

**European Federation of National Organisations Working With the Homeless**  
**Press Release – 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011**  
**For Immediate Release**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Criminalisation of Homelessness is Not the Answer: Integrated Homelessness Strategies Are**

FEANTSA has previously expressed concerns over the continued, concerted attack on homeless people in Hungary and the punitive measures homeless people face there, which lead to the criminalization of homelessness. We have condemned and called for the withdrawal of a proposed law that would make sleeping on the street an offence in Hungary and subject people sleeping rough to fines and detention, and propose an integrated homelessness strategy as a positive alternative.

In the public debate on homelessness, Hungarian politicians often refer to examples from across Europe and draw alleged parallels with policies in other European countries. István Tarlós, the mayor of Budapest, has said that “those who believe that all problems would be solved if homeless people were given housing [...] are mistaken. I wonder why wild liberals who praise laissez-faire ideologies do not bother to look at the rules and practices of such European countries like Austria, the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Germany or even liberal Holland. In all these countries there are strict regulations.”

In response to these alleged examples, FEANTSA can offer evidence from its work across Europe that shows that while most of the countries mentioned apply strict rules for homeless services in terms of funding, quality and support, today in Europe there is no national law that imposes such significant fines on rough sleepers as in Hungary, nor is there any national law in place that threatens rough sleepers with imprisonment. Importantly, those European cities that do apply some pressure on rough sleepers to use services also offer an adequate number of services and alternatives to homelessness. These alternatives include real housing options for homeless people, either in social rental properties or in supported housing on the private rental market. This is not the case in Budapest, where “shelters are already full while more than a thousand people sleep rough”. Instead of the establishment of conventional shelters of big capacity, some countries’ homelessness strategies – as part of the housing first approach - clearly set the objective of reducing the use of conventional shelters and change them into supported, rented accommodation units. (Finland, Glasgow (UK)).

As opposed to what Mr Tarlos's statement suggests, the approach endorsed by the city of Budapest clearly runs counter to the trends in other parts of Europe. These trends include positive, housing-led approaches to reducing homelessness, such as the Housing First approach (which is being implemented in a number of European countries including Finland, Portugal, the UK, Denmark, Austria, Ireland, France and the Netherlands), the enforceable right to housing in France, and integrated homeless strategies in Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the UK.

If these countries are the examples that Budapest wishes to follow, there is certainly a long way to go. The trend for criminalisation is happening in Budapest as a whole, but also some districts are independently applying stronger pressure (while not offering real alternatives, or only doing so for 10 out of 100 people) - this has been happening in the 8th district, and now some others (the 5th and 14th, for example) are planning to follow their example. Following European trends would require abandoning the idea of criminalising homelessness. There is a need to develop concerted efforts to tackle this complex issue that do not criminalise the people affected by it.

Last month, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling for a European Homelessness Strategy. The spirit of and the ideas outlined in this resolution are in stark contrast to the measures taken by the city of Budapest. Interestingly, the resolution was supported by most Hungarian MEPs, including the members of the party supporting Mr Tarlos, the party of the mayors of the 5th, 8th and 14th districts of Budapest.. The Resolution calls for a strategy with a specific focus on innovative, housing-led approaches, for links to the structural funds and for a framework for monitoring the development of national and regional homelessness strategies. It thus provides the right ideas for the elaboration of an integrated homelessness strategy in Hungary. This is the path to be followed, not that of criminalising homelessness.

**Freek Spinnewijn, FEANTSA Director, considers that *"with a clear message from the European Parliament, including a majority of Hungarian MEPs, in favour of an integrated homelessness strategy in Europe and housing-led approaches, we would like to see a housing-based strategy that works with homeless service providers in Hungary, and a will to follow positive examples in Europe that have been proven to reduce homelessness."***

FEANTSA recommends:

- Withdrawing the draft law which would lead to the human rights violation of homeless people

- 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
- Guaranteeing the enforceable right to housing for all and ensuring the effective exercise of the right to housing
- Improving the services and conditions of homeless shelters, increasing the social housing stock and increasing housing assistance
- Developing a long-term and strategic approach towards ending homelessness in Hungary

----- ENDS -----

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

#### 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. 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.
3. The support of the Resolution by the delegates of the HUNGarian governing party is clearly evident in the [vote break-down](#).
4. More information on national homelessness strategies can be found on the [FEANTSA website](#).
5. Previous FEANTSA press releases condemning the criminalisation of homelessness in Hungary are to be found on our [Press Page](#).

#### For more details, please contact:

- [Freek Spinnewijn](#), FEANTSA Director
- [Dalma Fabian](#), FEANTSA Policy Officer
- [Boróka Fehér](#), Representative of Tizek Társasága, umbrella organization of Budapest homeless service providers
- [Péter Bakos](#), FEANTSA Board Member for Hungary, Member of FEANTSA Executive Committee.

*For press information, please contact [Suzannah Young](#), FEANTSA Communications and Information Officer*

\*\*\*\*\*