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Homelessness Amongst Immigrants in the EU –  
A Homeless Service Providers' Perspective

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■ European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless AISBL

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Immigrants make up a significant proportion of the homeless people in the European Union. They live in severely overcrowded housing or with no access to basic facilities; they might find accommodation in shelters but might be obliged to sleep rough because of limited capacity in night shelters or because of limitations linked to their residence status. According to data gathered by FEANTSA in 2012, homeless service providers in 14 EU Member States referred to a general trend of an increasing proportion of the homeless population being composed of immigrants. This covered both third country nationals in various situations - asylum seekers, refugees, people with subsidiary protection status, overstayers, and people waiting to be returned to their countries - and EU citizens exercising their right to free movement.

People mainly migrate to and within the EU for economic or humanitarian reasons and for reasons of family reunification. A recurring theme that arises in the stories of those migrants who have experienced homelessness is the lack of regular and secure employment, often caused by discrimination in access to the labour market and to fair and equal working conditions. A lack of employment, precarious working conditions and undeclared work are all obstacles to accessing social benefits and, in some Member States, even to accessing emergency social support such as night shelters. Besides work-related reasons, homelessness can be due to discrimination on the housing market, lack of residence status, insufficient availability of accommodation in reception centres for asylum seekers, dependency on sustaining a relationship with a violent partner (particularly for women), length of administrative procedures and so. Without sufficient financial resources and access to social security, migrants are forced to rely on their social networks, on very limited, voluntary support structures, or to develop autonomous survival strategies on the streets and in very poor quality housing.

### **The EU Must Guarantee Access to Basic Services and Facilities for All**

Homeless service providers are often confronted with a dilemma whereby, while they believe emergency accommodation and basic support are a fundamental right and should be granted to all, whatever the nationality and the residence status of the persons concerned, they cannot provide services because they lack resources or in some Member States because they cannot use public funding for hosting people who do not have a residence permit/do not have regular migration status. FEANTSA calls on the EU to guarantee access to basic services and facilities. These basic services should include food, healthcare, accommodation and other homeless services, such as hygiene facilities, laundry and storage. National and local authorities must put the necessary financial and human resources at the disposal of organisations working with homeless people in order to enable them to work effectively with all people experiencing homelessness including immigrants



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### **Homelessness Among Immigrants Needs to Be Tackled Through Targeted Services**

Although homeless service providers firmly believe that services must not discriminate on the grounds of nationality, ethnic origin or residence status, they are also aware that immigrants generally have specific needs – i.e. administrative guidance, linguistic services, legal support and specific employment services - that are different from those that nationals have. As a consequence, in some national contexts, capacity building is necessary in order to provide adapted services to meet the accommodation and support needs of homeless migrants. This requires specific funding streams and the involvement of other relevant policy areas, particularly migration policy, which has an important role to play in preventing homelessness and destitution amongst immigrants residing in the EU.

### **Homeless Services Should Not Be Used As a Way to Compensate for Inconsistent Migration Policies**

Besides the need for specific services, FEANTSA believes that the needs of some groups of immigrants, particularly asylum seekers, may be best met outside the homeless sector. Homeless services should not be used systematically to compensate for inconsistent migration policies that lead people to situations of destitution and homelessness. The European Union and Member States' have a responsibility to prevent migrants from entering homelessness using their migration policies and legislation.

### **The EU and its Member States Must Design Coherent and Balanced Migration Policies**

While the EU acknowledges the need for labour migration and the demographic challenge whereby Member States' labour markets will need an even greater immigrant workforce in the future in order to maintain their welfare systems, EU migration policies tend to create obstacles to the fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights. Indeed, strict migration policies coupled with administrative burdens and delays lead an important proportion of immigrants to live in destitution, with no rights and no prospects, and they must rely on the support of charities.



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### **The EU Must Set Clearer Rules on Free Movement of Economically Inactive EU Citizens**

Member States' conditions regulating whether or not an EU citizen has the right to reside in the host country and to which social benefits s/he is entitled vary greatly between Member States. Furthermore, in some Member States, EU citizens still encounter restrictive conditions hindering their access to the labour market and to services for economically inactive people. The EU must ensure that Member States' application of the concept of 'unreasonable burden' on the social welfare system is appropriate and proportionate.

### **The Cross-Border Nature of Homelessness Shows That Homeless Policies Need to Be Coordinated at EU Level**

The increasingly cross-border nature of homelessness, which is at the root of the debate on conditionality of access to homeless services, demonstrates the need for more coordinated policy in the fight against homelessness at EU level. The EU must facilitate the adoption and implementation of coordinated and professional action in relation to homeless people at local level and these actions need to be coordinated through an EU strategy on homelessness. As called for by the European Parliament in its resolution on an EU homelessness strategy, one of the key elements of a homelessness strategy should be a focus on the changing profiles of the homeless population and in particular the impact migration can have on it.

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For more details, contact [Mauro Striano](#)



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