

Homelessness among mobile EU citizens: new data from four European cities

Over the last decade, FEANTSA has worked to protect the rights of destitute mobile EU citizens, as their presence in the homeless populations of numerous cities in Europe was observed, including within the homeless service providers who are FEANTSA members. After an initial phase of documentation developed under the project Protecting the Rights of Destitute EU Mobile Citizens (PRODEC) between 2017 - 2019¹, we noticed a lack of comprehensive and comparable data on the situation of destitute citizens living in an EU country different from theirs.

To address this gap in information, FEANTSA initiated a data collection process in four European cities in the second phase of PRODEC (2019 – 2021).² Joining us in this effort, our members at DIOGENES³, Bruss'help⁴, Arrels Fundacio, Bischof-Hermann-Stiftung⁵ and Crossroads (Stockholms Stadsmission)⁶ worked over the past two years to investigate closer the living situations of destitute and homeless mobile EU citizens. Our common aim is to increase the knowledge on this topic and to put it on the public agendas of the European and national institutions, while raising awareness on the factors that push and maintain mobile EU citizens in destitution.

On the **9th of December 2021**, an online infosession was hosted by FEANTSA in partnership with the 5 organisations which worked on the data collection and analysis: **Bruss'help and DIOGENES** (Brussels, Belgium), **Crossroads Stockholms Stadsmission** (Stockholm, Sweden), **Bischof-Hermann-Stiftung** (Münster, Germany), and **Arrels Fundació** (Barcelona, Spain). A number of around 95 attendees joined from different countries. Three guest speakers took part in the event – **Patricija Kezele**, Seconded National Expert, Information and EURES Unit (European Labour Authority), **Dominique Be**, Policy Officer at DG EMPL (European Commission) and **Maria Czechowicz**, Vice-Consul of the Republic of Poland in Brussels.

¹ More information can be found [here](#). The PRODEC project is financially supported by EPIM, the European Programme for Integration and Migration.

² More information can be found [here](#).

³ Diogenes is an organisation which works in Brussels since 1995, supporting people in homelessness with street work and housing inclusion.

⁴ Bruss'help is the organisation responsible, among other things, for coordinating homeless services in the Brussels-Capital Region.


⁵ The Bischof-Herman Foundation is a private church foundation providing numerous services, ranging from direct access to emergency accommodation, to specialised services for homeless people in need of care, older people with a history of homelessness or people with mental health needs. Through the Europa.Brücke.Münster project, the BHS focuses on mobile EU citizens in precarious living circumstances and/or homelessness.

⁶ Crossroads is a department of the Stockholms Stadsmission in Sweden working to support European citizens and third country nationals who live in conditions of social or economic vulnerability.

The event was opened by FEANTSA’s team, who explained the objective of the PRODEC project and of the meeting, which is *to create a sense of urgency at European political level on the topic of homelessness among mobile EU citizens*. The first session of presentations was opened by an overview of the demographic data in the four surveyed cities, followed by introductions of the representatives of each organisation.

Data collection 2020 - 2021

DIOGENES and Bruss’help (Brussels)
Stockholms Stadsmission (Stockholm)
BISCHOF-HERMANN-STIFTUNG (Münster)
Arrels Fundació (Barcelona)



	No of respondents	Age	Gender*	Nationality
Brussels	314	(n: 230) 23% between 40-49 25.7% between 50-59 13% between 60-69	63.7% men 36.3% women	46.2% Romania 32.8% Poland 3.5% Slovakia 3.2% France
Stockholm	51	31% between 40-49 23.5% between 50-59 23.5% between 30-39 12% between 18-29 10% over 60	78% men 22% women	49% Romania 20% Poland 20% Italy** 11% other
Münster	100	32% between 29-38 25% between 39-48 18% between 49-58 16% between 19-28	56% women 44% men	59% Bulgaria 15% Romania 9% Slovakia
Barcelona	99	24% between 36-45 24% between 46-55 19% between 56-65 18% between 26-35	85% men 11% women 4% other/NA	ND

* important to point out that homeless women in general are more likely to stay with family and friends (hidden homelessness)

** (n: 7) of the Italian nationals explained that they had acquired Italian citizenship after having moved to Italy from a third country.

The first presentation came from Brussels, with **Mauro Striano, Advisor at Bruss’help, explaining the main findings of the report on data from 314 mobile EU citizens experiencing homelessness and accompanied by DIOGENES in 2020**. Mauro underlined that a clear outcome of the analysis showed many EU citizens had difficulties obtaining an address in Brussels (more than 50% of the respondents did not have one), which is needed to register in a Belgian municipality. This makes it impossible to have a residence permit (63.1% of the respondents were irregularly residing) and to access services like employment support or a bank account. The lack of an address and all its consequences has a negative impact on the living conditions of the people interviewed: while 50% of those irregularly residing who were accompanied by DIOGENES slept rough, this was only the case for 10% of those with a residence permit. In terms of receiving a legal income or having medical insurance, this difference was even starker: while almost none of those irregularly residing had neither a legal source of income nor full medical insurance, this was the case for less than 20% of those with a residence permit.

Andréa Poulieva, Research and Development Officer at DIOGENES continued the presentation for Brussels and added that out of all the homeless mobile EU citizens supported by DIOGENES in 2020, 56% of them had been living in Belgium for at least 5 years and from these, more than a half still did not have a residence permit. She then underlined the link between residence status and access to rights, which leads to a vicious circle comprising lack of income, housing, address and jobs. To break this circle, DIOGENES initiated the project **ISSUE**, which consists of settling people for at least 6 months in empty buildings, which allows them to obtain an address and thus to unblock administrative procedures, apart from being a temporary rest for people having slept rough. Finally, Andréa suggested some recommendations for a more social EU: access to rights regardless of administrative status, social protection in the host Member State (MS) or portability of rights from one MS to another.

Maurizio Dogliotti, Legal Expert, presented their survey with destitute mobile EU citizens accompanied by Crossroads, the service for migrants of Stockholms Stadsmission. He focused on one issue they frequently encounter among the people they support, which is the lack of access to rights for jobseekers. Maurizio explained how, according to the ruling C-292/89 of the EU Court of Justice⁷, a mobile EU citizen looking for a job in the host MS is entitled to an unconditional right of residence for the first 6 months. After that, the right of residence will be kept if the citizen has genuine chances of getting employed and if s/he provides evidence of seeking employment. However, the Swedish Aliens Act imposes this condition also during the first 6 months, contrary to the ruling. At the same time, the Swedish Population Registration Act states that to be registered an applicant must prove to have the right of residence for at least 1 year, which is almost impossible to demonstrate for vulnerable mobile EU citizens. This ‘one-year rule’ affects both jobseekers and workers, given that destitute mobile EU citizens tend to work (if they do) with temporary contracts of less than 1 year. The combined effect of these two Acts means that for most of the people Crossroads work with, it is impossible to obtain registration in Sweden and thus a social security number, restricting their access to most of public and private services.

Stefanie Beckmann, social counsellor, presented the main findings of the Bischof-Hermann-Stiftung survey of 100 destitute mobile EU citizens in Münster. She focused on the access of the respondents to the labour market and education. Regarding the former, only 60% of them were employed at the time of the interview: 18% with a full-time contract, 27% with a part-time one and 55% with a “mini-job”. “Mini-jobs” are contracts with a salary of a maximum of 450€ for which the employers do not pay health or social security contributions. Even if this kind of contracts can be a first step into the labour market and give access to welfare benefits, problems may be encountered when trying to register with this type of contract as a “worker” and to access healthcare or unemployment benefits, since it is up to the employee to pay these contributions (within the 450€ salary). Regarding education, the number of interviewees who cannot read or write was high, and only 38% of them had a good knowledge of German (according to their self-assessment). In the case of children, only 50% of those aged between 3 and 6 years old went to ‘kita’ (a non-mandatory ‘kindergarten’ for children below 6), which was very useful for parents working or looking for a job. For the other half, they could not attend a ‘kita’ because of homelessness, e.g. their family shelter was located in a district very far from the nearest ‘kita’.

Closing the first session of the event, **Beatriz Fernández, Head of the juridical care team from Arrels Fundació, focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the 99 mobile EU citizens they interviewed.** 40% of the respondents said that their situation worsened because of the pandemic, while only 9% stayed in shelters and 54% had never had a COVID-19 test at the time of the interview. Accessing jobs or other sources of income was the main issue reported, together with the closure of services for homeless people and public spaces in general. Many people working in precarious conditions or in the black market in Spain were fired when lockdown was imposed, putting their housing situation at risk and becoming homeless in many cases. As a conclusion, Beatriz highlighted that the pandemic only exacerbated the existing vulnerability of people in homelessness, in the health, social, administrative or accommodation aspects. She closed the first part of the infossession by claiming that it is necessary to find a way to provide access to full rights to mobile EU citizens in homelessness.

⁷ The full ruling is available [here](#).



During the second part of the event the guest speakers had brief interventions and an exchanged views under the moderation of Ruth Owen, Deputy Director at FEANTSA.

Dominique Be, Policy Officer at DG EMPL (European Commission) gave an overview of the situation of mobile EU citizens according to data collected by Eurostat, explaining that most of mobile EU citizens are nationals of Southern and Eastern European countries. Dominique compared the data from countries such as Romania, Italy, Poland and Portugal with the effectiveness of their national welfare systems, measured with the at-risk-of-poverty rates before and after social transfers. Thus, he concluded that mobility to another MS is explained not only by seeking employment, but also to escape from situations of poverty, destitution, or poor housing conditions in the home countries. Finally, he explained that the European Commission will present the new guidelines on the Free Movement Directive 2004/38/EC in 2022, which will address the main implementation issues identified in the past years. He underlined that these new guidelines should be accompanied by reforms in the education, employment, housing and social policies in the host and home countries to better support mobile EU citizens in need.

Patricija Kezele, Seconded National Expert at the Information and EURES Unit of the European Labour Authority (ELA) introduced us to the main activities carried out by ELA since its establishment in 2019. These included supporting MS to better enforce their labour legislation, organising the exchange of information between MS on labour issues, promoting the available European services in this area, providing analysis and risk assessments on intra-EU mobility, or supporting MS in capacity building, social security coordination or joint inspections, among other activities. Some of these can be linked to the prevention of homelessness, such as the campaigns to tackle undeclared work. Secondly, Patricija explained the role of the EURES service to solve the lack of information when citizens move to another MS, or to support job placements across EU countries. This service is available for every European regardless of their residence status and it includes a network of one thousand advisors in all EU languages, who are available in social media, by telephone or by e-mail. To conclude, Patricija underlined that ELA works to support fair and safe labour mobility, and by doing so it tries to prevent situations of destitution and homelessness among mobile EU citizens.

Closing the second session was **Maria Czechowicz, Vice-Consul at the Consular Section of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Brussels**. The Embassy of Poland in Brussels supports Polish nationals experiencing homelessness in Brussels in several ways. Firstly, by issuing a passport or an identity document for those who need it, which allows people to access several medical services and social assistance, to legalise their stay or to prove their identity. Secondly, the Embassy can organise returns to Poland if the person wants to and s/he has no other support means. Thirdly, they organise returns with the help of NGOs and social workers, who oversee the cases and are better equipped to provide the right support. The Consulate can also provide with food and other basic materials to shelters and NGOs working in Belgium with Polish nationals in need. Since the help the Consulate can offer is limited, they prioritise returns to Poland when the person wants to, after being sure s/he can access welfare benefits or an employment to avoid falling back into homelessness when in Poland.



After the interventions of the guest speakers, there was a round of Q&A with the attendees of the infosession. A participant asked about the **new guidelines on the Free Movement Directive**, to which Dominique Be replied that concepts like “jobseeker” or “burden to the welfare system” could be clarified and reminded that the Directive itself will not change. Beatriz Fernández from Arrels Fundació suggested that, in order to achieve social integration of destitute mobile EU citizens, humanitarian reasons should be considered as a reason to obtain a legal stay permit, as it happens with third country nationals.

There was a question addressed to Andréa Poulieva from DIOGENES regarding the **suitability of Housing First for mobile EU citizens in homelessness**. She explained that this programme is usually addressed for vulnerable people with certain conditions (e.g. health issues, alcohol or addiction problems) and who have some type of regularised status, which is not the case for many mobile EU citizens they work with. However, the principle of finding an adequate accommodation to stabilise as much as possible the housing situation still applies to mobile EU citizens in homelessness. Andréa also replied to a question on the digital divide, which is increasingly a factor of exclusion for many people they work with, especially for people with urgent needs in terms of health or family.

Finally, it was discussed how European funds like ESF+ or FEAD can be used to tackle homelessness, as well as the role of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness⁸ on the issue of mobile EU citizens. Dominique Be suggested that activities like this webinar could fall under the remit of the Platform, which was launched in Lisbon in 2021, after a Declaration signed by the European institutions, the 27 EU Member States and several civil society organisations, including FEANTSA.



To read the reports in full and to access the recording, we invite you to visit the [event webpage](#).

This event is part of the ongoing work by [FEANTSA](#) on the link between EU migration and homelessness, which is currently undertaken within the framework of the [PRODEC](#) project (Protecting the Rights of Destitute Mobile EU citizens). This project is supported financially by [EPIM](#), the European Programme for Integration and Migration.

⁸ More Information can be found [here](#).