



Seminar 1: Homelessness in Times of COVID-19 (Floor -1, Room 7)

Chair: **Masa Filipovic-Hrast, SI**

Ruth Owen: COVID-19 Response & Homelessness in the EU



Ruth Owen is Deputy Director at FEANTSA (European Federation of National Associations Working with the Homeless). She has worked at FEANTSA since 2011, leading on a range of policy files and developing organisational strategy. She has a special interest in housing policy. She holds a BA in Geography from University College London. Ruth is also an alumna of the UK TeachFirst programme, which addresses educational disadvantage by recruiting high-performing graduates as teachers and leaders in challenging schools.

The presentation summarises the responses developed across EU member states and the challenges of their implementation. Based on the examples we conclude that there is a need for better pandemic planning for homeless people as a vulnerable group in the future, and there are a few key issues that proved essential to keeping homeless people safe – that would have been also essential also before the pandemic.

Roberta Bova, IT: The Homeless Population during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Inequities, Practices of Social Resilience and Social Reintegration Strategies



Roberta Bova holds a PhD in International Cooperation. Roberta Bova has been a research fellow in Sociology at the University of Bergamo (IT); her main interests are welfare studies and the role of culture in health and migration. Roberta Bova is currently involved in a number of applied research projects, examining the impact of social interactions in health, assessing vulnerability and the support politics for homeless people.

This presentation analyses the amplification of social insecurity and the social misrecognition of the homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was carried out in the city of Bergamo (IT) and was developed in two phases. The first phase was conducted in the months of May-September 2020. I carried out 18 discursive interviews with the socio-educational staff and the coordination figures who work in the support services and reception facilities for the homeless. The second phase of the research was conducted in the months spanning January-September 2021 and I carried out 12 interviews with homeless people who are participating in social reintegration programmes.

The survey shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the social insecurity of homeless people. During the first months of 2020, the public authorities failed to pay attention to homeless people, both those who sleep on the street and those who lived in communities or found support in a night shelters. The support services, faced with this process of social misrecognition, reacted by activating practices of social resilience; for instance, personalisation of the intervention, enhancement of the relational dimension and empowerment of users.

At the same time, from directly conversing with homeless people engaged in building paths of autonomy and social reintegration, it emerges that obtaining a stable residence and re-establishing bounds with one's family and friends network are fundamental prerequisites for promoting self-confidence and increasing well-being. However, in order to achieve full social reintegration and to prevent new forms of social misrecognition, in the event of future social or health crises, the relationship with a non-stigmatised social community is fundamental.

Consequently, the primary objectives that the support network for homeless people should set for future projects should be to involve the local community through project participation activities and raising awareness of the phenomenon of poverty.