

# Vulnerabilities and Resources of Central and Eastern European Homeless People Living in Geneva and Zurich

Dr. Zsolt Temesvary, PhD ([zsolt.temesvary@fhnw.ch](mailto:zsolt.temesvary@fhnw.ch))

Dr. Sabrina Roduit, PhD ([sabrina.roduit@fhnw.ch](mailto:sabrina.roduit@fhnw.ch))

Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz

Institut Sozialplanung, Organisationaler Wandel und Stadtentwicklung

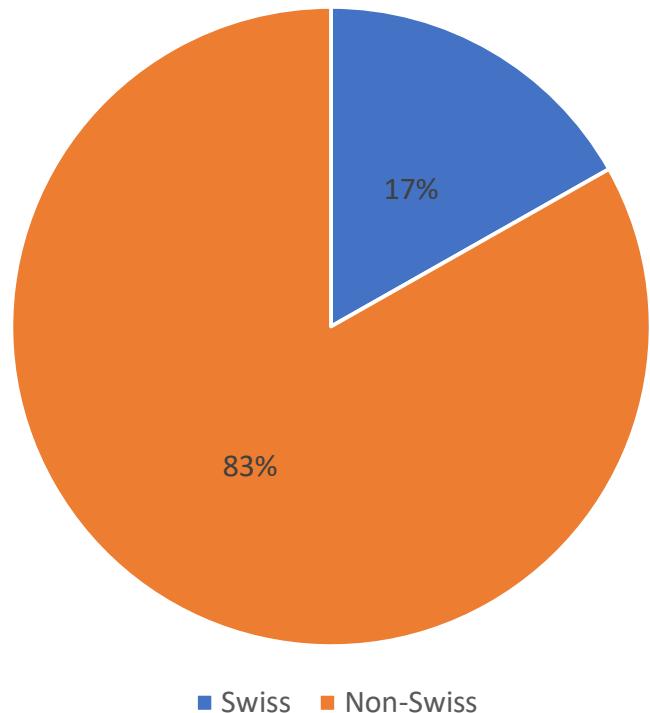
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Focus of the study:  
The Central and  
Eastern European  
region

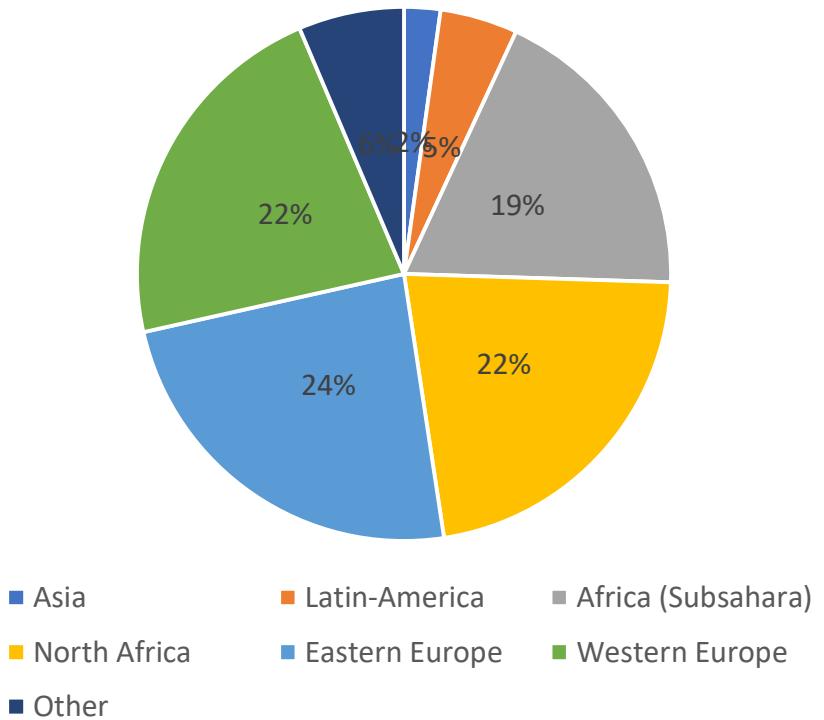


# Migrating homeless people in Switzerland

Proportion of Swiss and non-Swiss  
homeless people (n=543)



Origin of non-Swiss homeless people  
(n=452)



# Goals of the research project «Routes into Destitution»

- To identify **vulnerabilities and resources in the life-course** of destitute CEE migrants living in Switzerland
- To identify **coping strategies** that contribute to overcome homelessness
- To discover the **responses of the Swiss social welfare system** regarding homelessness and migration from EU/EFTA countries





## Target group

- **CEE citizenship:** Citizens of one of the EU/EFTA member CEE countries
- **Sans-Papiers:** Without Swiss residency permit
- **Homelessness:** based on the ETHOS categories

# Special legal conditions

- **3 months of stay** is allowed for CEE citizens without a residence permit
- After 3 months they **must clarify the reason of stay** and apply to a permit
- Without labour and housing contracts their **claims are rejected**
- Without papers they are **not eligible for most social and medical services**

Ausländerausweis  
Livret pour étrangers  
Libretto per stranieri



# Applied methods

## **Research approaches and methods**

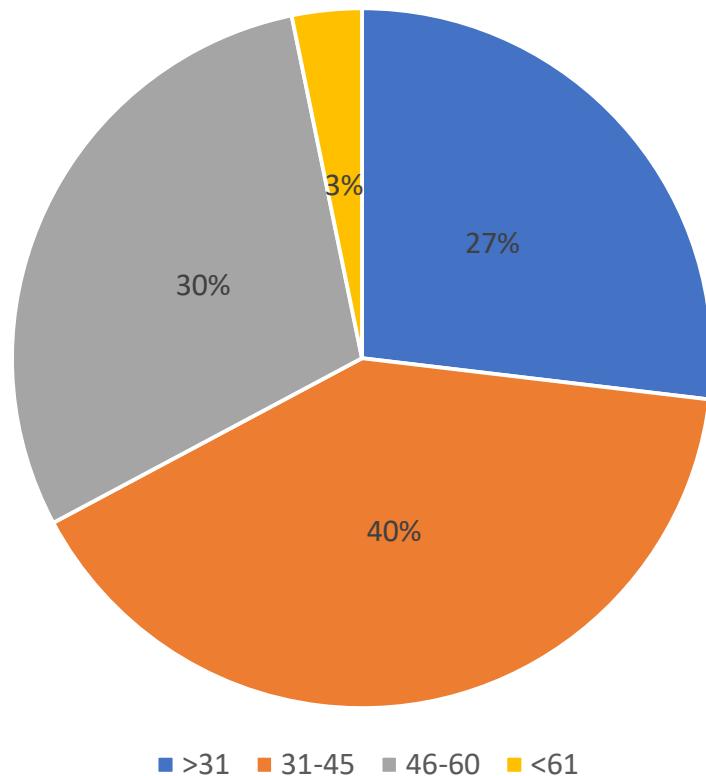
- Basic research with mixed methods
  - Ethnographic & anthropological research perspectives
  - Expert-Interviews (16 interviews in 2 cities)
  - Biographical-narrative Interviews (40 Interviews in 2 cities)
  - Vulnerability scale to explore hidden dimensions (100 questionnaires in 2 cities)

1. Residency and housing conditions		2. Work and education	
<b>methods</b> mixed methods 1 country (CH canton initials) 1.2 City/village	1.3 Type of housing	1.4 Residential instability (if yes, check the box)	1.5 Residence permit (CH)
geographical research perspectives 5 interviews in 2 cities)	emergency and residential shelter	"Sofa surfing" at Family/fri ends inadequate housing (squat, garage, camping)	happened to sleep rough 1- CH citizen 2- C Permit 3- B Permit 4- N Permit 5- L Permit 6 - No permit
Interviews (40 Interviews in 2 cities)	(homeless) Cologne	x x	x x 6) CRO all the time
explore hidden dimensions (100 ties)	3 (new girlfriend)	x	Working at constructions Quit business because of debts
			Own company (laundry and drying)
	1 (own home GER, Kassel)		

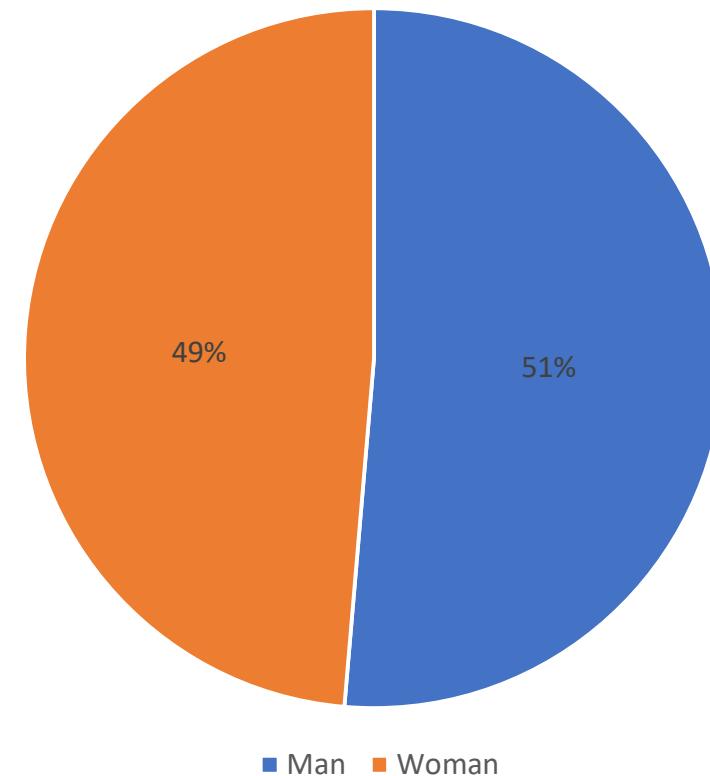
ZH9 Ariana ZH10 Elek ZH11 George ZH12 Christiano **ZH13 Montu** ZH9 Ariana (6) + ...

# Sociodemographic characteristics

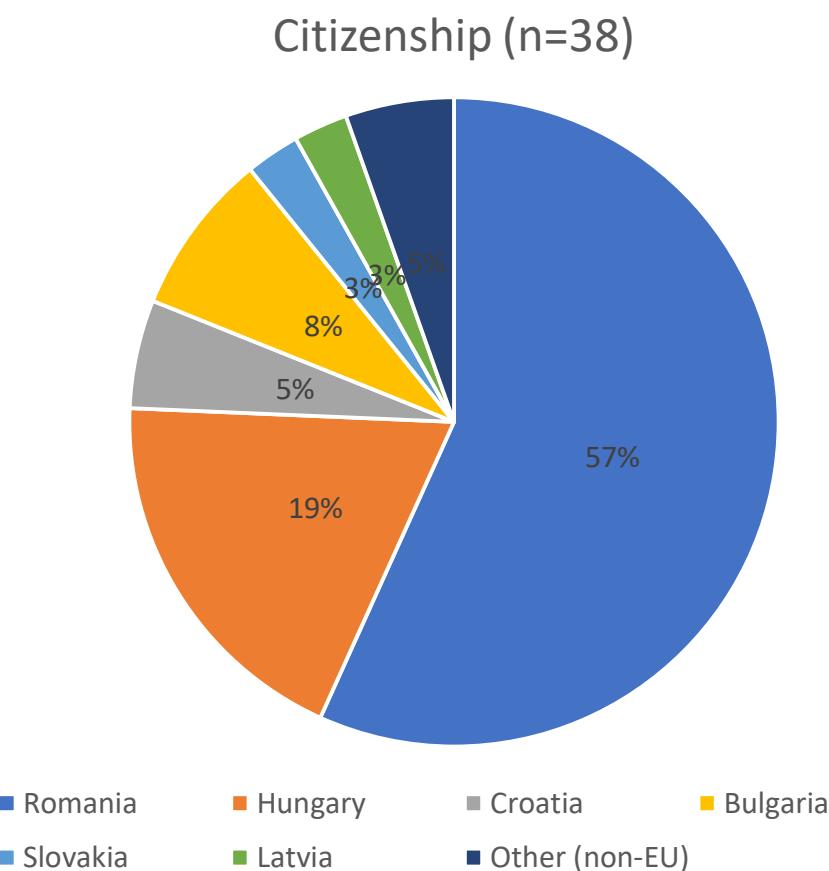
Age groups (n=38)



Gender (n=38)



# Sociodemographic characteristics

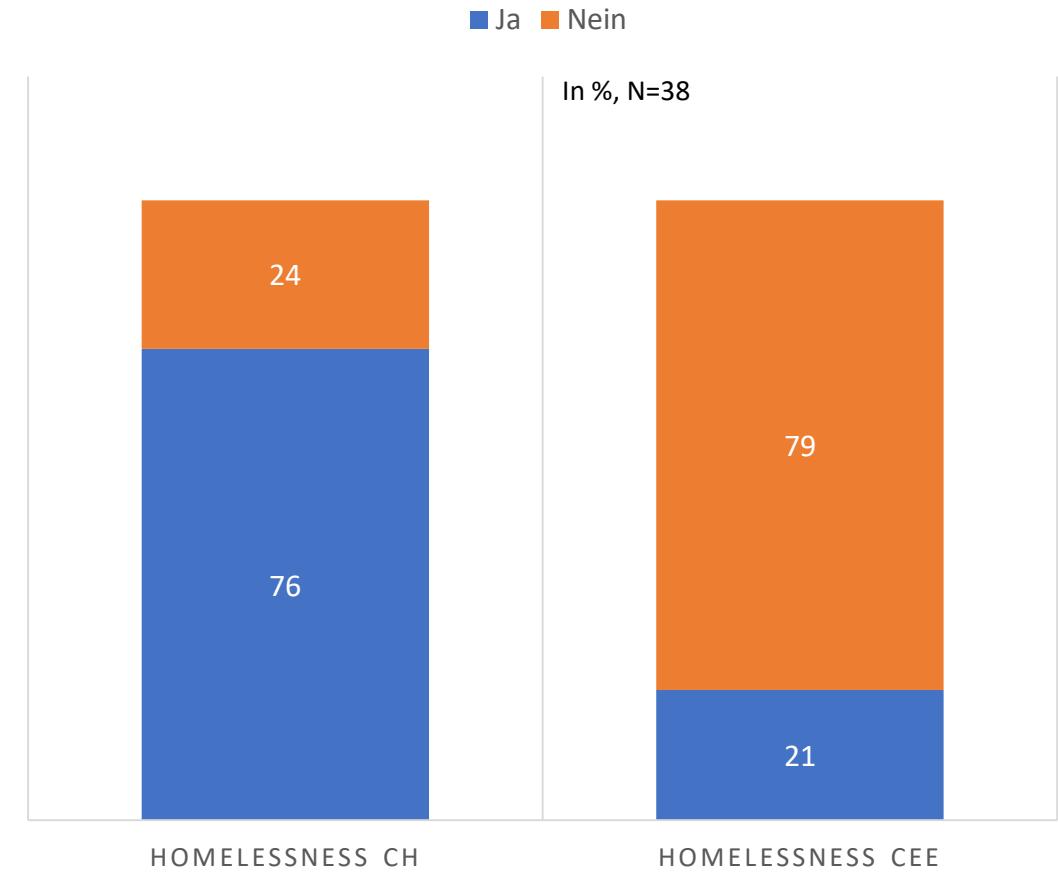


- The vast majority (57%) of destitute CEE migrants **arrived from Romania**
- They are **significantly younger** compared to the whole homeless population
- **Roma (63%) are significantly overrepresented** among the homeless migrants
- **4 of 5 people (82%) were undocumented**
- More than **half (58%)** of the poor wanderers **were single**
- **Women are overrepresented** compared to the “Swiss” homeless

# Experience with homelessness in Switzerland and the home countries

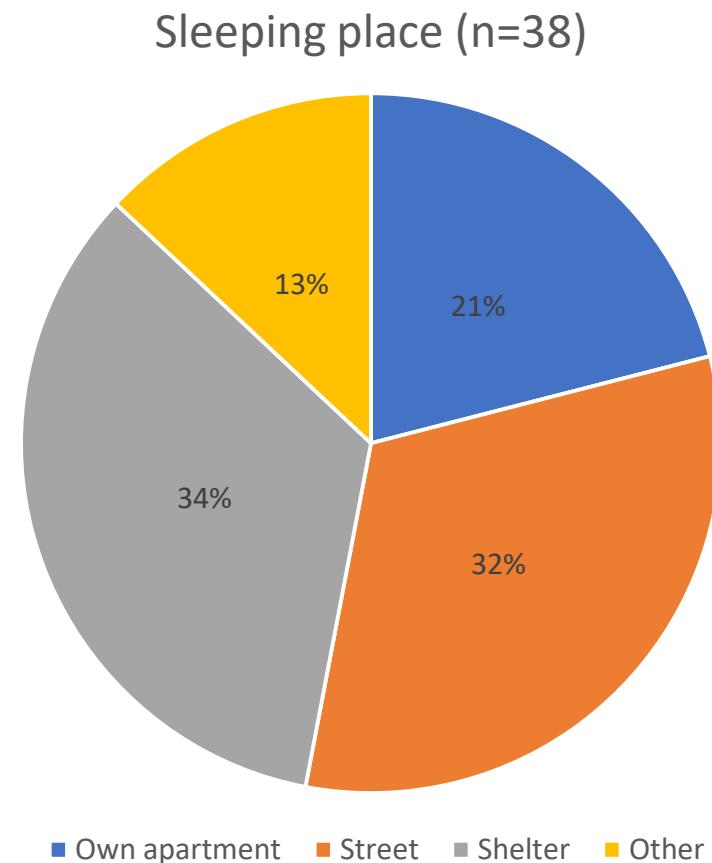
*I was in Budapest, because there is no social system in Győr. In Budapest I lived on the street and in homeless shelters when I could get in.*  
*(Attila, 49, Hungary)*

*I lived on the streets of Bucharest as a street child. It was bad. There were a lot of people using drugs.* (George, 21, Romania)



# Homelessness in Zurich and Geneva

- 94% in Geneva and “only” 60% in Zurich identified themselves as **homeless**
- 45% in ZH and 94% in GEN used **homeless shelters**
- 4 of 5 respondents used **outreach services** in both cities
- Third of the respondents had an **own apartment** in home countries



# Experience with rough sleeping

*I have a sleeping bag, and if I do not have money for accommodation, I sleep elsewhere, everywhere. It is better in summer. I am afraid sleeping outside, particularly in the winter. (ZH; Cristiano, 25, Romania)*

*If I have sleep three or four days outside, it won't be shocking. But after that, two weeks, I can't! I just can't! It's difficult to sleep outside, for a woman, and all alone, there are tramps who come, people who are on drugs. (GE; Elena, 37, Romania)*

*I live on the street. At midnight, when people go to sleep, I seek a bush or a gateway where I can lay my mattress and I leave early in the morning, so that people do not even know that I sleep in their doorway at night. (ZH; Sandor, 43, Slovakia)*

*It is getting colder and darker outside and not too good sleeping on the street. Maybe a night shelter somewhere, but I do not know where to go and where I can have some help. (ZH; Christian, 30, Romania)*

**SEASONALITY AND VULNERABILITY**

**GENDER VULNERABILITY**

**HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS**

**LACK OF INFORMATION**

# Experience with living in shelters

*I lived in a night shelter called Iglu. I could stay only 10 days at Iglu, and there is another shelter in the city center, where I could sleep for 3 more days. (ZH; Ferenc, 41, Hungary)*

*I have heard about the night shelter for Eastern-European homeless people called Iglu, but it is open only from the 1st of November. I cannot sleep on the street so long. (ZH; Peter, 51, Slovakia)*

*My belongings disappeared in the shelter and almost everyone there is a drug addict. They often steal to be able to buy drugs. (ZH; Elek, 51, Hungary)*

*If there wasn't this shelter, I don't know what we would do! They've taken me in and I hope it lasts a little bit longer. Because otherwise I don't know what would have happened. (GE; Elena, 37, Romania)*

**LIMITED ACCESS**

**OR NO ACCESS AT ALL**

**POOR CONDITIONS AT SHELTERS**

**UNCERTAINTY**

# Exploitation and housing usurers

*I was his slave! Prepared the dinner, went to bed as he wanted. And if I wasn't happy, sometimes he brought whores, and I had to go out and come back. And I had no other solution, because of my situation, the lack of permit. (GE; Dijana, 52, Croatia)*

*This woman accommodated us in an apartment in Leimbach (...). She said she pays 4000 CHF for the apartment, and we must pay it from now. Now I know that it was too much money for that flat. (ZH: Tünde, 50, Hungary)*

*He was happy that I slept more in his apartment, but for me it was only escape from homelessness. (...) Later he used my problem with the sans papier status against me and abused me. (ZH; Ariana, 34, Kosovo/Serbia)*

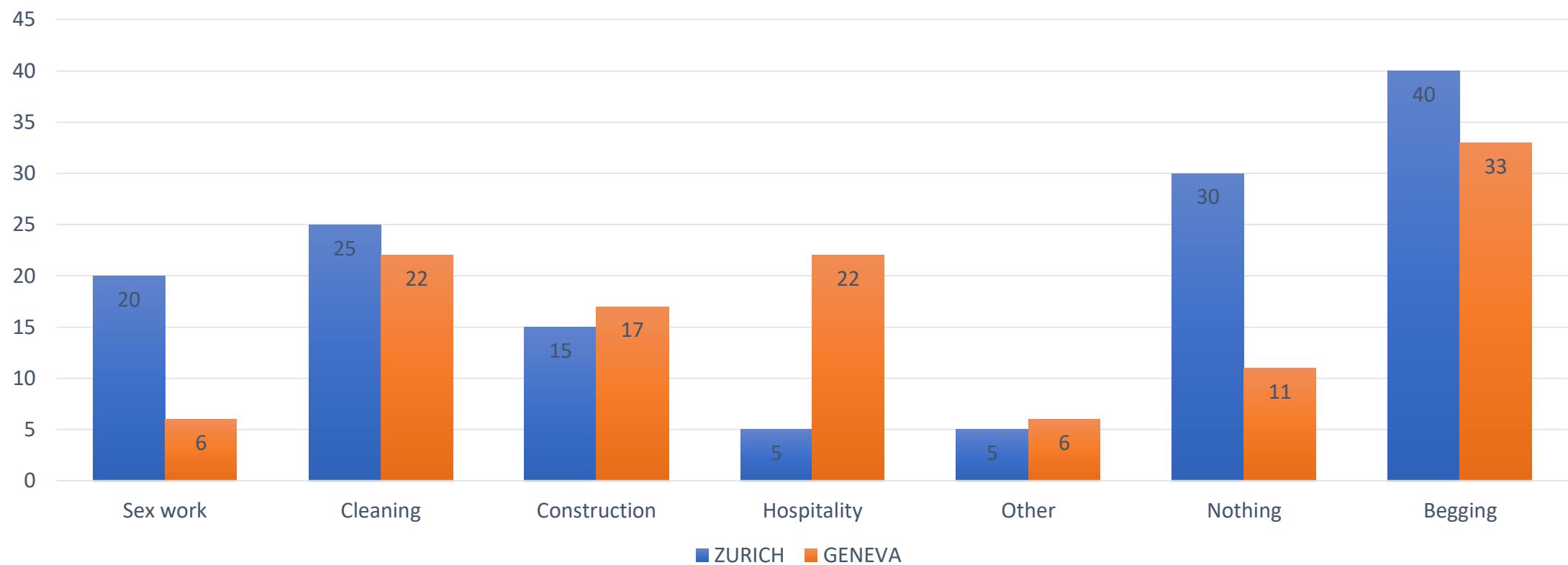
**HUMILIATING CONDITIONS AND MODERN SLAVERY**

**OVERPRICED APARTMENTS AND ILLEGAL SUBLETS**

**EXPLOITATION OF HOMELESS WOMEN**

# Employment

Type of activity (%), n=38, cumulated)



# Vulnerabilities at employment

*I do not have a special qualification. After finishing elementary I had to go to work to support myself and my family. (ZH; Bayram, 43, Kosovo)*

**POOR QUALIFICATIONS**

*If I could speak the language better, I would be able to find an organization that would help us. (ZH; Ariane, 34, Kosovo/Serbia)*

**POOR LANGUAGE SKILLS**

*There was a possibility at the Zürich Airport, a cleaning position. Only cleaning, but I did not have too much experience and I wasn't admitted. (ZH; Virág, 30, Hungary)*

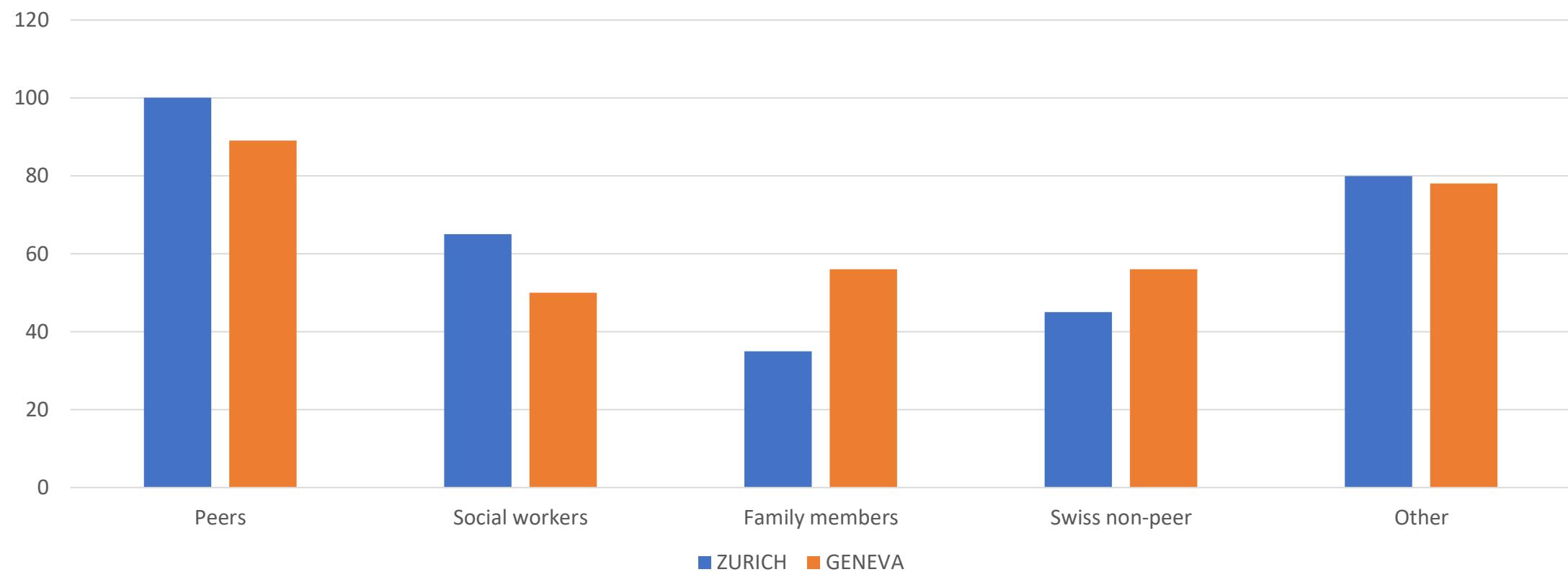
**LACK OF EXPERIENCE**

*What bothers me is the work, the lack of salary. I had a good education in Bulgaria, but I can't utilize it here, I can't realise it. It's hard for me. (GE; Devora, 59, Bulgaria)*

**QUALIFICATIONS**

# Social relationships

Daily social relationships with... (% , n=38, cumulated)



# Vulnerabilities in social relationships

*I came alone and I am still alone. Sleep alone, eat alone and walk alone the whole day long.* (ZH; Adrian, 39, Romania)

LONELINESS

*I have found some friends. But they are all homeless people with a lot of problems.* (ZH; Montu, 37, Kosovo/Croatia)

ONLY THE PEER GROUP

*Sometimes I call my mother; she is the only one remained me. She is worrying a lot about me and tell me to go home, but I do not want to be a burden for her.* (ZH; Peter, 52, Slovakia)

BURDEN FOR THE FAMILY

*I still think a lot about my mother, she is always in my head. We talk rarely, and only for 10 minutes. You OK and me Ok, and that is all, we have nothing to say to each other.* (ZH; Dusan, Bulgaria, 34)

WEAKENING RELATIONSHIPS

*I have four children in Romania. They are 20-, 18- and 15-year-olds and the little one is only five. They are all with my wife in Romania and attend school.* (ZH; David, 50, Romania)

CHILDREN REMAIN AT HOME

*I don't ask [social workers] for help. All the people who work in social work don't help us, the Roma. We have to manage on our own.* (GE; Marian, 44, Romania)

MISTRUST/DISCRIMINATION

# Summary

- The “**poorest among the poor**” (Sen 1976) – revival of destitution in Switzerland
- **Extreme poverty in the home countries** lies behind migration-related decisions
- **Homelessness in CH**, but not in the home countries
- **Accessibility of shelters** is much better in Geneva
- Most of the CEE homeless are **active in the Swiss labour market**
- Social **relationships are limited to the peer group**
- “**Higher-level relationships**” are mostly with social workers



THANK YOU FOR YOUR  
KIND ATTENTION!



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