

Honouring People who Died Homeless



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Editorial

The idea for this magazine was born during a seminar held at the FEANTSA Forum in Athens in May 2025. During this session, Gill Taylor (*Museum of Homelessness, UK*) and Adèle Lenormand (*Collectif Les Morts de la Rue, France*) presented their work and methodologies for *Breaking the cycle of invisibility and for honouring people who died homeless*. From the gathering of information to restore names and identities to those who died while homeless, to the organisation of memorial events, their contributions highlighted practices that are both rigorous and deeply human.

Beyond methods and tools, the discussion opened a more intimate space. It spoke to the bonds that professionals build with the people they support, sometimes over many years, and to the sense of rupture and grief that can accompany their death. Anyone who has worked in services supporting people experiencing homelessness has, at some point, been confronted with death. This inevitably raises questions about how practitioners themselves are supported through loss, as well as how other service users are affected. It also calls into question the processes that exist - or are missing - to allow grief and remembrance to be expressed within professional settings.

This seminar shed light on the unique emotional intensity of social and care professions, and on words that are often thought to have no place in this field - among them, love. In the room, around fifteen people were present. At the end of the session, a professional stayed behind to continue the conversation with Gill and Adèle. She suddenly broke down in tears. This moment - suspended in the middle of a succession of presentations and seminars - allowed some to lay down, if only briefly, part of the weight of sadness that does not always find space to be expressed in everyday professional life.

From this experience emerged the desire to extend the reflection and give it a European scope, while remaining firmly grounded in practice. While some countries are able to present consolidated national figures on deaths among people experiencing homelessness - such as [France](#), the [UK](#), the [Czech Republic](#), [Ireland](#) and [Italy](#) - such data does not exist everywhere, and even less so at a European level. What we do know, however, is that people who experience homelessness die younger, particularly those with long histories of living on the streets. We know that life on the streets wears people down; it is exhausting and destructive to both physical and mental health.

Today in Europe, it is still possible to die without a name, without loved ones being informed, and without a dignified funeral being organised.

To better understand this reality, we draw on the reflections developed by SMES - Santé Mentale et Exclusion Sociale in their publication [SMES-03 \(2021\)](#), which

invites us to understand the death of people experiencing homelessness not as a single moment in time, but as a continuum extending before, during, and after death.

From this perspective, the death of a person experiencing homelessness is not an isolated event, but a process that mobilises multiple dimensions of practice and experience:

- **Before death:** long trajectories of hardship, care, disengagement or fragmented care pathways, and repeated interactions with services
- **At the moment of death:** often occurring in conditions of invisibility, urgency, or within care and support settings
- **After death:** processes of identification, post-mortem care, administrative procedures, and acts of dignity and remembrance
- **For professionals:** emotional impact, moral distress, grief, and the need for spaces to reflect and process loss
- **For systems and services:** questions of responsibility, coordination, recognition, and learning from each death

In light of these realities, this edition of *Homeless in Europe* is dedicated to this theme, complementing the 2018 issue on mortality, which focused primarily on prevention and end-of-life support. This time, we acknowledge that people are dying within services, and we focus on how this reality is being met with dignity, remembrance, and post-mortem care, as well as the support offered to those who remain.

This edition also follows a somewhat new methodology. A voluntary collective, facilitated by FEANTSA, came together around this issue and gradually took shape as an editorial committee, bringing together perspectives, experiences and practices from across Europe. This is how Gill, Adèle, Magdalena, Florence, Caterina, Floriana, Guillem, Silvia, and myself worked together to bring you this new edition of *Homeless in Europe* Magazine.

In these pages, you will find articles exploring developments in funeral support in Paris, reflections on how local data collection initiatives in Italy have evolved into a national network, and a feature on the “Breathing Room”, a project for practitioners, emphasising the importance of having dedicated space to process loss.

Editorial

All contributions are firmly rooted in practice, with many more articles to discover throughout this magazine.

The working group closes this edition with a short set of recommendations aimed at improving both practice and policy in the recognition, acknowledgement, and honouring of deaths among people experiencing homelessness.

To move beyond simply discussing how things are done to actually doing them, this edition also includes two pages dedicated to testimonies and memories from professionals who have lost someone they were supporting, collected during the FEANTSA Forum 2026 in Warsaw. Without the need or the desire to be fully understood, they have left a trace: a memory, a few words, a gesture of remembrance for someone they accompanied, and who is no longer here.



By **Arnaud Vernus**, Media and Publications Officer, FEANTSA

Remembering, Counting, Acting: Homeless Deaths in the UK and France



By **Gill Taylor**, Strategic Lead - Dying Homeless Project, Museum of Homelessness, & **Adèle Lenormand**, Record & Report Team Coordinator, Collectif Les Morts de la Rue France

This article examines two initiatives in the UK and France documenting the deaths of people experiencing homelessness: the Dying Homeless Project and the Collectif Les Morts de la Rue France. Combining data collection, memorialisation, and advocacy, both initiatives challenge the invisibility of deaths of people experiencing homelessness and call for stronger political action across Europe. Together, they show that these deaths are preventable and that dignity must be upheld in both life and death.

Across Europe, the deaths of people experiencing homelessness remain one of the starkest indicators of social failure. While policy contexts, welfare systems, and civic traditions differ, grassroots initiatives have emerged that refuse to let these deaths go unnoticed. Two of the most prominent examples are the Museum of Homelessness's *Dying Homeless Project* in the UK and the Collective Les Morts de la Rue's *Dénombrer et Décrire* (Record and Report) in Paris and across France. Although they take distinct approaches shaped by their national contexts, both initiatives share a profound commitment to remembrance, dignity and action. Together, they amplify a Europe-wide call to prevent deaths and to act earlier, more collectively and more decisively.

The Dying Homeless Project: Counting as Resistance in the UK

The Dying Homeless Project, hosted by the Museum of Homelessness (MoH), is the only year-round record of deaths of people experiencing homelessness across all four nations of the UK. Established in 2017 and led by MoH since 2019, the project combines investigative research with public memorialisation, insisting that every death is a deeply human loss worthy of record and investigation.

Each year, the project gathers information through Freedom of Information requests,



coroners' reports, family testimony, and submissions from frontline services. This rigorous methodology allows MoH to publish annual findings and recommendations that reveal gaps in official statistics, expose shocking trends and, importantly, call for action to prevent future losses of life. In doing so, the project frames counting as an act of resistance that is part of a lineage of social justice projects that make visible the lives and deaths of marginalised and excluded people. The project challenges the idea that some lives are "ungrievable" and insists on memorialisation, visibility and solidarity with those bereaved.

At the heart of the Dying Homeless Project is its digital memorial, where names, tributes and stories are held with care and dignity. Public vigils, remembrance banners and learning events make these deaths visible to decision-makers and the wider public, connecting remembrance directly to political action and accountability.

Collectif Les Morts de la Rue: Dignity, Homage and Collective Responsibility in France

In France, the Collectif Les Morts de la Rue has been carrying out a parallel mission for over twenty years. Founded in 2004, the Collective is a coalition of associations and individuals united by a refusal to accept premature death as an inevitable consequence of life without a roof.

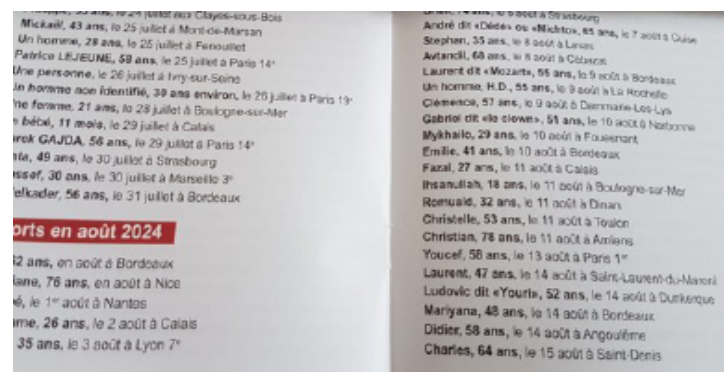
The Collective's work centres on four interconnected actions: recording deaths, paying public tribute, attending funeral ceremonies for isolated people in Paris, and supporting those left behind. Its annual report, *Dénombrer et Décrire*, documents deaths of people experiencing any form of homelessness when they died, while also illuminating life trajectories marked not only by exclusion and systemic failure, but by beauty and creativity.

Death reports come from different sources: most of the information (approximately 36%) comes from institutional partners, 30% comes from other charities, 24% from the media watch and 6% from private individuals. Every source of information is biased, and because those

sources feed the annual report of the Collective, that leads to bias in the report. For example, the main goal of the media is to attract readers. In order to do that, articles are based on sensationalism and often exploit homelessness to fuel security discourse. In certain French regions, articles in the media are the only source of information (Guadeloupe, for instance). It affects the data collection as it causes an over-representation of violent causes of death.

It is important to note that the French legislation doesn't have a Freedom of Information law. The number of deaths counted each year is a lower limit of homeless mortality in France, and putting a name on a report form for a deceased may be easier for the Collective than it is for the Museum of homelessness, as every citizen in France can ask for the death certificate of someone who died in France. This annual report is the basis of our public memorial, as it provides a list of names and descriptions of life stories.

The Collective is particularly known for campaigning around dignity in death. Volunteers attend the funerals of people with no known relatives, organise public homages, and support relatives and friends in navigating grief. These acts powerfully assert that no one should die - or be mourned - in isolation, and that remembrance is a responsibility shared by society as a whole.



Obituary notice for August 2024

Different Approaches, Shared Intent

The UK and French initiatives reflect their differing contexts. The Dying Homeless Project places strong emphasis on national data visibility and investigative methods that challenge government narratives, while the Collectif Les Morts de la Rue draws on a long tradition of civic association, public homage, and accompaniment. Yet the differences are complementary rather than conflicting.

Both initiatives insist that memorialisation and action belong together. Remembrance is not merely symbolic; it is a political act that demands prevention.

Both projects show that understanding how people die while homeless reveals failures in housing, healthcare, migration systems, and social protection that transcend borders.

A European Call to Action

Together, the Dying Homeless Project and the Collective Les Morts de la Rue demonstrate that refusing invisibility is a powerful starting point towards preventing deaths. Their work strengthens arguments made across FEANTSA's European network: that deaths of people experiencing homelessness are preventable, that reliable data and lived-experience-led remembrance matter, and that dignity must be upheld both in life and in death.

At a European level, these initiatives amplify each other's impact. They show policymakers that the deaths of people experiencing homelessness are not a local anomaly, but a shared crisis demanding coordinated responses. By counting carefully, remembering publicly and acting collectively, they remind us that preventing deaths starts with acknowledging every life lost.

In different languages and forms, the message is the same on both sides of the Channel: homelessness kills, but it does not have to. European countries and organizations already have the knowledge and models not just to count and remember, but to prevent future deaths. What remains is the political will to take action against the systemic and individual harms behind every life remembered.

Grief Tending: Why Space to Reflect is Crucial for the Homelessness Sector



By **Gill Taylor**, Strategic Lead – Dying Homeless Project, Museum of Homelessness, Independent Safeguarding Adult Review Author, Pathway UK Fellow - Safeguarding and System Transformation, Churchill Fellow - Radical Safeguarding & Harm Reduction

Working in homelessness services involves repeated exposure to death, loss, and emotional strain. This article explores the importance of creating structured spaces for reflection and grief across all levels of the workforce. It argues that acknowledging moral injury and collective grief is essential for ethical practice, organisational learning and staff wellbeing. It also highlights how memorialisation can support meaning-making, retention, and systemic change within the sector.

Working in the homelessness sector means forming professional relationships in conditions of a profoundly personal nature. Staff working in outreach teams, supported housing services, daycentres, and specialist health and social work settings walk alongside people through moments of immense vulnerability, personal crises and experiences of stigma and systemic inequality.

When someone you work with dies, it is never just “part of the job”. After twenty-two years working in the homelessness sector, I carry the memory of too many people who have passed away before realising their hopes for a stable life. Each of their losses has had a profound effect on me and my professional practice. In my various roles supporting homelessness and inclusion health sectors in the UK, Europe, and North America, my experiences have found purpose in challenging the professional tendency to rush past grief, treating the deaths of the people we support as regrettable operational issues to be quickly moved on from.

This article reflects on the role of creating spaces for front-line staff, managers, and strategic leaders to process their feelings when someone dies. These spaces acknowledge a hard truth: in a system shaped by precarity and preventable harm, death is not rare and the emotional impact on professionals can be profound. However, rather than adding to feelings of helplessness and failure, this article posits that making space for grief is essential to ethical practice, to collective learning and to the long-term health of the workforce and our sector at large.

Making Room for Grief: Tending to Moral Injury

When a person dies, staff often carry a dense mix of feelings: sadness, guilt, anger, helplessness, fear, and injustice. Without space to process these emotions and transform them into something meaningful, they rarely just disappear;

instead, they harden. Practitioners I've had the privilege to work with, from specialisms and services across the sector, tell me about how this can show up as cynicism, hopelessness, emotional withdrawal, burnout, and ultimately lead to decisions to leave the sector altogether. Their reflections mirror the learning in FEANTSA's recent publication about staff wellbeing.

Reflection and emotional expression are not indulgent, nor a distraction from service delivery or strategic leadership. Reflection is a necessary condition for learning, improvement, and leadership. This is no different when reflecting on death as on other workplace experiences and professional practices.

Scholars at Durham University describe “the experience of sustained and enduring negative moral emotions - guilt, shame, contempt and anger - which results from the betrayal, violation or suppression of deeply held or shared moral values” as ‘moral injury’. Moral injury “involves a profound sense of broken trust in ourselves, our leaders, governments and institutions to act in just and morally “good” ways”. Creating spaces that legitimise grief and encourage reflection can go some way to countering the forces that drive moral injury, by building the conditions for positive change in the organisations and systems they work for and within, and by reflecting and acting on the systemic forces that drive premature and undignified deaths.

The year-long series of *Breathing Room* sessions that I was invited to host on behalf of the Museum of Homelessness modelled how creating space for grief in the homelessness sector can support the frontline workforce to process grief, anger, frustration, and loss whilst remaining connected and energised around their work. Those involved shared that the opportunity to recount memories, to call out injustices, and to access peer support outside of their individual organisations was supportive

of their desire to continually advocate for systemic change and practice improvement, even in the face of ongoing resource pressures, local system barriers and political uncertainty. Grief tending, as a reflective and collective practice of changemaking, can be a remedy to moral injury.



Image: Museum of Homelessness graphic about the Breathing Room

Learning Without Blame: The Role of ‘Safeguarding Adult’ & ‘Homelessness Fatality’ Reviews

In the UK, the practice of Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) and Homelessness Fatality Reviews (HFRs) provides an important opportunity to transform reflection into learning and action. Debriefing practices and learning reviews that follow deaths are crucial opportunities to blend practice improvement work with opportunities for grief and personal reflection. The multi-agency learning events and 1:1 meetings that form part of these review processes move beyond statistics to ask relational and systemic questions about how and why someone died, and what can be learned about how agencies worked together to support them. Crucially, they are not about apportioning blame, but about learning together to prevent

future deaths and enable people to live more safely by accessing the support they need.

Participating in or engaging with reviews can be both painful and meaningful for staff and managers. Done well, learning events and reflective spaces that form parts of these reviews can allow practitioners and managers to voice what they saw, what they feared, and where they felt blocked by policy or resource gaps. They acknowledge and hold space for moral injury and system fatigue. They place focus on actions and improvements that agencies can implement to prevent future deaths and strengthen local systems. Importantly, reflective learning activities affirm that emotional responses are linked to real, systemic issues - not personal inadequacy.

Conducting reviews after someone has died can help transform grief into knowledge, action, and change. They bring to the surface gaps in practice, inter-agency breakdowns, and structural failures, and offer a framework for frontline practitioners to share their learning and ideas with local Safeguarding Adult Boards and other governance spaces. Importantly, fatality review activity can take many forms according to who, what, and when is being reviewed, and organisations should develop ways of learning from deaths that suit their expertise and context.

Vicarious and Anticipatory Grief: Tending to the Needs of Sector Leaders

It would be understandable but inaccurate to position grief only at the frontline of service delivery in the homelessness sector. Whilst it is absolutely correct to ensure that those most connected to an individual have space for grief and reflection, my experience points to the importance of ensuring that operational and strategic leaders also have these opportunities. Indeed, evidence from trauma-informed care is clear: a focus only on frontline practice inhibits the organisational growth needed to develop truly trauma-informed ways of supporting the people and communities we serve.

I work 1:1 and in groups with strategic managers and leaders, as part of reviews and in coaching and leadership development relationships, usually following a death or other profoundly challenging situations that occur in the practice of our work. I hear often how they feel conflicted about expressing grief, concerned it may be viewed as “unprofessional” and uncertain as to its usefulness in making real the learning and improvement needed after someone has died. In contrast to frontline workers, managers and leaders often speak about the cumulative toll of death on their wellbeing and leadership practice, and how fears about future deaths loom large when supporting teams and individuals. They speak of concerns that they are “failing” their teams and of the vicarious impact of particularly traumatic deaths, as well as feelings of personal responsibility, tension with system partners and deepening frustration at wider policy issues.

This reflective work with leaders suggests that emotional reflection can work in tandem with problem-solving about organisational cultures, system barriers and strategic governance. In fact, this work suggests that grief tending plays a vital role in developing leadership practice and organisational change processes to prevent and respond to deaths.

Memory, Meaning and Memorial

Responding to grief is also about memorialisation. My work with the Museum of Homelessness has transformed my understanding of this, learning from community members that people who die while homeless should be remembered as more than tragic statistics and reports, as people with full and complex lives, relationships, and histories. Creating memorials - whether physical, digital or ritual - gives staff and communities a way to honour those they have lost by ensuring they are not forgotten.

Contributing to memorials can be a form of meaning-making for an individual, and an opportunity to deepen professional relationships. In Breathing Room discussions, staff and managers spoke about

the healing role of laying flowers, of creating memorial books, of attending funerals, and of hosting remembrance parties to honour those lost. Importantly, memorialisation brings staff, service users and the wider community together around a shared purpose. Grief is not only about pain and sadness; it's also about celebration, joy and collective acts of remembrance. In acts of remembrance shared by professionals and service users, the foundations of trauma-informed relational practice - safety, collaboration and trustworthiness - can be strengthened, built and rebuilt after loss.

Managers and leaders often reflect that the act of witnessing and remembering can be motivating and connecting. The annual remembrance ceremony at St-Martin-in-the-Fields Church in London is an example often cited as important to senior leaders, reconnecting them with why they entered the sector and what they want to achieve. Creating space for grief and remembrance with sector allies and allowing time for celebration, joy, and laughter in honour of those who died reminds those of us in leadership why we are here in the first place.

Memorialisation takes many forms, and each individual, team, and organisation will have its own way of approaching this. Learnings from memorial practices and events across the UK suggest starting small, always including a shared meal, reaching out to local places of worship for support, and, most importantly, ensuring that family, friends, and people with lived experience shape how they want to remember those lost.

Why This Matters for Retention—and the Sector's Future

The homelessness workforce is chronically overstretched, under-resourced, and emotionally burdened by profound individual and systemic harms. When grief is ignored, the cost is attrition and the loss of some of our most knowledgeable and insightful workers. Frontline practitioners, operational managers, and strategic leaders know that without reflective spaces and honest conversations about the hardest aspect of this work, roles become unsustainable and opportunities to bring about real change are overlooked.

Providing 1:1 and collective spaces to process grief, learn from deaths, and participate in remembrance is an important part of healthier team and organisational cultures. It builds collective resilience rather than relying on individual coping strategies. It acknowledges systemic harm whilst holding personal agency and accountability with candour and care. Ultimately, it helps people remain connected to their work, committed to embedding learning and energised to take action. For managers and strategic leaders, these mechanisms provide leadership confidence and an acknowledgement of the depth and breadth of the responsibilities they hold. In short, tending to grief is a key remedy against moral injury and towards a healthier sector.



Image: Lucinda Macpherson, Dying Homeless Project Annual Vigil 2024.

Looking Forward: Learning from the Living

This article has reflected on the support we can offer our workforce in response to the deaths of people experiencing homelessness. Yet there is a final, crucial point that should not be overlooked. While reflection and learning after death is vital, real progress lies in learning earlier and from success as well as from failure. A focus on death alone risks missing opportunities to learn about what is working well, to celebrate goals achieved, and to plan for good endings. The challenge, therefore, is to apply the same depth of listening, curiosity, and care to the experiences of the living as to the memory of those who pass away.

Creating space for grief is not about accepting death as inevitable. It is about honouring those who have been lost, sustaining those who remain, and employing learning to energise and replenish our efforts towards ending homelessness and the fatal harms it perpetuates.

ENDNOTES

- 1 https://www.feantsa.org/files/Themes/misc/2025/Staff-wellbeing/Staff_wellbeing_final.pdf
- 2 The Breathing Room was a one-year series of reflective practice sessions, creative memorial spaces and discussions, hosted by the Museum of Homelessness as an offer to the homeless community and to front-line practitioners and managers working in the sector. Breathing Room spaces offered a 'safe container' to talk about grief, loss, and the factors that influence both. More than 50 practitioners from organisations across England and Wales participated, offering their memories, honest reflections, problem-solving skills, and peer support.
- 3 Homelessness Fatality Reviews were established in England in 2019, with the aim of ensuring that every death affecting someone who experienced homelessness was recorded, reflected on and learned from. The practice is now recognised as best practice by the UK Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government, and more than 20 local authorities across the country now regularly undertake HFR's following the deaths of individuals experiencing homelessness in their areas.
- 4 Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2022), Working definition of trauma-informed practice, UK Government, 2 November 2022

Evolution in Funeral Practices in Paris, France



By **Adèle Lenormand**, Record & Report Team
Coordinator, Collectif Les Morts de la Rue France

This article explores the evolution of funeral practices for isolated and marginalised people in Paris, particularly through the work of the Collective Les Morts de la Rue France. Over the past twenty years, cooperation between civil society and the municipality has contributed to more dignified and humane burial practices. The article highlights how inequalities experienced in life can continue after death and the importance of addressing them collectively.

The French law (Art. 2213-7, 2223-17, and 2223-19 of the general code of territorial collectives) obliges municipalities to proceed at their own expense with the burial of persons lacking sufficient funds and/or without close family (next of kin) to take care of funeral arrangements. These persons must be «decently buried without religious distinctions».

Burials are carried out in the 'common burial ground' of cemeteries, and for a minimum of five years during which the family can claim the body to arrange a funeral or move it to a family burial site.

In France, mass graves have been prohibited since 1804, but the term continued to be used in the communal code until 1991. It was then replaced by 'common ground' or 'fraternity ground'. In those areas, municipalities usually bury people without close family or without financial resources. Every municipality organises the burials in its own way, and several cities have established agreements with charities to make sure the funerals are as dignified as possible. Since 2004 in Paris, the Collective Les Morts de La Rue has had an agreement with Paris City Hall, to be made aware of homeless people's funerals and to make sure everyone has dignified burials.

The Genesis

In the early 2000s, social workers and people experiencing homelessness noticed the high number of homeless people's deaths in Paris. They had difficulties knowing when the burials would take place, to be present and pay homage. When the Collective was created in 2004, the founders received an agreement proposal from the Paris municipality: providing funeral assistance for isolated people. The Collective accepted for 2 reasons:

- To be informed of burial dates to try to contact those close to the deceased (family, friends, charities, etc),
- To ensure dignified burials, with personalised homage, for everybody.

Not all those isolated people had experienced homelessness. A large proportion of the people buried by the city were people living in retirement homes or apartments, but without family

members organising the funerals. However, agreeing to accompany those deaths was not only a civic gesture but also a source of information about homeless people's deaths.

How it Works

The Collective is informed by the morgue and the Paris Funeral Services a few days before the body of a deceased person, for whom public services have not found any relatives, is released.

Upon receiving the identity of the deceased, the relatives outreach team from the Collective searches for that person's loved ones (family, neighbours, friends, etc.). The first goal is to notify those who have not been informed of the death and to tell them the date and place of burial. The second reason is to collect details about the lives of the deceased from people who knew them, allowing volunteers to personalise and enrich the tribute they're preparing. The Collective reaches out to hospital administrative services, social services, charities, police stations, and building managers, as well as friends, ex-spouses, neighbours, neighbourhood shopkeepers, etc. Work that often proves fruitful and, when successful, means that relatives can be physically present or present through messages passed on to the volunteers.

The convoys are collective, and they take place on Tuesdays from the city morgue and from the mortuary chambers of the various Parisian hospitals on Wednesdays. The hearse carries four coffins at a time, but an individual time for remembrance is respected when transporting the body in the mortuary chamber and during the cemetery burial. Two volunteers from the Collective accompany each convoy. They are present at the morgue or at the hospital mortuary chambers to remember the deceased people and accompany the transportation of the body. They then go to the Thiais cemetery with the hearse and pay tribute to the person who died, during the burial. They read a text they have prepared or a poem and place a flower on the grave in the name of the Collective. In addition, a written record of the funeral is kept for each of the deceased persons, for families who sometimes only learn of the death afterwards. They can then be told what happened, which text was read, what flower was placed, what the weather was like, etc. It can help them with their grief. On another note, the Collective can be informed of any irregularities during the burial from those transcripts.

In the 2010's, the volunteers accompanied between 200 and 250 deceased people each year. Since 2020, the number of people accompanied by the Collective has risen sharply, from 242 in 2019 to 340 in 2020. This number has not been reduced since then. In 2025, volunteers from the Collective

paid tribute to 346 people, with 104 convoys. Of those 346 people, 110 had experienced homelessness during their lives. In half the cases, the Collective Les Morts de La Rue was able to contact some family members, friends, or charities.

The Evolution of this Action over the Years

The Collective Les Morts de la Rue has been carrying out this mission for over twenty years, with improvements possible thanks to feedback from the volunteers present at the burials, which was then shared with Paris City Hall.

Before this agreement between the Collective and the municipality, the convoys took place every Monday, and 8 people were buried the same day. No names were written on the graves, just numbers. It was not allowed to place flowers on the grave or to be present during the burials. The inequalities shocked and led social workers and people experiencing homelessness to call for action. In 2003, names were finally written on tombs. At the same time, the country experienced an intense heatwave that led to numerous deaths, especially among the elderly. Therefore, the municipality was confronted with a rising number of isolated people who had died. Then, a Deputy Mayor witnessed a burial, and this experience left a deep impression on her: the name was on a label, and the person's weight was written on the coffin to optimise the loading of the coffins into the hearse. With her help, actions were taken, and the Paris City Hall asked the Collective Les Morts de La Rue if they would consider being present at each burial of isolated people without relatives.

The Collective reflected not only on that offer, but also on how to organise secular funeral rituals and to ensure that those funerals were as dignified as any other funerals. A selection of secular readings was compiled. When volunteers started this mission, the deceased people they were accompanying were taken from the morgue to the hearse through a different exit from the one used for other deceased people. A call was made to change this. No moment of contemplation was scheduled at the morgue or at the hospitals for those who cannot go to the cemetery, but also no opportunity to pay tribute to those who died. At the time, gravediggers were dressed in work clothes. The Collective also asked not to have the weight written on the coffins and to have two convoys of four persons each, and not one convoy for eight persons.

Now, volunteers or relatives have a moment at the cemetery, but also where the body was brought after the death, to say a few words about the person. The hearse transports 4 people maximum. At the cemetery, gravediggers wear formal attire.

While these improvements are, in some cases, merely symbolic, they are important not only to close ones, but also to the professionals (grave-diggers for instance). By exchanging with professionals and by involving them to make sure the burials were as dignified as possible, it also gave greater meaning to their work and contributed to a more humane approach. The burials evolution for isolated people in Paris was developed in collaboration with the municipality. Paris is not a unique example of this cooperation in France, where other charities carry out similar work, sometimes for a longer time.

In conclusion, it is important to ensure that the inequalities affecting people in life do not continue after death.

Understanding Counts and Mortality Research



By **Magdalena Mostowska**, Researcher, University of Warsaw

Understanding how many people die while homeless is essential for evidence-based policy, but producing reliable mortality statistics is complex, involves data limitations, definitional ambiguities, and uncertainty. As a result, research findings are often cautious, difficult to interpret, and poorly translated into public debate, which can make the issue seem abstract or distant. In contrast, counts and tributes compiled by organisations - though incomplete - provide more emotional accounts of loss and can powerfully convey the scale and reality of homeless deaths. Rigorous statistical research and more personal forms of remembrance are complementary; they both serve roles in informing policy while preserving dignity and visibility.

On 17th October 2025, I went to Kielce, a medium-sized city in central Poland. It was grey and windy. A few dozen people gathered near the unremarkable building of the main station, covered in yellow limestone and blue glass panels. Behind a low hedge and in front of the kebab bar windows stood a 2.5m tall wooden cross. Traffic was bustling around as three men stood near the cross facing the gathering. One of them rolled out a simple piece of paper and read about twenty names. Those were the names of people who died last year on the streets of Kielce.

Back at home, I look at a picture of red roses on a pavement in memory of the 959 people who died homeless in France in 2025. I scroll through the names collected over 20 years by the Brussels Morts de la Rue collective. I see the Italian Federation of organisations reporting that the average age of people who died homeless in Italy was 46.3 years. I endlessly scroll through “unknowns” on the Museum of Homelessness Dying Homeless Project website, with small candles on a dark background. These real and online events look like memorials, but they are also reports from tedious, systematic work.

How do we even know how many people die while homeless? And why does it matter?

Of course, these numbers are crucial for evidence-based policies that rely on robust data, and that’s why scientists are careful with calculations. In scientific papers and reports, there are tables and charts; and it takes a while for me to understand what is even on them. Statistics can feel abstract. People’s lives are put into categories that seem distant from real experiences. This is, however, the nature of such studies - they usually operate with what authorities collect in public registers: personal numbers, addresses, housing assessments, doctor appointments, benefit claims, and causes of death. And, as in so many other homelessness experiences, much goes unrecorded. That’s because researchers rarely collect data on deaths themselves; they rely on registers or data from services. What is not there is out of sight - not because researchers are not looking, but because we are all trying not to see.

Measuring homeless mortality properly is hard because it requires large datasets, often with the possibility of linking various databases (for instance, population registers and

healthcare data), consistent definitions, long time series, and multiple variables. It is even difficult to decide which situations should be counted as homelessness. Mortality rates are not just tallies; the numerator is not enough. They also require denominators (for instance, how many people are homeless during a year) to understand not only how many people died, but what proportion of all people experiencing homelessness died during a year. They require comparison groups (for instance, the general population) to understand how the health of this group compares to others. The health part is also not easy: causes of death are coded according to the ICD-10 codebook, which contains hundreds of disease names that are difficult to pronounce.

Often, the nitty-gritty of calculations overwhelms the paper: some cases are excluded, cases are weighted, variables are missing, alternative models and hypotheses are tested, and results are adjusted. It involves making assumptions and therefore dealing with uncertainty. This is why mortality statistics are not straightforward; they acknowledge uncertainty and use hedging language that can make findings seem weak or unclear. Still, they reflect scientific caution and ethical responsibility. Research, however, has its own problems and biases—looking more for stark differences (for instance, between groups) than similarities, and focusing on “problems” rather than solutions.

Finally, research could allow public health experts and policymakers to understand homelessness as a factor in individual health trajectories, to assess links to other policies and services, to understand sequences of events, and to design policies that work. But more often than not, we only have counts compiled by non-profits, by activists who trace each media report, gather information from shelters, friends, and family, and put together annual tallies, memorial lists, and organise vigils. Even if their counts are incomplete and selective, they are nevertheless powerful and often make their point much better than standardised rates and odds ratios.

Mortality statistics, with their limitations and complications, do not find an easy way into the media and broader audiences. They may be misinterpreted and sensationalised.

Still, they can be a powerful argument for how detrimental homelessness is for health. With robust data, it is possible to convincingly show how

mental health, physical health, housing, and poverty are intertwined. Research results complement moral arguments with rational, hard data.

Organisations that take on the task of counting step in where authorities are blind and research may not be possible to conduct on a larger scale. But they also fight for dignified deaths and farewells, for remembering names, faces, and stories. They do what statistics cannot do: restore individuality and counter invisibility. In short, we need both: better data and thorough research, but also recognition, dignity, and memory.

Accompanying People Until the End: Caring for the Lives, Deaths, and Memories



By **Silvia Torralba**, Head of Communications, Arrels Fundació

Living on the street severely damages health, accelerates ageing and shortens lives. Drawing on the experience of Arrels Fundació in Barcelona, this article examines how people experiencing homelessness are supported through illness, end-of-life care and death. It argues that accompaniment must extend beyond healthcare to include dignity, personal choice, grief and remembrance. Public memorial practices also play a vital role in making visible lives too often erased from collective memory.

In the city of Barcelona, nearly 2,000 people are currently sleeping rough. Their daily lives, exposed to the elements, involve far more than simply lacking a roof over their heads: it means having lost resources, trust, safety, social ties, health, and rights. It is a situation of permanent strain that affects both the person and their health. When you live on the street, it is difficult to sleep and rest properly. You must remain constantly alert and keep moving in order to shower, eat and access basic services. You are more exposed to violence and less likely to seek medical care.

At Arrels, we know this because for four decades we have been supporting people experiencing homelessness and going out onto the streets of the city to meet them. We also know it because, over recent years, people themselves have shared their situations and needs with us through surveys.

On average, people sleeping rough in Barcelona are 43 years old and have spent 4 years and 5 months living on the streets. More than half struggle to rest during the day and are unable to eat hot meals; more than 80% have experienced physical and/or verbal violence; and many have no healthcare coverage beyond emergency services. Four in ten people living on the streets rate their health negatively, whereas among the city's population as a whole this figure does not exceed 20%.

The longer someone lives on the street, the more their health deteriorates and the faster ageing processes accelerate. In fact, people sleeping rough in Barcelona have an average life expectancy of 58 years – 25 years less than the rest of the city's residents.

When we talk about death and homelessness, we are not speaking only about the final days of life. We are speaking about life trajectories marked by exclusion, loss of rights and ongoing exhaustion that often accelerates processes of frailty. The people we support at Arrels experience the physical, cognitive, and emotional signs of ageing earlier in life. Many live with chronic illnesses, mental health problems, ongoing substance use, and cognitive deterioration that are often worsened by difficulties accessing and maintaining continuity of care within the healthcare system.

Support from Beginning to End

At Arrels, we build relationships with people living on the streets and accompany them from the moment we meet them until they pass away. Our model of care involves providing holistic support, respecting each person's pace and decisions, avoiding imposing choices on them and enabling them to decide for themselves until the very end.

We work from a harm reduction perspective, placing the person at the centre when supporting situations of fragile health and offering assistance in everyday matters so that they can maintain a certain degree of autonomy. We do this in many ways: for example, by fostering and supporting the relationship between the person and the healthcare system, helping with daily activities such as showering or remembering medication, respecting people's decisions during medical and recovery processes, visiting people in hospital or supporting those who move into residential care homes for older people.

With people we support directly on the streets, this becomes more difficult. However, when we can guarantee accommodation, support related to health and end-of-life care offers many more possibilities.

Having access to a stable accommodation facilitates rest, continuous access to healthcare and stronger relationships with professional support teams. It also allows us to address, more calmly, issues that often remain invisible when someone is living on the street: talking about what they would like to happen if their health deteriorates, whether they would like to say goodbye to someone or contact someone, or what they would like to happen to their belongings.

These are delicate, intimate, and profound conversations that form part of accompaniment and reflect a way of caring grounded in respect and in the right to make decisions about one's own life until the very end.

The Right to Be Remembered: sharing grief, raising awareness and making reality visible

The deaths of people experiencing homelessness whom we support at Arrels often come unexpectedly. Some people pass away after periods of deterioration during which we are able to be present and accompany them. Others die suddenly, due to illnesses not detected in time, situations of violence or the accumulated exhaustion caused by having to survive on the streets.

We never tire of saying that having to live on the street is not normal — and dying on the street even less so. When this happens, our feelings of helplessness and injustice are immense. Even more so when the death

is classified as “natural causes”. It is difficult to speak of a natural death when someone has spent years living on the streets, in extreme conditions, without basic rights and exposed to violence and the elements.

At Arrels, staff and volunteers try to ensure that end-of-life support is not focused solely on death itself, but also on how the person has been able to live through this final stage of life. Despite the fragility of the situation, we want them to have experienced moments of safety, to have had someone by their side, and for their wishes and rights to have been acknowledged.

For us, accompanying someone in death means maintaining until the very end the relationship we built with that person. We do this in hospitals and recovery centres, in housing or care homes, and directly on the streets.

The solitary funeral of someone we had accompanied during their lifetime deeply affected us and led us to create internal protocols to ensure this would never happen again. Because everyone has the right to be buried and mourned in the company of others.

In this context, 2009 marked a turning point for Arrels in supporting people experiencing homelessness at the end of their lives in Barcelona.

Over time, and inspired by other European initiatives, we realised that this grief also needed to be shared collectively and that this reality had to be made visible. Since 2016, every autumn we have organised a public memorial to remember the people experiencing homelessness who died during the previous year and to denounce the fact that having to live on the streets damages health and shortens lives.

We hold the memorial in a central square in the city. We place a pair of shoes for each person we remember and read out their full names; there is also music and white roses in remembrance. It is an open, community-based space that brings together people experiencing homelessness, volunteers and staff from Arrels, social organisations from across the city, and members of the public. It is at once a tribute, a space for mourning, and an act of denunciation.

Why is this so important to us? Because there are usually no farewell rituals for people who have lived on the streets. Relationships with family

and social networks have often been broken, and there are no spaces in which to share grief and dignity. That is why we defend the right to be remembered as a right that is too often violated.

Over the past ten years, we have publicly remembered more than 600 people who had experienced homelessness in Barcelona and who have since then passed away. These are deaths we could not prevent, but we have tried to ensure that they do not disappear into oblivion and that they continue to challenge us as a society.

Remembering people experiencing homelessness who have died means asking ourselves how we want to care for one another as a society and what it means that someone grows old and dies as a consequence of life on the streets.

No one should die homeless and alone. Nor should anyone die without being remembered.

From Local Data Collection to a National Network

Insights into national-level data collection and coordination on homelessness and mortality in Italy



By **Caterina Cortese**, Social Policy and Research Officer, fio.PSD ETS & **Maddalena Floriana Grassi**, Social Policy and Research Officer, fio.PSD ETS & **Fabio Tesser**, Social Worker, Cooperativa La Esse

The article describes the origin and development of Italy's national monitoring system for deaths among people experiencing homelessness. Starting as an individual initiative by a worker at the social cooperative La Esse in Treviso – who collected local news reports to give a name and a story to those who died on the street – the project gradually grew into a national programme managed by fio.PSD from 2021.

In Italy, extreme poverty claims victims all year round. Since 2021, fio.PSD – the Italian Federation of Organisations working with people experiencing homelessness – has been publishing an annual report documenting deaths among people experiencing homelessness across the country. The initiative, known as “La strage invisibile” (annual report on deaths among people experiencing homelessness in Italy), draws on local news monitoring and reports from member organisations to build a picture of a phenomenon that is both structural and persistently underestimated.

The data collected are not a formal statistical survey. They represent, in the Federation's own words, an estimate of a broader phenomenon that remains largely hidden. And yet, what emerges year after year is striking in its consistency: this is not a seasonal emergency. It is a chronic, nationwide crisis.

The 2025 Data: A Persistent Crisis

In 2025, fio.PSD recorded 415 deaths of people experiencing homelessness in Italy – a figure broadly in line with 2024 (434) and 2023 (415), confirming that annual fatalities have stabilised above the threshold of 400. Behind that number are individual lives lost across 235 municipalities, from major metropolitan centres to small provincial towns.

Monthly deaths ranged from 21 to 44, with higher concentrations in winter and spring (226 deaths combined). Yet the summer and autumn months also registered significant figures, driven by heatwaves, chronic health conditions, accidents, and barriers to healthcare access. The data challenge a persistent public misconception: that homeless deaths are primarily a cold-weather problem.

The profile of those who died reflects deep structural vulnerabilities. Men accounted for 91.5% of them. More than half (56.5%) were foreign nationals, predominantly from non-European countries – particularly Morocco and Tunisia, with a growing presence of people from South Asia, especially Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. Italian citizens represented 29% of the total, a slight increase on the previous year.

The most sobering figure is the average age at death: 46.3 years. Against Italy's national life expectancy of over 81 years, this represents a gap of more than three decades – a stark measure of what life on the street does to the human body and mind.

Geographically, the North accounts for the largest share of deaths: 29% in the North-West and 19.7% in the North-East. The Centre follows at 26%, the South at 17%, and the Islands at 8.3%. Lombardy recorded the highest regional total with 78 deaths. Lazio came second with 60, followed by Veneto, Tuscany and Campania. Rome recorded 36 deaths within the city limits and 48 across the wider province, making it the single deadliest location in Italy. Milan, Bergamo, Turin, and Naples also registered significant numbers.

Critically, only 40.5% of deaths occurred in Italy's 14 metropolitan cities. The majority – around 60% – took place in smaller provincial contexts, many of which lack adequate services. This challenges the assumption that severe adult marginalisation is exclusively an urban problem.

Where and Why People Die

The places where bodies were found reveal the material conditions of life on the margins. In 34% of cases, deaths occurred in public spaces – streets, parks, open urban areas. These are visible places, but offer no protection, shelter or immediate assistance. A further 23% of deaths occurred in improvised shelters: shacks, abandoned buildings, makeshift structures that offer a semblance of refuge but none of the safety or hygiene of proper housing.

A notable 15% of deaths involved drowning – an indicator of the dangerous proximity to uncontrolled natural and urban environments that characterises many homeless lives.

As for causes of death, 42% were attributed to sudden illness or underlying health conditions. These are not simply individual medical failures: they are the predictable outcome of years without access to regular healthcare, late-stage diagnoses, no preventive care, and the impossibility of adhering to treatment. Conditions that would be manageable in a housed person become lethal on the street.

A nearly equal share – 40% – of deaths resulted from traumatic or accidental causes: assaults, accidents and suicides. For context, Italy's national statistics show that the general population dies from external causes in only 4% of cases. The disproportion is not incidental. Street life exposes people to dramatically elevated levels of risk: physical violence, dangerous environments, profound social isolation and acute psychological stress.

The data make clear that the street does not merely reflect pre-existing vulnerability – it amplifies it, turning manageable health problems, ordinary accidents and emotional crises into fatal events.

How the Monitoring System Was Built

The system that now underpins Italy's national data collection on deaths of homeless people began not as a policy initiative, but as one educator's response to grief.

While working in Treviso for the social cooperative La Esse on projects with people experiencing homelessness, a recurring and disturbing pattern emerged: people were dying on the street and disappearing without a trace – without a name, without a story, without any collective memory of their existence. The question was not only how many people were living without a home, but how many were dying, and under what circumstances.

The first attempts at data collection were entirely informal and involved monitoring local news sources daily, using keyword alerts to intercept stories that would otherwise remain scattered across dozens of local outlets.

Reports from social media and informal communications between street workers added further fragments. Alongside the numbers, the aim was to reconstruct brief accounts of the final hours of those who had died – a minimum act of recognition, an attempt to restore some dignity to people who had fallen through every institutional net.

This approach drew inspiration from comparable experiences abroad, notably the “Collectif Les Morts de la Rue” in France and the Homeless Persons' Memorial Day in the United States. In Italy, an early public moment came with “La Notte dei Senza Dimora” – the first edition of which was held in Treviso on 17 October 2011 – which opened connections to other organisations working on the ground.

Over time, informal contacts between individual practitioners evolved into a broader network. Organisations across the country began contributing their own local knowledge, integrating media sources with direct field experience. This combination improved not only coverage, but also the quality and accuracy of individual case reconstructions.

The pivotal transition came in 2021, when fio.PSD formally incorporated the project into its national work. The shift from an individual initiative to a coordinated system required shared agreement on criteria, tools, and methods. A standardised reporting form was developed to allow

consistent data collection across different contexts. Over successive iterations, the form was expanded to include information about service contact history, housing arrangements in the final period of life, and indicators of health or social vulnerability. This allowed the data to move beyond raw counts toward a more nuanced understanding of individual trajectories and systemic failures.

One significant methodological development was the integration of data from the Ministry of the Interior on unidentified deceased persons. Including this category brought to light the most extreme cases: individuals who, after dying, remained nameless for months – or permanently – and were buried without identification. This is marginalisation in its most absolute form, where the absence of a home coincides with total erasure from social and institutional existence. The choice to include these cases in the monitoring is both a methodological and an ethical one.

The system continues to evolve. Challenges remain in sustaining the engagement of local organisations, improving data completeness, and developing better tools for public reporting. An interactive map, updated in real time, is now available on the fio.PSD website. But the work is unfinished – and the questions it raises, about how to intercept, understand, and narrate the deaths of homeless people, remain as urgent as ever.

From Emergency Response to Structural Change

The evidence accumulated over five years points clearly toward one conclusion: emergency measures alone are insufficient. Winter cold-weather plans – temporary shelter expansions, strengthened outreach units – are essential and save lives. But deaths occur across all twelve months, and the numbers are not declining.

What is needed is a shift in approach: from emergency response to prevention; from a repair-based model to a housing-led system in which stable, dignified accommodation is the starting point for recovery, not its end goal. The Housing First model, which provides permanent housing without preconditions and builds support services around a stable home, has demonstrated consistent results in international and national programmes alike. Over the past decade, more than 70 Housing First programmes run by fio.PSD member organisations have housed over 1,700 people.

Current policy frameworks offer some grounds for cautious optimism. Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan includes an investment in temporary housing (Investment 1.3) targeting 3,000 people across 265 projects by 2026. The National Inclusion Plan (2021–2027) allocates

€830 million to interventions addressing severe adult marginalisation, including Housing First. The Poverty Fund directs €5 million per year specifically to Housing First programmes.

But housing is not the only answer – particularly in the context of a broader national housing crisis. Parallel investment is needed in proximity services, integrated social and healthcare provision, early intervention, and workforce development. The goal is to intercept vulnerability before it becomes chronic, and to ensure that a person's experience of poverty does not have to end on a street, in an abandoned building, or in an unmarked grave.

Every number in the annual report represents a life. Making those lives visible is, in itself, an act of resistance against the systems and circumstances that made them invisible.

Tributes collected at the FEANTSA Forum 2026 in Warsaw

By **Various Contributors**

A working session took place on 18 May in Warsaw during the FEANTSA Forum 2026. Fourteen participants attended a short presentation on practices for honouring people who have died while experiencing homelessness. They were then invited to write, draw, or create something by hand in memory of a person they had supported and who has since passed away.

At the end of the session, participants could choose to take their creation with them or leave it with us to be shared here.

This article is a reminder that remembering and honouring those who have passed is made up of small, simple gestures—something modest, yet deeply meaningful.

Dear Feri,

When you died two weeks ago, in your room that you shared with 3 other men in the homeless shelter. I gave chest compressions for you, for like half an hour.

You've been dead for an hour at least as the doctor said.

I didn't know it, I just found you in your bed.

You were listening to your headphones, the radio I supposed.

You were so light, so pale, so fragile, like a sparrow about to fly away.

I broke your rib, I'm afraid.

The dent on your chest was so rude and impolite.

I'm really sorry, I mean it.

All the people have witnesses in their lives.

Some have less.

Some have just a few.

I'm so thankful that I could have been your witness.

Anonymous



“Nameless”

Words, Names, Stories,
Cluster of letters on a tombstone.
Flowers, candles, memories.
Family souvenirs.
You’ve got your mother’s eyes.
Injustice overflows words
That try to hug them.
I hope death can be kinder
Than Life.

My privileges are voices
That I could hear.
My loss are histories
I will never know.
IN MEMORY OF ALL WHO ARE GONE.
MAY THE WORDS CARRY
YOUR HISTORIES FURTHER.

Agata Gołabek

Ni eve oblike, ni prave in
Ne prave barve, svet je
Mavrica. Nisi sam.

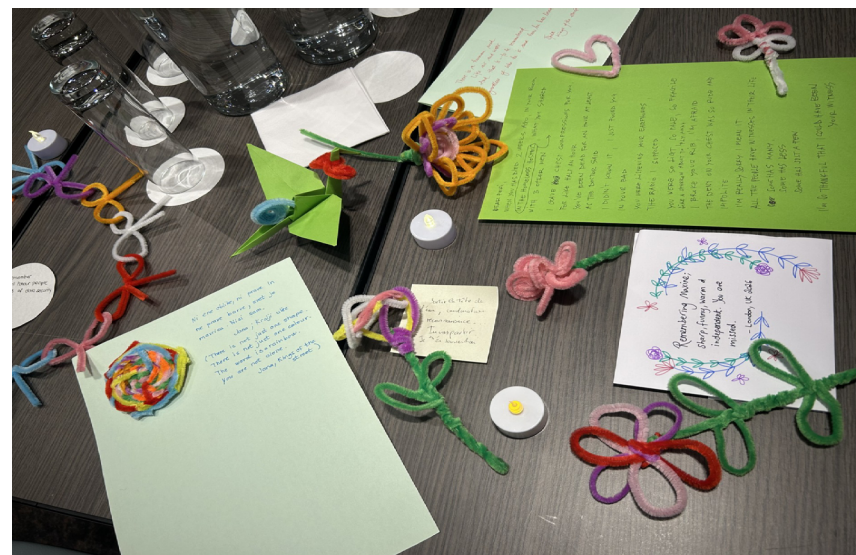
(There is not just one shape. There is not just one colour.
The world is a rainbow. You are not alone).

Jana, Kings of the Street

Remembering Maxine;
Sharp, funny, warm & independent. You are missed.
- London, UK 2026

Remember and honour people in times of data security.

There is a human need.
Like air and water.
And that is – to be remembered.
Regardless of who he is and how he has lived.
Spela, Kings of the Street



Remembering Through Images and Texts: Other Artistic Contributions

By **Various Contributors**

Memory is expressed through complementary artistic forms: a book created by the loved ones of Florian Vasseur, gathering personal texts and reflections, and the Monument of Indifference by the Czech Platform for Social Housing, a sculptural work placed in public space. Together, they offer two ways of remembering—one intimate and written, the other collective and material.

Florian Vasseur Remembered by his Loved Ones

Published in April 2025 by Mémoirédition, “*Florian Vasseur: vagabond extraordinaire (extraordinary wanderer) 1998–2025*” is a tribute book dedicated to the life and memory of Florian Vasseur, who died in 2025 at the age of 27.

Compiled by Philippe Vasseur and Zoé Choupeaux, with contributions from Alex Aubry, Rachel Lhermite, Cyrille Fradot and Junior, the book brings together excerpts from Florian’s writings and poems alongside memories shared by those who knew him best.

The volume opens with a foreword by Florian’s mother, Nathalie Vasseur:

“Today, and throughout my life, I would like to say thank you. Thank you for the sharp, sometimes cynical view you had of our society.”

Through the contributions of family, friends and loved ones, the book preserves Florian’s words and memories, offering a collective tribute to his life on the margins and his legacy.

Florian Vasseur created and published numerous works during his life, and we would like to present a poem from his collection “*Mâchoires Sombres*”, and a drawing entitled “*Vénus Noire*”.

**Je ressens
I feel**

Je sens maintenant ce sang qui coule dans mes veines
I now feel this blood flowing through my veins

Que ma vie commence enfin !
Let my life finally begin!

J’ai pleuré sur des tombes oxydées par le temps
I have wept over graves corroded by time

Que ma vie commence s’il vous plaît !
Please, let my life begin!

Je sens la vie, et aussi la mort
I feel life, and also death

Je ressens mes sens
I feel my senses

Je m’éveille seul
I awaken alone

Au seuil du suicide
On the threshold of suicide

Je crois tout régler avec des textes
I believe I can resolve everything with words

Tout ce monde est mauvais
This whole world is cruel

Noir c'est noir
Black is black

Noir sur du noir
Black upon black

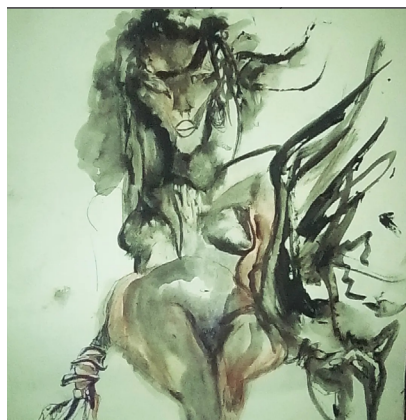
Noir tard le soir
Black late at night

Que ma vie commence
Let my life begin

Je ferai tout pour la chérir
I will do everything to cherish it

Offrez-la-moi s'il vous plaît
Please, grant it to me

Attendez-moi !
Wait for me!



Vénus noire (Black Venus) by Florian Vasseur is inspired by a graphic novel about Charles Baudelaire (an adaptation of the novel Crénom, Baudelaire! by Jean Teulé). The painting depicts Jeanne, the poet's lover and muse.

The Monument of Indifference by the Czech Platform for Social Housing

According to [a new analysis](#) of deaths among people experiencing homelessness in the Czech Republic, published by the Czech Platform for Social Housing, people with experience of homelessness die on average 16 years earlier than the general population.

In response, the organisation has chosen to draw attention to this issue, and more broadly to the need for a systemic response, through the creation of the *Monument of Indifference* (*Pomník lhostejnosti*). The monument serves as a permanent reminder that many people experiencing homelessness die in undignified conditions, in part because of systemic neglect.

The monument was created by academic sculptor Jakub Janovský. It takes the form of a subtle concrete sculpture of a pillow, shaped as though someone had been lying on it moments before their death. Through this work, the intention is to leave a lasting trace in public space and to commemorate those whom society has forgotten.



It is deliberately located near Prague's Main Railway Station, an area where many people experiencing homelessness reside. At the same time, its position in the city centre highlights the stark contrast between the wealth and historical grandeur of central Prague and the ongoing reality of poverty and social exclusion that continues to contribute to premature deaths among vulnerable populations. The exact location of the monument is 50°04'53.3"N 14°26'01.5"E.

The *Monument of Indifference* was unveiled on 16 June. The Platform for Social Housing intends to organise an annual gathering at the site on World Homeless Day, 10 October, to present key measures aimed at ending homelessness in the Czech Republic.

Before the Collective existed, people didn't die; they simply disappeared

By Collectif Les Morts de la Rue / Straatdoden Brussels

“Before the Collective existed, people didn't die; they simply disappeared”

Tuesday, 2 pm, at a day centre open to homeless people in the morning for coffee, a cloakroom, a launderette, a social support service, and so on.

In the afternoon, the centre operates by appointment, so it's quieter and we can use one of the rooms. We are the Brussels Street Deaths Collective. There are about fifteen of us who meet up every first Tuesday of the month. We share coffee, fruit, biscuits, catch up on each other's news, and celebrate Twelfth Night, birthdays, and so on.

Our meetings always begin by discussing the deaths we've heard of since the last meeting. On average, we hear of six to seven deaths a month. How were the funerals handled? How did they go? Were we informed in good time? Was the timetable adhered to? Did we have time for a ceremony? By attending funerals organised by local authorities, we see what is wrong: unmarked graves, inappropriate behaviour, timetables not being followed, and so on. And we take action. When we identify areas for improvement, we regularly request meetings with officials from the local authorities or cemeteries (there are 19 in the Brussels region). We meet with hospital services, social workers, cemetery staff and police services.

Then, inspired by these deaths, other ideas come to mind: a notebook in which people living in precarious circumstances could write down their last wishes; painting pebbles to place on graves in the cemetery; taking part in various events; watching a film together; putting on a show; and even a celebratory evening to mark our 20th anniversary.

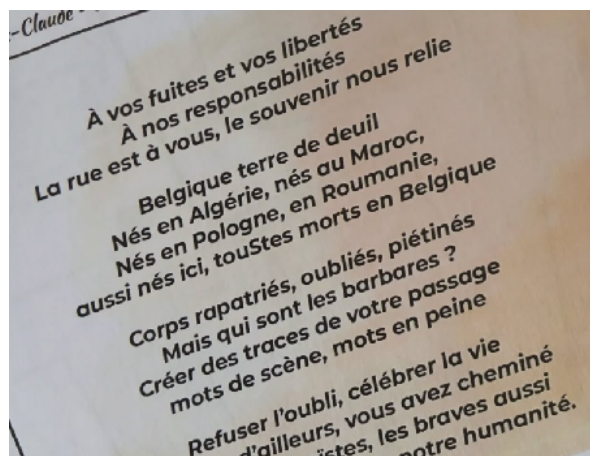
These deaths are what bring us together. They affect us personally (we are citizens, social workers, artists, people who have experienced life on the streets; who have lost friends, parents, and brothers, from living on the streets). Most of us came into contact with the Collective following a death and subsequently wished to get involved. Coming together around these deaths is an opportunity to take action, to move beyond sadness and anger. To reclaim these issues. The dead spur us into action.

We identify strongly with the ideas of the Belgian philosopher Vinciane Despret, who believes that *“the dead can help the liv-*

ing to transform the world” (*Les morts à l’oeuvre*, Editions La Découverte, 2023). On an individual level, we do not forget them so that their deaths are not in vain.

But it is also an opportunity to come together as a collective. To ensure that these farewells are not just for isolated individuals, but involve civil society, transforming an individual tragedy into an act of collective and political solidarity. To learn, or relearn, how to listen to one another. To hear others’ realities. To imagine solutions. To organise, come together, and forge connections. To make decisions, together. To imagine and experience the collective. To experiment with democracy. But also, to look after one another, ourselves, and the group.

We also keep these deceased alive in the public space through the Street Tree of the Dead, a living monument planted right in the city centre. We gather there to read poems and chant the names of those whose deaths we learned of the previous year. We hang objects in memory of each of these people (80 in 2026). Objects made during art workshops in a night shelter.



Poetry plays an important role in our collective. In Belgium, a politician recently said that our country should be run by engineers, not poets. We see on a daily basis how the world—and in this case, death—functions when it is managed solely according to an ‘engineering’ logic: schedules, efficiency, profitability, timesaving, and so on. Like that person buried an hour early to fill a gap in a schedule; those graves left unmarked for several months because the screws needed to attach the nameplates to the crosses were missing; those ceremonies held around a grave that

had already been closed because the schedules hadn’t allowed time for a ceremony...

In the face of this, we offer resistance through our actions. For us, slowness, gentleness, care, the pursuit of beauty, connections, creativity – all of these things that take time, and which have shaped our civilisation – are our priorities. The work of our Collective also serves to curb systemic and institutional violence, thereby protecting the bereaved from some of this violence.

For the past fifteen years or so, a poem has been written in memory of every person whose passing we learned of, and these poems are read out at the ceremony we organise every spring. In recent years, these poems have been written during writing workshops by anyone who wishes to take part. Writing is a skill that can be discovered and practised at any age, and poetry is an accessible art form. It allows us to highlight the beauty or ugliness of the world, to speak out, to play with words. These workshops are co-led by a ‘street poet’ and bring together up to 10 people. The poems are then read aloud by several voices during the annual ceremony.

To celebrate its 20th anniversary, the collective organised one of its “gesticulated evenings”. Six people involved in the collective undertook training, then shared “gesticulated anecdotes” – a blend of theatre and lecture, of lived experience and academic knowledge, of theory and personal stories – to recount their experiences of life on the streets, of poverty and dignity, and of facing death, without taboos, in a packed theatre. This allowed us to reach an audience that is usually far removed from our realities, and in an unexpected way.

In conclusion:

Twenty years after its founding, the ‘Collectif *Les Morts de la Rue, Brussels*’ demonstrates that remembrance is a political act. Through our presence, our demands on the authorities and the telling of our life stories, we force society to face the reality of life on the streets. These “dead who spur us into action” compel us: they bring us together as a united collective, transforming personal grief into a collective struggle for dignity.

Before You Leave: Six Recommendations to Improve Policy and Practice

By **Various Contributors**

These recommendations were developed collectively during a workshop at the FEANTSA Forum 2026. Several contributors to this magazine (Magdalena, Gill, Adèle, Floriana, Arnaud) came together to reflect on practical and achievable ways to improve how homelessness services, public authorities and communities respond to the deaths of people experiencing homelessness.

1. Ensure that all deaths of people experiencing homelessness are recorded and monitored

All deaths of people experiencing homelessness should be systematically recorded through a clear local or national mechanism led by public authorities or designated agencies. NGOs and frontline services should be encouraged to notify relevant authorities when a death occurs, particularly where no formal process exists. Recording deaths should not only serve statistical purposes but also ensure that no one dies anonymously or without acknowledgement.

2. Investigate homeless deaths to understand systemic failures and prevent future deaths

Public authorities should investigate deaths of people experiencing homelessness – particularly premature deaths, deaths in public spaces, violent deaths, and drug-related deaths – not primarily as criminal cases, but as opportunities to understand what led to these situations and which support systems or safety nets failed. Such investigations can help identify systemic gaps, improve prevention policies, and ensure that every person's life and death are recognised and understood.

3. Strengthen coordination and awareness across relevant public services

Local governments should strengthen coordination between homelessness services, healthcare providers, hospitals, police, coroners, ministries, and other relevant actors to ensure more dignified and effective responses when deaths occur. Awareness and understanding of homelessness should be improved across these sectors so that responsibilities are clearer, communication is better, and people experiencing homelessness are treated with dignity throughout all public systems.

4. Integrate mortality prevention, end-of-life care, and dignity into homelessness strategies

Preventing homelessness remains one of the most effective ways to prevent avoidable deaths. Still, the prevention of deaths among people experiencing homelessness should also be explicitly integrated into local and national homelessness strategies. This should include access to healthcare, harm

reduction, mental health support, protection from violence, overdose prevention, and appropriate palliative and end-of-life care, while ensuring dignity and accompaniment when death cannot be prevented.

5. Create spaces for remembrance and tribute

Cities and homelessness organisations should create collective spaces to honour and remember people who died while experiencing homelessness, including regular memorial events organised in partnership with NGOs, local authorities, peers, and communities. These collective moments of remembrance can also complement smaller tributes or commemorative practices organised by services and communities each time a person dies, ensuring that every individual is acknowledged with dignity and humanity.

6. Prepare clear protocols and support mechanisms following a death

Homelessness services should prepare clear protocols and support mechanisms to guide staff and service users when a death occurs, rather than responding on an ad hoc basis during moments of crisis. Services should recognise the emotional impact, grief, frustration, and trauma that these events can create for frontline workers, peers, and communities, and provide appropriate spaces for reflection, emotional support, and collective processing.

Cover image:
Museum of Homelessness, United Kingdom, 2022.
Image credit: Anthony Luvera



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