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No free movement for the poor? A strategy to address homelessness among mobile EU citizens is urgently needed

On Tuesday 16 February, a seminar on homelessness among mobile EU citizens was co-hosted by Alfred Sant MEP and Sylvie Goulard MEP and organised by FEANTSA in the European Parliament.

Over the last few years, controversial debates on the consequences of EU enlargement and of the economic recession, along with a political crisis related to migration flows in general, has put into question EU free movement and the right of EU citizens to move and settle in another Member State. This situation of instability, coupled with EU rules on free movement that are open to interpretation and implemented in different ways at national level, has been jeopardising the living situations of that small minority of mobile EU citizens who have not succeeded and for whom moving to another Member State has led to destitution.

As stated by Mr Sant: *"homelessness is a serious problem in Europe also because of an increasing number of EU citizens who choose to move to another Member States with the goal of achieving a better life but fail"*.

Indeed, in several European cities a significant proportion of homeless people are mobile EU citizens who in some cases, do not have access to publicly funded shelters and are pushed to sleep rough.

"Homelessness needs systemic rather than partial solutions, but unfortunately there is little political appetite to progress on that" said Ms Goulard, who reiterated, along with Neena Gill MEP, the European Parliament call for an EU action on homelessness. Ms Gill added that *"it is really important to have a coherent housing policy"* and that *"as Parliamentarians, we are pushing the Commission to take up the challenges related to homelessness"*.

FEANTSA, represented by several members of its migration working group – Wayne Stanley from Focus Ireland, Bo Jochimsen from Projekt Undefor and Fabrizio Vittoria from Crossroads Gothenburg – called for a coordinated strategy that would involve all relevant service providers, along with local authorities and European institutions in order to find long-term solutions to prevent mobile EU citizens from becoming destitute.

This strategy, as highlighted by FEANTSA's director Freek Spinnewijn, *"can be built by promoting at EU level the good solutions already tested through for instance the Crossroads model and by recognising homelessness among mobile EU citizens as a consequence of precarious working conditions and in general the challenges that can be faced in accessing employment"*.

Last but not the least, a coordinated action needs to involve cities that, as reminded by Paulina Banas, policy coordinator at Eurocities, *"are on the frontline in order to provide solutions for destitute people."*

When it comes to addressing destitution among EU citizens who exercise the right to free movement, Member States concerned push for burden-sharing and rely on civil society for services and even for 'reconnections' to the country of origin, yet no Member State has ever proposed to share with the countries of origin the benefits of economic migration – and these have been shown in several studies. Of course the issue needs to be addressed and it is certain that the EU has a role to play, but a long-term solution can only be achieved through adequate social policies which include access to basic services that would help people living a crisis to get back on the right track.

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For comment, please contact Mauro Striano, FEANTSA Migration Policy Officer | mauro.striano@feantsa.org | +32(0)2 230 48 86

Notes for editors:

¹ FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. It is an umbrella organisation which participates in or contributes to the fight against homelessness in Europe | www.feantsa.org