

10 DECEMBER 2018

FEANTSA Youth Denounce Criminalisation of Homelessness on Human Rights Day

To mark International Human Rights Day, FEANTSA Youth, a group of activists fighting to end youth homelessness in Europe, are shining a light on recent moves to criminalise homelessness in Europe. The group of activists are deeply concerned by the growth of criminalisation of homelessness in Europe.

Across Europe we have seen increases in laws that discriminate against people experiencing homelessness and prevent them from occupying the public space. Apart from legislation that makes it illegal to sleep, stay or store personal belongings in public spaces, we have seen several attempts to ban begging. Furthermore, defensive public furniture like anti-homeless spikes or benches, have been introduced with the privatisation of public spaces. Earlier this year the Government of Hungary made homelessness a criminal offence resulting in European citizens being brought to court, fined, imprisoned and having their possessions burnt in an EU member state.

Freek Spinnewijn, Director of FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organizations with the Homeless) said:

“What is most worrying about Hungary is the lack of reaction and international condemnation by European governments and the European Commission. We talk about the need for a more social Europe, and yet here in an EU member state, people are being imprisoned for being poor. We are talking about some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our society, and those in a position of power are allowing this practice to continue”

Homelessness is growing in 27 of the 28 EU Member States. Homelessness is the infringement of basic human rights, where the entire social system has failed to ensure the right to an adequate standard of living, access to education, health and housing. If we wish to reverse these trends we need to invest in solutions, not criminalising people living in extreme poverty.

Spinnewijn continued:

“What is happening in Hungary is shocking. On International Human Rights Day we are calling on the European Union to condemn the recent actions of the Hungarian government. These policies only serve to further marginalise and even demonise vulnerable people in our society. FEANTSA stands in solidarity with services in Hungary who are working under incredibly difficult circumstances to deliver solutions to people experiencing homelessness”.

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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