that pushes individuals to migrate but inadequate working conditions and job insecurity in the host society can render mobile EU citizens defenceless as soon as something unexpected happens. Several cases have been recorded of EU citizens moving to another country because of a worsening economic situation in their country of origin and on bogus promises of jobs that might also turn out to be linked to criminal activity. What is more, precarious economic sectors, such as domestic work, tend to rely on workers not having an employment contract, often because private firms find it difficult to give cleaners or care workers regular working hours. Once trapped in an insecure – and sometimes dangerous – working environment, it is difficult for the individual concerned to access the right support.

More broadly, access to the labour market can be very challenging, especially in Member States where there are very strict criteria when it comes to hiring foreigners. Individuals therefore need advice and support with regard to administrative procedures and on how to look for employment before their situation becomes too difficult. Furthermore, the lack of a stable job might result in the loss of residency rights and, with them, the entitlement to social benefits and support.

### *2.3 Health issues*

Prolonged destitution can quickly lead to additional challenges related to physical and mental health. Health issues make the process of social integration more difficult, a process that is already easily compromised by discrimination, social welfare restrictions and a lack of access to adequate services.

### *2.4 Drug and alcohol misuse*

Drug and alcohol misuse can further exacerbate the consequences of social and economic precariousness, pushing the individual into a negative spiral that it is very hard to get out of.

## *2.5 Lack of preparation*

The lack of preparation prior to the migratory journey can have devastating effects, particularly when the person has no safeguards in the event of unexpected problems.

## *2.6 Family disruption*

Family disruption is one of the main factors in precariousness and is likely to prevent people from finding stability and accessing the right support. This can particularly affect people who have moved to another country and face additional challenges due to their lack of integration into an unknown system.

## *2.7 Domestic violence*

Domestic violence is the immediate cause of homelessness for many women. Survivors of domestic violence are often kept isolated from support networks and financial resources by their abusers, which puts them at risk of becoming homeless. As a result, they may lack a steady income and suffer from anxiety, panic attacks, severe depression and substance misuse. Evidence shows that there is a lack of coherent and legally binding protocols on how to deal with domestic violence cases and how to protect the most vulnerable survivors, especially minors and undocumented migrants. Having an irregular immigration status further prevents women from asking for support when they are victims of domestic abuse, since the only alternative is often detention and repatriation. Unfortunately, there is limited awareness and a lack of competence around this issue among those professionals – such as health care providers, police and judicial authorities – who are indispensable in assessing individuals' situations and offering solutions.

## *2.8 Discrimination*

Homelessness brings with it prejudices and stigma from society at large, often reinforced by prejudices around ethnic origin and nationality. A socially excluded person can easily slip into a downward spiral if s/he is not economically active, does not have a place to sleep, cannot find support and, on top of all that, has to endure discrimination.

## *2.9 People trafficking*

People trafficking is increasing throughout the EU and can be very closely linked to homelessness and destitution. People who have been trafficked are often unaware of their rights and entitlements and are fearful of approaching agencies for help. Many are traumatised by their experiences – especially those who have been sold into the sexual services industry.



## Case Study: Bottle Collectors in Copenhagen

### Provided by the Homeless Unit of Copenhagen

Many individuals collect bottles in Copenhagen and a significant proportion of them are from Eastern European countries. Some sleep in tents in remote green areas of the city, some in abandoned buildings and subway tunnels; some sleep on the streets in the city centre. The level of use they make of homelessness services varies: some rely on homelessness services for food and accommodation, while others are completely independent.

Their level of vulnerability also varies: some look well-groomed, have nice clothes and new phones and sleep in exposed places such as empty car parks; other groups seem more vulnerable and lack the resources to look after themselves.

The Romanian nationals the Copenhagen Homeless Unit meet came to Copenhagen to collect bottles because there were no job options for them in their country of origin. They are either highly educated or low-skilled individuals. Many send money home to their families. Several have told outreach workers that they can make more money collecting bottles in Copenhagen than they can from working in Romania. However, they do want to have an ordinary job with a contract in the future.

Mobile EU citizens who are bottle collectors rarely make contact with the municipality and often avoid outreach workers. They are vulnerable because of rough sleeping, irregular residency, stigmatization, violence and mugging.

### Meet L. from Romania

L. has been in Denmark on and off for about 7 years. He is from Romania, unskilled, homeless and jobless. He has children in Romania who are staying with relatives but L. and his wife do not want to go back to Romania. They both sleep rough and collect bottles in Copenhagen in order to send money home for the upkeep of the children.

L. is HIV-positive and has been receiving regular treatment from a Danish hospital. He tells us he is looking for job but has not succeeded in finding one. He does not speak English or Danish and he has been informed several times that it is difficult to find a job without education or language skills.

The hospital provides L. with medical treatment. The hospital says that, in principle, L. should get the same treatment in Romania but when L. went to Romania last year, his treatment stopped for some reason, which is inappropriate for a patient with HIV.

Being homeless makes it difficult for L. to take his medicine and pay for it. When confronted about this issue, he replies that earning money to send home is his first priority, even when it interferes with his HIV treatment. L. has been receiving advice for jobseekers in Copenhagen.

### 3. Profiles of Homeless Mobile EU Citizens

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The overall picture shows two main groups of homeless mobile EU citizens. The majority of destitute mobile EU citizens lack adequate housing options and are looking for a job that will allow them to have a higher income. They are relatively resourceful despite their vulnerable economic situation. The other group of destitute mobile EU citizens is smaller and is made up of extremely vulnerable people, particularly because of substance misuse and mental ill health.

#### *3.1 Job seekers and precarious workers*

Researcher Magdalena Mostowska defines this group as being mainly made up of ‘transient workers’, i.e. “individuals who lose their living quarters recurrently due to seasonal unemployment, alcohol problems, illness or other incidents. In most cases, their physical homelessness is temporary but they face recurrent episodes of rough sleeping, they are in a state of constant flux between living on the streets and renting precarious accommodation [...]. They clearly see a breaking point that leads to their physical homelessness: being cheated by an employer, being robbed, a relationship breakdown.”<sup>5</sup> They often look for or are employed in jobs that do not need high-level qualifications. They are predominantly men who were not homeless in their country of origin; they are healthy and eager to work. Most of them were not adequately prepared for the move, lack the requisite language skills and do not know how the welfare system works in the country they have moved to.

People who have this profile see their living situations deteriorate if they are unable to access the right support. They are likely to fall into a downward spiral that progressively pushes them towards long-term unemployment, a lack of social support and severe social exclusion.

#### *3.2 Severely excluded destitute mobile EU citizens*

For the group of particularly vulnerable mobile EU citizens, alcoholism, drug misuse and mental and physical ill health often occur. They suffer from several health problems, such as circulatory disorders, poor dental hygiene, malnutrition, diabetes and liver problems - to name but a few - due to lack of adequate access to health care. Mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, depression and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder also occur frequently. The hard and unpredictable life on the street, particularly if for an extended period of time, causes stress for almost everyone in the target group.

Misuse of and addiction to various substances such as alcohol, cocaine, heroin, marijuana and different tablets is very common among people in this group; the longer they are on the street, the more likely they are to develop addictions.

People in this group are severely excluded; they are more likely to be victims of violence, they lack social networks and have lost contact with their families.

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<sup>5</sup> Mostowska, M. (2014) Homelessness abroad: “Place utility” in the narratives of the Polish homeless in Brussels, in: International Migration Special Issue: Polish Migration after the Fall of the Iron Curtain. 52 (1). 118–129.

## 4. What do Homeless Mobile EU Citizens Need?

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Providing for homeless people's basic needs is of course paramount, regardless of their nationality or immigration status, but this might not be enough. To help homeless mobile EU citizens properly, what is needed is a combination of advice and support. In order to fight against social and economic exclusion, it is necessary to develop strategies based on advice and information with the aim of ensuring that homeless mobile EU citizens' rights are respected and the sustainability of the interventions is maintained through adequate financial resources.

Even providing support for basic needs can help address structural challenges faced by the target group. For instance, in order to increase the chances of mobile EU citizens accessing the labour market, shower and laundry facilities or the use of computers and access to the internet are all important services, as they allow service users to get ready for job interviews or to look for jobs. If these services are combined with training and advice provision, the chance of destitute mobile EU citizens finding viable solutions increases.

Therefore, it is important to focus on the short-term by alleviating the daily challenges homeless people face, such as a lack of food, accommodation and clean clothes – indeed, having to develop daily survival strategies prevents them from focusing on activities that would help them integrate into society. This should be supplemented by housing and employment support so as to prevent them, in the long-term, from becoming destitute again.

### *4.1 Levels of intervention*

- Provision of basic services to fulfil basic human needs such as health, food, personal hygiene, clothing, safety, rest, and other related issues.
- Provision of advice and information services that facilitate access to jobs and to the housing market and help service users to overcome administrative obstacles.
- Access to rights, such as the right to health care and social assistance, in order to prevent mobile EU citizens from being excluded from them.
- Advocacy through networking, lobbying and public awareness-raising, at local, national and EU level to spread information about the challenges faced by destitute mobile EU citizens and strengthen their rights by suggesting new practices and policies.
- Organisation of safe reconnection when the individual chooses to return to her or his country of origin.

### *4.2 Activities and services needed*

- First-port-of-call services. It is important that service users feel welcome and have a clear idea of who is among the staff that work in the service, so they can ask them for support and about existing rules (for instance no alcohol, no fights and so on). First-port-of-call services are also important for collecting information on service users - whilst still respecting their privacy - by asking their names, their nationalities, their immigration status and other information that can be relevant to helping them and for statistical purposes.
- Provision of food. Providing food is paramount for health reasons but also to allow service users to focus on longer-term objectives rather than just on daily survival. Cooking can be carried out by staff or by volunteers but can also be done by former service users. Meals can also be an opportunity for service users to come into contact not only with staff but also with each other, increasing their chances of feeling included and of acquiring relevant information regarding, for instance, housing and employment that might help them.
- Accommodation. As with food, the possibility to have a good night's sleep helps individuals focus on longer-term objectives. If there are not enough beds, joint working with other organisations and with public authorities can help find solutions, even if just for the short-term.

- Availability of showers. Personal hygiene is very important for health reasons but also to create the conditions for people to feel more confident and for their job interviews and other important meetings to be successful.
- Laundry. As with personal hygiene, the possibility to wash one's clothes is also a very important basic-need service, not only for health reasons but also in order to allow people to be presentable for job interviews or other administrative appointments.
- Availability of clothes. Clothing distribution is often based on donations from individuals and companies. Clothes help individuals to fulfil a basic need as well as to be socially included.
- Availability of storage lockers. Living on the street exposes individuals to the risk of having their possessions stolen. Providing storage lockers prevents people from losing their personal belongings.
- Information about welfare benefits and society. Especially when they are newcomers, mobile EU citizens often need information on how the welfare system works in practice, about benefits entitlements and the procedures to follow in order to get them. It is also important that they be informed about obstacles to claiming them and about how relying on benefits could lead to them being considered an unreasonable burden on the social assistance system and eventually to their expulsion.
- Careers advice. These meetings aim at strengthening service users' ability to look for job opportunities, draft CVs and cover letters and prepare for job interviews.
- Translation services. Translation of documents issued in their countries of origin, such as CVs, is often very important for mobile EU citizens, for instance to allow them to access education, training or employment.
- Use of the internet, phones and other communication tools. For mobile EU citizens living in precarious situations, access to information and the possibility to communicate is very important. On the one hand, they need to be able to find information on a variety of topics, such as housing, health care and job opportunities and, on the other hand, they need to be directly contactable.
- Meeting doctors and nurses. Access to health care, besides being a fundamental right and need, contributes to increased stability and to opportunities for people to get out of poverty and integrate into society.
- Provision of language courses. Mobile EU citizens often leave their country without being sufficiently prepared and one of the major problems can be a lack of language skills. Language courses enable service users to communicate effectively in the host country language and increase their chances of being economically and socially included.

### *4.3 Reconnections*

When individuals decide to go back to their country of origin, it is important that they are provided with an effective and safe individual plan that allows them to be properly 'reconnected'. Reconnections must not be an easy way to avoid providing assistance to a mobile EU citizen who is economically inactive and needs social support. Adequately carried-out reconnection can not only be a good solution for the person concerned but can also be a sustainable one, since the likelihood that the person decides to return to the country where she or he became homeless is lower.

1. First and foremost: service providers must make sure that the individual concerned wants to go back to her or his country of origin.
2. An individual plan should be designed and put in place in partnership with the individual concerned. User involvement is paramount in the whole process of reconnection. Drawing up this plan requires time, often weeks.
3. All possible efforts have to be made to guarantee the physical and mental stability of the person before she or he leaves. A health assessment must be carried out in order to check if there is a need for medical or psychiatric help, a need for rehabilitation if the individual suffers from substance misuse, or a need for help with gathering the necessary identity documents.
4. Coordination and cooperation with the different stakeholders involved is crucial to facilitating an adequate social- and healthcare situation in the individual's country of origin:

- Local cooperation needs to be enabled in order to take into account different approaches and expertise among NGOs, hospitals and services provided by the municipality.
  - Transnational cooperation through contacts with consulates, NGOs working in the country of origin, families and friends must be ensured.
5. Unless desired otherwise by the individual concerned, it is important that someone goes with the person to her or his country of origin and stays with her or him for 2 to 3 days (or more if needed) to make sure that the person is not at risk.

## **Case Study: Meet A. from Romania**

### **Provided by Gothenburg City Mission**

A. is a strong man and had a good life in Romania before the crisis came in 2008. He worked as a taxi driver for a long time and also delivered goods for two companies at the same time. Then came the crisis and all three companies he was working for went bankrupt. In 2009, A. moved to Norway as one of his friends promised him a job there but after a while he became caught up in criminal activities. He immediately left Norway to move to Sweden to look for a job. A. soon realised that there was no chance of him finding a job in the short term so he started to collect bottles in Gothenburg.

A. learned to turn off his feelings and to work like a machine. A. says that no matter what job he does, he always tries to be the best. The same applies when it comes to collecting bottles. He works about 12-14 hours a day, walking fast and far, sometimes over 10km in one night. A. bought a car though he cannot drive. He bought it cheaply so he had somewhere to sleep. The winter is hard in Sweden and sometimes he cannot sleep for the cold. He usually stays in Gothenburg for three months, then he goes back home for a month to visit his daughter and wife in Romania. When he gets back to Sweden, it always takes a few days before he can start to collect bottles again.

He says that Swedish people are often polite but quite reserved. He thinks Romanians have a bad reputation in Sweden as some of them have been involved in criminal activity recently, which reflects badly on law-abiding people. Sometimes he tells people that he is from the Czech Republic and thinks he is treated better by the Swedes when he tells them this.

A. earned a total of 13,000 SEK (around €1,400) in the last three months. He sent everything he earned to his family. Sending money home is very expensive since he has to pay 1700 SEK (around €180) to Western Union to make the transfer. His wife works as a hairdresser in Romania and her salary is 1100 SEK per month (around €120), so A.'s family is dependent on his income from Sweden.

A. dreams of saving enough money to start his own business in Romania. He would like to open a second hand shop, while his wife would like to have her own hair salon. Meanwhile, A. continues to collect bottles and sleep in his car, hoping for a better life.

# 5. What do Homelessness Services Need?

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## 5.1 Joint working with other stakeholders

Tackling destitution among mobile EU citizens requires strategies in which homelessness service providers are only one of the relevant stakeholders. In order to find long-term solutions, joint working between stakeholders is needed.

- Linking with local authorities. Cities and local authorities are often the most affected by the lack of solutions to homelessness among mobile EU citizens and are very interested in developing effective strategies to tackle it. Moreover, in some cases, it is possible for homelessness service providers to link with cities' existing activities aimed at helping homeless people.
- Linking with national authorities. In order to change policies and make room for new practices, contacts with national authorities are paramount. It is important for national authorities to be aware of local-level situations and use all the influence they have to put pressure on EU-level bodies so as to work towards shared EU policies on the issue.
- Active cooperation with organisations working in the sector. Local contexts can be very different but generally, depending on the size of the city and the scale of the problem, there are several organisations working with homeless people, including mobile EU citizens, in a city, or at least organisations that are in some way concerned by the situation in which destitute people live. These are not only homelessness service providers: organisations providing legal advice, employment or housing services, health treatment, language or other educational training also have expertise and experience with various forms of intervention for the target group. Cooperation between all these stakeholders is more likely to deliver effective support and help deal with the challenges homeless mobile EU citizens face than if they were working separately.

## 5.2 Individual action plans and user participation

A personalised approach is needed that includes an initial as well as an ongoing assessment of the needs and aspirations of the homeless person as well as ongoing support. Many mobile EU citizens experiencing homelessness may require extra time and support before being able to take up and sustain employment. Personalised action plans are therefore very important but will only be effective if they are backed up by sufficient resources and tailored to individual needs. Individual coaching is for instance a promising strategy in social work practice and, specifically, in return-to-work programmes for people who have experienced homelessness and are therefore extremely excluded from the labour market.

In order to develop effective individual action plans, the participation of people experiencing homelessness is indispensable. Participation is a way of working that empowers people to participate in decisions and actions that affect their lives. It is based on the conviction that people have the right to have a say in the way that services they use are set up and run. Participation is a way of ensuring that the experiences of people who have a unique insight into the services are taken into account, thus improving the quality and effectiveness of services and policies targeted at them. Empowerment is one of the intended outcomes of participation, because an empowered person is one who can find a sustainable route out of homelessness more easily.

There are many good reasons for pursuing participation. The benefits can be far-reaching for the people involved, the practices of the organisation, planners and policy makers and communities through raising awareness, improving perceptions of homeless mobile EU citizens, correcting clichéd images and dispelling myths and stereotypes. Through participation, the individuals concerned experience personal gain or empowerment, for example through an increase in confidence, knowledge, skills or self-awareness. Participation is generally used as a tool by services to consult their service users to allow them to identify aspirations better and adjust practice in response to these. This

is the aspect of participation that is used most widely as change can be effected relatively easily, so both the person and the service can reap immediate rewards. Moreover, there is generally a low awareness of poverty and homelessness issues in society, often accompanied by myths, prejudices and stereotypes about its causes and the characteristics of the people who experience it, especially when it comes to migrants. There are many participative projects that can assist in improving public perceptions of homelessness. Key opportunities to make an impact at this level include community events, mainstream services, researchers, academics, politicians and the media, including social media.

Participative practices allow individuals to feel like important actors in their recovery and not just passive recipients of services. What's more, the cost of operations is likely to decrease as well, as users themselves are involved in the running of activities. The participation of excluded and homeless groups makes decision- and policy-making more open and democratic, respects human rights and gives legitimacy to how practices are implemented.

### *5.3 Communication with service users*

Working with a target group which is culturally different from mainstream society calls for staff that have a strong set of linguistic and cultural skills, and are technically prepared on the subject. Therefore, it is essential to hire employees capable of speaking several languages, who have a variety of different ethnic origins and who are sensitive to different cultures and thus have an understanding of the cultural context that can influence people's life choices when it comes to work and education. Another important skill is empathy: the ability to respect and understand how homeless mobile EU citizens perceive their situation, the choices they face, their vulnerability and their exclusion.

In respect of participative principles, activities should be developed on the basis of the participants' needs, which might be different in each individual case. This requires flexibility and the ability to make decisions quickly.

Motivational interviewing can be a good method for assessing participants' needs and developing an adequate action plan. Motivational interviewing is a form of collaborative conversation that is used to strengthen a person's own motivation and commitment to change. It is a person-centered counselling style, used for addressing the common problem of ambivalence about change by paying particular attention to the language of change. It is designed to strengthen an individual's motivation for and movement toward a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person's own reasons for wanting change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion.<sup>6</sup>

During the interview, a few questions necessarily have to be taken into account:

- What is the individual's main aim? For what purpose did the mobile EU citizen decide to leave her or his country and move to another EU Member State? In most cases, this is about work and work-related issues.
- Housing situation. It is important to assess the housing situation of the individual concerned and, where possible, provide accommodation or list the options available, if feasible, in cooperation with other organisations or public authorities working in the sector. Having a good service-provider network is, in this case, fundamental to linking the service user with other existing activities and organisations providing different types of housing or shelter, especially during the winter.
- Work. This is often the most important issue when developing individual action plans because finding a job can be the key to mobile EU citizens reaching self-sufficiency. Therefore, official translation of documents, certificates and diplomas is an important part of the service, as is helping service users to compile CVs and draft cover letters.

It is recommended that relations be established with the Public Employment Service in order to facilitate mobile EU citizens' contact with Public Employment Service caseworkers and eventually access the labour market. If homelessness service providers have enough resources and the service users desire it, a member of staff can

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.motivationalinterviewing.org/>



accompany the participants to the Public Employment Service and act as their mentor. Alternatively, a partnership could be created in order for Public Employment Service caseworkers or job coaches to be regularly present in the homelessness service.

### *5.4 Volunteer support*

Human and financial resources are often scarce, thus, volunteers can be of much help. Some activities can be assigned to volunteers, who can dedicate a few hours to them and contribute with their knowledge. However, it is important to strike a balance between relying on volunteers for a number of activities and replacing the workforce with unpaid – or poorly-paid – volunteers. It is equally paramount to provide the necessary training and supervision of volunteers. In this case, the time factor is a difficult challenge to deal with, since it is hard to have time to induct and supervise all new volunteers.

There are several activities, like language teaching, translations and recreational activities – such as sport, art courses and film clubs - that can be managed by volunteers. Pro-bono lawyers and, to a certain extent, law students can support the work of homelessness service providers by providing administrative and legal assistance. Although time-consuming, it is not difficult to generate interest and recruit volunteers. An important resource in this context is the national Volunteer Agency, if one exists, but advertisements can also be circulated and announcements can be made in colleges and universities, through social media and in lifelong learning centres.

#### **Case Study: Meet E. from Belgium**

##### **Provided by Projekt Udenfor**

E. is a 47 year-old man who lost both his parents when he was a teenager. After being thrown out of his sister's house, he travelled to Switzerland where he found a job and worked in a kitchen. Later, he travelled to Italy, France and Germany. There were periods when he was working and lived in an apartment and others in which he was homeless during this time. E. has been travelling around for the past twenty years and came to Denmark almost seven years ago. Only after several meetings with an outreach worker did E. explain that he wanted to find a job but was struggling to find his way around the Danish system. The outreach worker helped E. to find work in a cleaning company and found him a room to rent. Three months later, the outreach worker met E. again. E. told him that he no longer had the job. He said that he was fired because the boss was unhappy with him. The outreach worker called the former employer, who said that E. had not been fired but that he had just left one day and had not been back since. E. seemed very depressed and convinced that everyone was against him. He began to drink a lot. After a few months, E. was thrown out of his room because he had not paid the rent and he ended up on the street again. The following month, the outreach worker could not get into contact with E., but E. suddenly called one day and asked for help to get a new passport and new documents since he had lost all his possessions.

The outreach worker helped E. to get new documents and succeeded in finding him a job through a recruitment company for persons with special needs. E. also found an apartment. Six months later, E. said that he was not happy in his new workplace because the others were against him and decided not to go to work anymore. Fonden projekt UDENFOR helped E. to apply for cash benefits, to which he was entitled since he had a job. E. was awarded cash benefits, but after a year the municipality assessed that E. no longer had the right to them since he did not have the right to stay in Denmark anymore and had to leave the country.

While E. waited to be sent back to Belgium, he had a nervous breakdown. Fonden projekt UDENFOR consequently helped E. to get in contact with a psychiatrist, from whom he received treatment for a short period. E. was sent back to Belgium in December 2011, but a few days later he was back in Denmark again. He did not want to live in Belgium, he was determined to stay in Denmark, which he considered to be home. However, he no longer had his apartment and therefore had to live on the street. E. was helped to buy a bicycle so he could collect bottles and find permanent overnight accommodation. When the outreach worker met E. a month later, E. said that he was pleased with his new residence. However, he was upset that he had lost all his possessions again, including his passport. The outreach worker helped E. to get new documents and Fonden projekt UDENFOR paid so he could store his possessions in a locker at the main train station.





# European Homeless Mobile Citizen Network

The right to free movement is one of the fundamental rights of EU citizens



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