



**FEANTSA**

**European Federation of National Organisations Working With the Homeless  
Press Release – 24th November 2011  
For Immediate Release**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**European Homeless Service Provider Network Condemns Hungarian Law Criminalising Homelessness**

FEANTSA condemns the latest and most serious development in the wave of criminalisation of homelessness in Hungary - the Hungarian Parliament's decision to imprison homeless people across Hungary if they are found sleeping rough twice within a six month period. FEANTSA opposes the criminalisation of homelessness and proposes integrated homelessness strategies as a positive alternative.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> November, the Hungarian Parliament voted a law which allows for the imprisonment of those found "guilty" of rough sleeping twice in a six month period.

Homelessness is an unacceptable violation of fundamental human rights and dignity that continues to affect people in all EU Member States. It is one of the clearest indicators of deepening poverty and social exclusion. It has far reaching implications, both for the individuals who experience it and for the society at large.

There are multiple pathways into homelessness. Often, experiences such as relationship breakdown, illness, addiction, eviction or experience of violence combine with structural<sup>1</sup> and institutional factors<sup>2</sup> to cause homelessness.

The drafters of the law argue that imprisoning homeless people is a "dissuasive" form of sanction. This is very cynical and ignores the fact that homeless people are often obliged to use public space to survive because of a lack of services, especially ones adapted to their needs. Framing homelessness as an offence subtracts the question of homelessness from social policies. It also constitutes a denial of state responsibility for what is often a result of structural problems and belies a culture of blaming homeless people for their situation.

Criminalisation means an additional and more serious stigma for homeless people which further jeopardizes their chances of social or labour market integration. These measures are also ineffective, since they aim to conceal the problem of homelessness rather than offering any real solution.

FEANTSA strongly opposes any measure that criminalizes homelessness and recommends improving the services and conditions of homeless shelters, increasing the social housing stock and increasing housing assistance. We also recommend developing a long-term and strategic approach towards ending homelessness.

A wide variety of approaches to combat homelessness exist. FEANTSA proposes an integrated homelessness strategy as a positive alternative to criminalisation. Alternatives to criminalisation include real housing options for homeless people, either in social rental properties or in supported housing on the private rental market, coupled with homelessness prevention.

FEANTSA also recommends holding regular consultation with representatives of civil society and organisations working in the field as well as homeless people themselves, in view of better understanding the reality of homelessness, assessing the existing needs and designing appropriate legal and policy measures, as well as Improving the services and conditions of homeless shelters, increasing the social housing stock and increasing housing assistance.

<sup>1</sup> Poor access to decent affordable housing, unemployment, precarious employment and discrimination and stigmatisation

<sup>2</sup> Release from institutions such as prisons, medical or children's institutions, poorly structured and administrated benefits systems and lack of service coordination

The European Parliament recently adopted a Resolution calling for an EU Homelessness Strategy. Moreover, in its report on the European Platform Against Poverty, the Parliament states that “the situation of the homeless calls for particular attention and the introduction of additional measures on the part of both the Member States and the [European] Commission [...], which will necessitate the collection and annual publication of comparable data and reliable statistics at EU level, together with an account of the progress achieved and the objectives set in the respective national and EU strategies for fighting poverty and social exclusion”. This engages the Hungarian government, as well as other Member State governments, to make real commitments to ending homelessness, rather than imprisoning homeless people.

**FEANTSA President, Rina Beers, said, "with a clear message from the European Parliament in favour of an integrated homelessness strategy in Europe and the proof that housing-led approaches are a positive answer to homelessness, we would like to see Hungary adopt a housing-based strategy that works with homeless service providers rather than criminalising the most vulnerable people in society."**

The Hungarian government has voted punitive measures that will allow for the imprisonment of people found sleeping rough twice in a period of six months. FEANTSA strongly opposes this move which criminalises homelessness and proposes positive examples of homelessness prevention and housing-led approaches as an alternative, and encourages the Hungarian government to work with homelessness organisations in Hungary. It recommends a concrete homelessness strategy as a way to reduce and end homelessness rather than punitive measures that punish the poor, violate their human rights and only serve to hide homelessness rather than solve it.

Find out more from [www.feantsa.org](http://www.feantsa.org) or call 0032 2 538 66 69

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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.
2. FEANTSA has created a [Toolkit for developing an integrated homelessness strategy](#), as well as a [Handbook](#) that draws on examples of approaches from across Europe that are rising to the challenge of ending homelessness.
3. EP [Resolution](#) B7-0475/2011, adopted by a large majority, sends out a strong political message that homelessness is an urgent issue, on which the EU must step up its co-ordination and support of Member States' policies.
4. The support of the Resolution by the delegates of the HUngharian governing party is clearly evident in the [vote break-down](#).
5. The European Parliament [Report](#) on the European Platform Against Poverty calls for action on homelessness "as a matter of urgency".
6. More information on national homelessness strategies can be found on the [FEANTSA website](#).
7. Previous FEANTSA press releases condemning the criminalisation of homelessness in Hungary are to be found on our [Press Page](#).

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