



The Magazine of FEANTSA - The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless AISBL

# Homeless in Europe

Summer 2012

The Geographies of Homelessness:  
Homeless Experiences  
and Homeless Policy in  
Different Spaces



FEANTSA



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 Editorial
- 4 The Danish Government's Policies on Homeless Migrants' Rights to Public Space and Public Facilities and Services for Homeless People: An Example of the Criminalisation of Homelessness in Copenhagen  
*Jeanett Schmidt*
- 7 Is Anti-Begging Legislation 'Good Practice' in Tackling Homelessness?  
*Silke Paasche*
- 11 The Geographies of Homelessness: The Case of Italian Railway Stations  
*Alessandro Radicchi*
- 14 The Work of the Samur Social in Bazaras International Airport  
*Darío Pérez Madera*
- 16 The Creation of the "Bois de Vincennes MOUS (Social and Urban Project)"  
*Nicola Iodice*
- 19 The Work Carried Out by the Aurore Maraude Ouest (Western Patrol) in the Bois de Boulogne: Its Target Group, Objectives and Partners  
*Michel Dorin*
- 20 The Pilis Park Forest Programme – The First Steps Towards a New Approach in Hungary  
*Andrea Szabó*

## The Geographies of Homelessness: Homeless Experiences and Homeless Policy in Different Spaces

Homelessness is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Homeless experiences and the means to tackle homelessness can be affected by the geographical context in which homeless people live.

For example, homelessness is often thought of as an urban phenomenon, however, it can also exist in rural areas, often constituting what is known as "hidden homelessness", which can represent an extra obstacle to people trying to get out of homelessness and for the services trying to reach them.

Another example is that of public space. Homeless people often need to use public space to survive, but are regularly driven off those spaces to satisfy commercial or even state interests. Public space is often only open to those who engage in permitted behaviour, frequently associated with consumption. Some EU cities use the criminal justice system to punish people living on the street for doing things they do in order to survive, such as sleeping, eating and begging.

Sometimes homeless people are not the explicit target of legislation, but they feel its impact disproportionately as they rely on public space for conducting their day-to-day activities. Having a criminal record of course makes it more difficult for people to get out of homelessness. The denial of access to public space is an infringement on homeless people's rights and can lead to their unfair criminalisation.<sup>1</sup>

However, one good way to can make sure homeless people are not forced to use public space is by building more housing, making administrative policies transparent and understandable and enabling everyone to have access to their social rights.<sup>2</sup>

The articles that follow give examples of how homelessness and homeless policy can differ depending on where the episode of homelessness takes place, and the very particular relationships homelessness and homeless policy can have with space.

One group of homeless people who are especially obliged to inhabit public space and are particularly vulnerable to police controls are migrants, who may not have the right to access services in the host country and therefore must necessarily eke out their existence outside, in public spaces. Jeanett Schmidt, Consultant at projekt UDENFOR in Denmark, describes the Danish Government's

policies on homeless migrants' right to public space and services for homeless people and qualifies it as an example of the criminalisation of homelessness in Copenhagen. She describes the work of project UDENFOR's outreach team with this group of homeless people as part of the *Project Foreign Rough Sleepers*. While no "anti-homeless" laws explicitly target homeless people in Denmark, "homeless behaviour" has previously led to the deportation of homeless migrants, and strict restrictions in relation to migrants' access to homeless facilities and services leave them in a legal vacuum in which they have the right to stay, but not to get state help.

Other types of public-space control measures include anti-begging legislation. Silke Paasche, Independent Homelessness Expert based in Ireland, explores recent attempts to prohibit and restrict begging in several European Union countries and focuses on its impact on people experiencing homelessness and the potential implications for designing homelessness strategies. She discusses how debates on anti-begging legislation centre on the conflict between the individual rights of the person who begs and the rights and interests of the public to be free from nuisance or harassment. In several countries, anti-begging legislation is even explicitly part of coercive approaches to tackling homelessness. She concludes that anti-begging legislation cannot be "good practice" in tackling homelessness as anti-begging legislation is not concerned with the welfare of homeless individuals but rather leads to their criminalisation and further exclusion, and warns that "coercive care" can raise human rights concerns.

While anti-begging legislation often affects homeless and non-homeless people in external public spaces, homeless people also make use of and need support in internal public spaces. For many homeless people, public transport terminals are places where they can feel comfortable and safe. Recently, transport companies have become active in the fight against homelessness. Alessandro Radicchi, ONDS Director and Fabrizio Torella, Responsible for Social Policies at *Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane* in Italy describe why and how railway stations are used by homeless people and present the network of Help Centers in Italian railway stations which provides a place where homeless people have free access to a service directing them to social services available in the city. The goal is to offer homeless persons an effective answer to their needs, outside the station.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We would like to give you the chance to comment on any of the articles which have appeared in this issue. If you would like to share your ideas, thoughts and feedback, please send an email to the editor, [suzannah.young@feantsa.org](mailto:suzannah.young@feantsa.org).

The articles in *Homeless in Europe* do not necessarily reflect the views of FEANTSA. Extracts from this publication can be quoted as long as the sources are acknowledged.



The ONDS (National Observatory on Poverty and Solidarity in railway stations) is a network of Help Centers and a think-tank, where studies, strategies, analysis, data and best practices are shared and developed, in order to make social intervention more effective. The existence of such assistance in train stations is now Europe-wide. *Gare Européenne et Solidarité* (European Stations and Solidarity), the first network of railway companies dedicated to social policies in station areas, now boasts 12 members from as many European countries.

Darío Pérez Madera, Head of Department at the Samur Social and Homeless Service in Madrid, gives us another insight into work with homeless people in transport terminals – this time it is outreach in Madrid Barajas Airport, part of the work done by the Samur Social, the “entry point” into the system of assistance for homeless people in the city. He explores the reasons why airports are attractive places for homeless people, as a particular type of public space, and describes the nature of the outreach work, giving statistics about its activity in 2011. The outreach done is the result of an agreement between Madrid City Council and *Aeropuertos Españoles y Navegación Aérea*, the body governing Spanish airports and aeronautics.

Of course, urban homelessness is quite different from homelessness in rural areas. Nicola Iodice, Coordinator of the *Emmaüs Solidarité* Outreach Patrol in the bois de Vincennes, France, describes how *Emmaüs* provide full-time services to the homeless people in the woods on the outskirts of Paris as part of an agreement with the Regional authorities. The article describes how the bois de Vincennes is a challenging environment for social workers as the people live in semi-permanent, self-constructed structures in the woods. *Emmaüs* therefore decided to give the homeless people the possibility to visit the outreach workers so that the homeless person is transformed from being someone who is part of a passive process in which they are visited by an “intruding outreach worker”, into someone who is part of an “active process”. The Bois de Vincennes patrol can offer housing to people who request it and responses to the other elements of insertion related to the activity being carried out, notably with regard to helping people to find employment. The large number of people who have left the woods and the continuous arrival of new people mean the authorities decided that the project should continue in the future.

Michel Dorin, Head of Service of the Western Patrol in the Bois de Boulogne gives a parallel perspective: the Bois de Boulogne is situated to the West of Paris while the Bois de Vincennes is in the East; both are inhabited by homeless people and both are served by outreach teams. The outreach work in the west of Paris takes the form of social interventions designed to get people off the streets on a permanent basis, by working alongside the people concerned where possible in order to help them gain access to housing and to rebuild their life. The Western Patrol experiences similar problems to the Bois de Vincennes team: the people encountered by the team are extremely vulnerable and in most cases have been living in the woods for many years. These people do not make use of the various structures available because they have already rejected the existing provisions because they do not meet with their expectations or because the collective facilities on offer are not adapted to their needs.

The phenomenon of forest homelessness also exists in Hungary. It is also possible to find solutions to the problem. Andrea Szabó of the Public Foundation for the Homeless, describes the Pilis Park Forest Programme, which she qualifies as the first steps towards a new approach to homelessness in Hungary. The Programme was developed to provide appropriate housing solutions for homeless people living in the forests around Budapest when the company that owned the park where the forests are located decided to develop hiking routes and picnic areas there. The company asked for the help of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Public Foundation to provide appropriate alternatives for the homeless people in the woods: the Pilis Park Forest Programme was born. The Programme brought many new aspects to the Hungarian homeless service system: this was the first project specifically aimed at integrating the difficult target group of long-term rough sleepers with complex needs. Social workers in this programme faced new gaps and challenges but also new forms of success. The results of the Programme proved that intensive and individualised social work, appropriate and diverse housing options and targeted and adequate support can help chronic homeless people with complex needs to exit homelessness.

FEANTSA would like to thank all the authors who contributed to this issue of the magazine.

1 In 2012, FEANTSA and Housing Rights Watch launched a campaign calling on citizens, organisations, lawyers, judges, police, elected officials and policy makers to use the means that we have: the law, politics, the media, social movements, to say - Poverty is not a crime! [www.povertyisnotacrime.org](http://www.povertyisnotacrime.org)  
2 <http://www.euractiv.com/sozialeurope/criminalising-homelessness-anti-analysis-513181>



# The Danish Government's Policies on Homeless Migrants' Rights to Public Space and Public Facilities and Services for Homeless People: An Example of the Criminalisation of Homelessness in Copenhagen

By **Jeanett Schmidt**,<sup>1</sup> *Consultant at projekt UDEFOR and Master of Science in Social Work, Denmark*

What has been called the *criminalisation of homelessness* in modern society, where the use of public space has become increasingly restrictive, has previously been a theme in American research (ex. Mitchell, 2003). It has been described how the annihilation of space by a raft of regulations and anti-homeless laws prohibiting certain behaviors in public space such as begging, camping, sleeping and the consumption of alcohol in the certain states in the USA leads to a situation where homeless people cannot do what they need to survive without breaking the law and even criminalises survival itself (Ibid). In the European context, it has earlier been described how similar regulations have been launched and, even though homeless people have not been the main target of control measures in public space, it has had an effect on the homeless people who use public space for conducting their day-to-day activities (Doherty et al, 2006 in Tosi, 2007).

In a previous article, projekt UDEFOR has showed how we in Denmark have seen examples of the deportation of homeless migrants in Copenhagen because of certain behavior (Ohrt Fehler, 2012). In July 2010, 23 Roma people were deported from Denmark with a two-year re-entry ban for camping in a public space (sleeping in tents in shrubbery and in a disused building). In December 2010, 69 homeless migrants were arrested and put in detention for staying overnight in a private low-threshold shelter in Copenhagen; many were later deported. Their arrest and subsequent detention was carried out because they were "guilty" of being foreigners and homeless.

In April 2011, 14 of the 23 Roma people that were deported took their case to court and were acquitted; the deportation was in conflict with the EU directive 2004/38/EF that gives EU-citizens the right to travel in all Schengen countries. A few months later, in June 2011, the former Danish government released a new policy on deportation and a new guideline was put into practice. This meant that in current practice, homeless migrants who are EU citizens cannot be deported simply because they are poor or homeless – lacking the means of subsistence. To lack the means of subsistence is set to an amount of 350 DKK per day (around €50) and at police routine checks, homeless migrants who could not present this amount could, before the change in practice, be deported, which 278 EU citizens were from 2009 to mid-2011 (Ibid.).

Even though Denmark has no policies that explicitly target homeless people, the aforementioned examples however show that when it comes to homeless migrants we have previously seen examples of the *criminalisation of homeless people* for performing their day-to-day activities in public space. At the same time, homeless migrants are being hit with strict regulations when it comes to accessing public facilities and services for homeless. It was made clear in an official statement by the previous Danish government that according to the Danish social legislation, public facilities and services that are run by the state or funded/ partly funded by the state are not allowed to use their public funding for homeless migrants without the right to Danish Social Security payments. In practice, this means that homeless migrants who have not had the right to Danish Social Security payments since 2008 at the latest have not been able to access public facilities and services such as shelters and day centers. When it comes to sleeping, for example, homeless migrants are therefore 'forced' to use either the few emergency accommodation units or facilities that are offered by NGOs or to sleep in a public place, which, in the worst case scenario, as the examples show, can lead to deportation.

All in all, the government's policies of strict regulations on public space and in relation to public facilities and services for homeless people seem to seek to get rid of homelessness among EU-citizens who cannot provide for themselves by criminalising their behaviour which, as this article will show, have severe consequences for the individual.

## THE HOMELESS MIGRANTS IN COPENHAGEN

Homeless migrants, mainly EU citizens from European countries, have made up an increasingly large group of homeless people in Copenhagen, as well as in other European cities, over the past few years. The increase is often described as an impact of the free movement of labour within the EU, the expansion of the EU to the East in 2004 and 2007, and the economic recession within Europe. EU citizens have the right to travel in the EU and therefore also to be in Denmark for between 3 and 6 months.

The subject of homeless migrants has sparked a huge public debate in the media and on the political stage in Denmark, while the research done on the subject

<sup>1</sup> [info@udenfor.dk](mailto:info@udenfor.dk)



is rather limited. Since the beginning of 2010, projekt UDENFOR has been working with homeless migrants in the *Project Foreign Rough Sleepers*. Because of this work and the lack of documented knowledge on the subject, projekt UDENFOR was given the task by the city council to describe the relatively new and undocumented urban phenomenon – homelessness among EU migrants. The *“Report on Homeless Migrants in Copenhagen”* was published in Danish in May 2012 and is based on the experiences from our work and from interviews with employees in 15 different church-, private- or publicly financed social facilities and services who carry out social work with homeless people. The report will also be available in English in summer 2012.

The homeless migrants in the *Project Foreign Rough Sleepers* are a diverse group in terms of problems and needs. In the *“Report on Homeless Migrants in Copenhagen”* we divide the group into two subcategories; homeless migrant workers and particularly vulnerable homeless migrants. For the homeless migrant workers, housing shortage due to poverty and unemployment is their primary problem and the solution to the problem is linked to these conditions. The particularly vulnerable homeless migrants, on the other hand, have more serious social problems in addition to homelessness. They are problems that broadly resemble those that are seen among ‘typical’ Danish homeless people and the solution to the problem is therefore more complex. The report estimates that an absolute minimum of 200 EU migrants each day and 500 each year live as homeless people in Copenhagen. About 1/5 of these are what we describe as “particularly vulnerable homeless migrants”.

One of the findings of the report is that a lot of the homeless migrants, regardless of which subcategory they belong to, undergo a process of social exclusion that is often faster than the social exclusion process among ‘typical’ Danish homeless people, something we experience in our daily outreach work with homeless migrants.

### **THE OUTREACH WORK IN THE PROJECT FOREIGN ROUGH SLEEPERS**

In the *Project Foreign Rough Sleepers* we work to meet homeless migrants’ immediate and basic needs through outreach work and to describe homeless migrants’ conditions through research and teaching on the subject of homelessness, their living conditions and legal rights. To meet homeless migrants’ immediate needs we carry out outreach work in specific areas or neighbourhoods to which homeless migrants come or are likely to come, such as parks, libraries, museums with free entry and low-threshold homeless facilities and services. When we become aware of the presence of homeless migrants who have immediate and basic needs, we give them our help and support through relation-building and an individual emergency assistance support. Through relation-building we help and support homeless migrants in response to their ‘human’ needs with contact and communication. When building relationships with the homeless

migrants, one of the things we do is carrying out individual emergency assistance, where we try to meet the homeless migrants’ more-or-less urgent basic needs by giving food, clean clothes, a sleeping bag or assist the homeless migrants in going to the hospital or to a health clinic, etc.

In our daily work, we address, first and foremost, the group of homeless migrants that can be characterised as particularly vulnerable. Through our work supporting homeless migrants in relation to their needs, we observe that individual emergency assistance in regards to basic needs constitutes a larger part of our work than we had anticipated and we witness homeless migrants getting worse and worse. For example, we meet particularly vulnerable homeless migrants who experience going in and out of hospital due to emergency health problems in addition to problems such as alcohol poisoning. Because homeless migrants are not entitled to access to public facilities and services, we see that they are often discharged from hospital without receiving full treatment, which in many cases makes their situation worse. For example, in March 2012, one of the homeless migrants in the *Project Foreign Rough Sleepers* had been hospitalised as a matter of emergency 63 times after he had been in Copenhagen for a total of eighteen months.

As part of our work, we also have daily contact with homeless migrant workers in the streets, who are looking for a job as they are required to do if their stay lasts more than 3 months, but at the same time they have to fight to survive as they do not have access to public facilities and services. This leaves them in a ‘legal-vacuum’, where they have the right to be in Denmark but cannot get the basic help they need. They therefore spend most of their time maintaining their most basic needs, in which case it is difficult for them to keep clean and presentable for the job search. This leads a social “fall-out” where homeless migrant workers get stuck in homelessness, makes them undesirable to employers and leaves them with no time to plan long-term solutions with regards to their situation.

### **AN EXAMPLE OF THE CRIMINALISATION OF HOMELESS MIGRANTS**

While we do not have anti-homeless laws that explicitly target homeless people in Denmark, we experience that ‘homeless behaviour’ has previously led to the deportation of homeless migrants. At the same time, we find that strict restrictions in relation to migrants’ access to homeless facilities and services leave them in a legal vacuum in which they have the right to stay, but not to get help from public facilities and services. Altogether it seems the government’s policies and practices lead to a situation where homeless migrants are being criminalised for being homeless and not being able to provide for themselves.

We often hear that the government’s policy and prohibiting of homeless migrants from accessing public facilities and services for homeless people finds

**Because homeless migrants are not entitled to access to public facilities and services, we see that they are often discharged from hospital without receiving full treatment.**



its reasoning in the assumption that ignoring homeless migrants will stop migrant homelessness occurring in Denmark, as they will travel somewhere else. If Denmark on the other hand offers homeless migrants just a minimum of assistance, the reasoning is that Denmark will quickly become the “shelter of Eastern Europe”, as it has earlier been described by a former Danish minister for Social Affairs.

In contrast to this, our experience is that strict regulations only lead to a situation where the economic and legal frameworks for working with homeless migrants are few. This means that we can only support and help particularly vulnerable homeless migrants up to a certain level, whereas it is difficult to meet the complexity of their problems and instead we see an individual “fall-out” for homeless migrants who remain in destitution. In this case, we experience that homeless migrants are more unlikely and unable to leave Denmark. Moreover, such treatment is not worthy of the universal Danish welfare state.

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# Is Anti-Begging Legislation ‘Good Practice’ in Tackling Homelessness?

By **Silke Paasche**,<sup>1</sup> *Independent Homelessness Expert, Ireland*

The relationship between begging and homelessness is far from being clear-cut. Not all people experiencing homelessness beg, nor are all people who beg homeless.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in most countries there are homeless people who beg and who are therefore affected by attempts to restrict or prohibit begging. In addition, due to their vulnerable housing situation that forces homeless people to make use of public space for prolonged periods of the day, they are more likely than other people to be affected by any regulations restricting the use of public space, including anti-begging legislation.<sup>3</sup>

This article looks at some of the more recent attempts to prohibit and restrict begging in several EU countries and focuses on its impact on people experiencing homelessness and potential implications for the design of effective homelessness strategies. The article is based on information collected from FEANTSA members, press articles and research.

## ANTI-BEGGING LEGISLATION IS NOT A NEW PHENOMENON

The attempt to restrict begging or make it illegal is not a new phenomenon. In centuries past, many laws to prohibit begging and undesired ‘street cultures’, such as prostitution or vagrancy, existed throughout Europe. The extent of the restrictions and possible punishments changed regularly and were dependent on the dominant discourse and context of the time.

Many Western European countries declared anti-begging laws unconstitutional in the 1960s and 1970s. Other countries followed much later due to their different historical context. Many Eastern European countries, for example, abandoned their anti-begging legislation in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> In Ireland, the 1847 Vagrancy Act, under which begging was an offence, was only declared unconstitutional by the High Court in 2007.<sup>5</sup>

In almost all these countries this did not completely end the debate on begging and the call for new restrictions, including new anti-begging legislation. In particular, in large metropolitan areas in Europe, local attempts to restrict or prohibit begging continue to emerge at regular intervals.<sup>6</sup> They are often in response to complaints from the business sector or residents about a real or perceived increase in begging activities.

In Paris, several decrees had banned begging in certain tourist and shopping areas of the city in early 2012.<sup>7</sup> However, in June 2012, the new police prefect stopped the measure indicating that it was not effective.<sup>8</sup> Other examples of recent attempts to introduce anti-begging measures at city level are Madrid<sup>9</sup> and Vilnius.<sup>10</sup> In addition, there are also recent examples of national legislation aimed at regulating begging, such as in Ireland (see below) but the issue is also currently being debated in Finland.<sup>11</sup>

## CONFLICT BETWEEN PEOPLE’S RIGHTS AND PUBLIC LAW AND ORDER

At the centre of the debates on anti-begging legislation is the conflict between the individual rights of the person who begs and the rights and interests of the public to be free from nuisance or harassment. While in most countries, there is no general prohibition of begging, the vast majority of countries will restrict some forms of begging, such as obvious aggressive behaviour or begging with children.

## IRELAND: NEW ANTI-BEGGING LEGISLATION DEEMED NECESSARY

In Ireland, new anti-begging legislation was introduced in February 2011 after a previous law from 1847 was found to be unconstitutional by the High Court in 2007. The new legislation was deemed necessary in order to give sufficient power back to the Irish police to intervene against undesirable forms of begging while respecting the recent High Court ruling.

The 2011 Act prohibits ‘aggressive’ begging as well as begging in front of or in the vicinity of shops, ATMs, vending machines and night safes. Failure to comply may result in fines of up to 500 Euros or up to 12 months’ imprisonment. In addition, the Act makes organised begging and forcing people into begging illegal.

From the Regulatory Impact Analysis prior to the 2011 Act, it becomes clear that the main aim of the new legislation is to secure public order and safety. It argues that given the comprehensive social welfare systems in place, nobody who is legally residing in the country is forced to beg. Begging is therefore thought to be a nuisance that should be restricted as much as possible.<sup>12</sup>

[D]ue to their vulnerable housing situation that forces homeless people to make use of public space [...] they are more likely than other people to be affected by any regulations restricting the use of public space, including anti-begging legislation.

<sup>1</sup> [sipaasche@gmail.com](mailto:sipaasche@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> See for example: Riffaut et al.: *Les mendicités à Paris et leurs publics*, CerPhi, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Doherty et al.: *The Changing Role of the State: Homelessness and Exclusion: Regulating public space*, FEANTSA, 2006, p. 3

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.9.

<sup>5</sup> *The Irish Times* - Monday, October 31, 2011

<sup>6</sup> Doherty et al.: *The Changing Role of the State: Homelessness and Exclusion: Regulating public space*, FEANTSA, 2006, p.9.

<sup>7</sup> FEANTSA Flash, February 2012.

<sup>8</sup> *Le Monde*, 20 June 2012.

<sup>9</sup> FEANTSA Flash, May 2011.

<sup>10</sup> FEANTSA Flash, February 2012.

<sup>11</sup> FEANTSA Flash, January 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Regulatory Impact Analysis, *Criminal Justice (Public Order) Bill 2010*.



In several countries anti-begging legislation is explicitly part of more coercive approaches to tackling homelessness.

Between the introduction of the new legislation in February 2011 and October 2011, more than 500 people were arrested in Dublin city centre. Almost two-thirds of these were foreign nationals, mainly from 'Roma families', according to the Irish police.<sup>13</sup>

### AUSTRIA: ANTI-BEGGING LEGISLATION BEFORE THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT

Austria is another example that recently introduced new anti-begging legislation. Contrary to Ireland, there is no national 'anti-begging law'. Rather, different anti-begging laws have been enacted in almost all of the different *Länder* and the debates mainly concern larger cities such as Vienna, Salzburg or Graz.<sup>14</sup>

While Tyrol and Salzburg have prohibited all forms of begging since the late 1970s, many of the other *Länder* have reinforced their anti-begging legislation over the last three years. The region of Steiermark reinforced its legislation in May 2011 making all forms of begging in public spaces illegal. The only exception is if a City Council designates a specific 'begging zone'. The other *Länder* introduced slightly less comprehensive begging prohibitions with some regional characteristics. Vienna, for example, prohibits 'commercial begging' while Upper Austria specifically allows 'silent begging'.

The reinforcement of anti-begging legislation in some of the Austrian *Länder* created widespread public debate and protest from social services and anti-poverty networks. In particular the racist undertone of the argumentation surrounding the legislation that is mainly targeted at begging 'Roma' and alleged 'Roma gangs', as well as the ignorance towards the real living situations of people who beg are being highlighted was criticised.<sup>15</sup> Several cases from five different *Länder* are currently before the Constitutional Court in Austria. It is expected that in particular the general prohibition of begging will be declared unconstitutional as it violates the individual human rights of the person who begs, such as their right to free expression.

### LINKING ANTI-BEGGING LEGISLATION TO HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES

While the previous examples do not specifically target people experiencing homelessness, in several countries anti-begging legislation is explicitly part of more coercive approaches to tackling homelessness. Two examples for this approach are the Netherlands and England.

### Tackling Homelessness in Rotterdam, the Netherlands

Police regulations in the City of Rotterdam prohibit begging as well as loitering in public spaces in a way that could be a nuisance to others. Fines of up to 2,500 Euros or three months' imprisonment apply. When the regulations were first introduced in 2003, they were very much aimed at 'securing' public order and specifically targeted people experiencing homelessness and people with drug addictions. The regulations were combined with a very pro-active attempt to improve the situation for people experiencing homelessness and other marginalised groups in the city. The idea was that a person fined under these regulations would be directed through the Courts into a care programme that would sometimes even start in prison.<sup>16</sup>

Homeless service providers as well as service-user organisations were very critical about the language and images used that closely linked homelessness to anti-social behaviour and nuisance. However, a positive result of this approach was that it improved cooperation between the police, penal institutions and social and housing services and led to positive housing outcomes for a significant proportion of homeless people in the city. The police regulations were simplified in 2008 and do not specifically target people experiencing homelessness or drug users anymore. Today, homelessness is considered to have been 'solved' in the City of Rotterdam. People experiencing homelessness have either been housed or have been directed to other parts of the country.

### Evidence from Five English Cities

In England, begging is prohibited under the Vagrancy Act from 1824. A person can be arrested for begging but not imprisoned. The most severe punishment for begging is a fine. This anti-begging legislation gained renewed importance in 2003 when the Home Office increased efforts to tackle 'problematic street culture' and anti-social behaviour in general. The prohibition of begging became part of a range of tools to govern civility, including so-called ASBOs (Anti-Social Behaviour Orders). These civil orders can contain conditions prohibiting an offender from specific anti-social acts and/or entering defined areas. Penalties for breach of ASBO conditions can include prison sentences of up to five years.<sup>17</sup> England also has an ambitious homelessness strategy that in particular aims to support people sleeping rough to move on to settled homes. Extensive and highly professional support services are in place.<sup>18</sup>

13 The Irish Times, 31 October 2011.

14 See also Schoibl, Heinz: Das Bettelverbot in Österreich, April 2012.

15 Ibid, p.3.

16 Pols, Geertien; Zuidan, Peter: On Criminalisation of homelessness and people who are homeless in Rotterdam, FEANTSA magazine Homeless in Europe, Summer 2007, p. 14-16.

17 Johnsen, Sarah; Fitzpatrick, Suzanne: Revanchist Sanitisation or Coercive Care? The Use of Enforcement to Combat Begging, Street Drinking and Rough Sleeping in England, in Urban Studies, 2010, 47(8) 1703-1723, July 2010.

18 See for example: Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out nationwide, Report by the Ministerial Group on Homelessness, July 2011.





In an evaluation of the impact of the new anti-social behaviour regulations on the welfare of street users in five English cities, Fitzpatrick and Johnsen draw a nuanced picture of this approach. On the one hand, the authors highlight the negative image and language employed. People experiencing homelessness together with other street users were “depicted as blights on society who had, the phraseology implies, ‘taken (over)’ particular neighbourhoods from the law-abiding, and presumably ‘acceptably pro-social’, majority.”<sup>19</sup> The new enforcement interventions did not end certain behaviour but simply led to its displacement from the city centre. Some service users also indicated that as a result of the anti-begging legislation they were engaging in other criminal activity, such as shoplifting.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, Fitzpatrick and Johnsen highlight positive outcomes for the service users. For example, the approach helped to address issues of abuse and harassment, also within groups of street users. Sometimes the most severe forms of intervention, the ASBOs, led to the most positive outcomes for people as they were often combined with targeted supportive interventions.<sup>21</sup> Fitzpatrick and Johnsen argue that there is a significant gap between the sometimes harsh and vengeful rhetoric surrounding coercive approaches to tackling ‘problematic’ street cultures, and a much less sensational reality of these enforcements ‘on the ground’. They conclude that in carefully-defined circumstances, certain forms of enforcement can play a very positive role in tackling problematic street culture and improving the welfare of street users.<sup>22</sup>

### **CONFLICTING POLICY AGENDAS: ANTI-BEGGING LEGISLATION AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES**

Anti-begging legislation has regained popularity amongst policy makers over the past few years in a number of EU countries. In many cases, the new or reinforced anti-begging legislation is part of a series of regulations aimed at tackling ‘problematic’ or ‘anti-social’ behaviour in public spaces in an attempt to keep city centres attractive and ‘secure’.

In many of these countries, the legislation does not explicitly target people experiencing homelessness but rather begging ‘Roma’ or ‘Roma families’,<sup>23</sup> which, in particular in Austria, raised widespread public criticism about the racist undertone of the legislation. However, the very nature of the regulations makes it very clear that people experiencing homelessness will also be affected; either because they are begging

or because they make use of public spaces for long periods of the day without necessarily having a clear and ‘socially acceptable’ purpose.

In addition, in some countries, people experiencing homelessness were one of the main target groups of the legislation. In these countries, enforcement approaches are used as a means to connect people with appropriate support services aimed at improving their housing situation and overall welfare.

Given the positive evidence from the Netherlands and England, the question arises as to whether a case can be made for integrating anti-begging legislation in an effective way into strategies to combat homelessness. In other words, can anti-begging legislation be ‘good practice’ in tackling homelessness?

The uneasiness amongst the vast majority of service-provider and service-user organisations in relation to anti-begging legislation suggests otherwise. One explanation for this uneasiness might be the fact that anti-begging legislation targeted at people experiencing homelessness mixes two potentially conflicting policy goals and disguises a debate that is not linked to begging but rather to issues around coercive care, i.e. an approach that emphasises the need to use a certain degree of ‘pressure’ or ‘force’ to make people engage with appropriate support services.<sup>24</sup>

There is an inherent conflict between anti-begging legislation and homelessness strategies that cannot be easily solved. Anti-begging legislation aims first and foremost at making city centres more attractive and ‘secure’ for the general public without making its impact on vulnerable street users its primary concern. Contrary to this, homelessness strategies put the welfare of the individual homeless person at the centre of the approach and aim to empower and support this individual on his/her pathway out of homelessness. Bringing the two together in one strategy will always lead to uneasiness as it combines the potential criminalisation of people,<sup>25</sup> in the form of fines or prison, with an attempt to rebuild trust and self-confidence.

Moreover, the positive outcomes for service users but also in relation to the increased cooperation between the relevant stakeholders in both the Netherlands and England have nothing to do with the anti-begging legislation as such but were rather a by-product of this approach. The debate on anti-begging legislation and homelessness disguises a separate debate on the need for coercive care in tackling homelessness.

19 Johnsen, Sarah; Fitzpatrick, Suzanne: Revanchist Sanitisation or Coercive Care? The Use of Enforcement to Combat Begging, Street Drinking and Rough Sleeping in England, in *Urban Studies*, 2010, 47(8) 1703–1723, July 2010, p. 1708.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 1710.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 1715.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 1718.

23 Some of whom may also be homeless.

24 *Ibid.*, 1712–1716.

25 See also: O’Sullivan, Eoin: Criminalising people who are homeless?, in *FEANTSA Magazine Homeless in Europe*, Summer 2007, p. 3–4.



The interesting question is therefore not whether anti-begging legislation can be 'good practice' in tackling homelessness. The answer to this question is very clearly negative as anti-begging legislation as such is not concerned with the welfare of homeless individuals. The question is rather if coercive care is or can be 'good practice' in tackling homelessness?

At first glance, the examples of the Netherlands and England suggest that coercive approaches may work for some homeless people. However, if this approach were to be adopted, it would not make sense to limit it to people engaged in begging activities or anti-social behaviour. Reducing it to this group remains in the logic of law and order. Instead, other criteria for coercive care that are more concerned with the welfare of the individual, their health and level of exclusion would need to be defined.

Such an approach, however, would constitute a significant interference in the people's lives and would raise serious human rights concerns. Neither can coercive measures be easily integrated into some of the existing homelessness strategies, which emphasise the need for very flexible, tailored support and the need to rebuild trust and self-confidence.

In addition, some of the negative effects that were documented in the Netherlands and England would remain. For example, there is no reliable information on how many people were simply forced into further exclusion by leaving the city or city centre and therefore reducing their chances to engage with potential support services.

It becomes clear that anti-begging legislation is not an answer to improving the welfare of people experiencing homelessness and other marginalised individuals but rather leads to their criminalisation and further exclusion. If a discussion were to be held it would concern the need for coercive care in relation to tackling homelessness in some very excluded and marginalised people. However, such legislation would not only look very different from the existing anti-begging and anti-social behaviour regulations in many countries but would also raise serious human rights concerns that cannot be easily ignored.



# The Geographies of Homelessness: The Case of Italian Railway Stations<sup>1</sup>

By **Alessandro Radicchi**, *ONDS Director*,<sup>2</sup> and **Fabrizio Torella**, *Responsible for Social Policies – Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane*,<sup>3</sup> Italy

The board introducing visitors to the exhibition *Foreclosed: Rehousing the American Dream*,<sup>4</sup> currently on at the MOMA in New York City, reads “the private house and the city or suburb in which it is situated share a common destiny. Hence, if you change the narratives guiding suburban housing (such as that of the American Dream) and the priorities they imply – including special arrangements, ownership patterns, the balance between public and private interests, and the mixtures of activities and services that any town or city entails – then you begin the process of redirecting suburban sprawl”.

The assumption the architects of Columbia University who curated the exhibit started from is particularly apt for introducing the evolution undergone by major railway stations in Italy and Europe in the last 10-15 years.

We can easily think of the station as a “private house” sharing the destiny of the suburb where it is located. No matter if this suburb is in fact in the very centre of an historic city, like in Rome, or in Paris: it is a suburb nonetheless, for the neighbourhoods around railway stations have all suffered impoverishment, in a broad sense. Cheap shops, faded buildings, low-quality hotels, hustlers, illegal business and unpleasant people – to use a euphemism – are the typical features of the areas around stations, as well as the stereotypical elements of “suburbs”.

Differently from private houses, though, railway stations hardly have a door to close or bell to ring before letting anybody in. The station is open, and not only for train business. Unlike in the recent past, to go back to the quotation above, special arrangements, a (difficult) balance between public and private interests and the mixtures of activities and services have today turned the station into a very inviting place for a broad spectrum of people. For the small social category of homeless people too, for whom it is cosy and somehow homely.

To sum up, we may say that a railway station is a beautiful house in an ugly suburb, or – to use a geographical metaphor – an inviting island in a forbidding urban sea.

A “city within the city”, the railway station is now far from the “non-place” definition that Marc Augé and his fellow sociologists have applied to this incredibly varied microcosm for decades. Stations have indeed a character, provide services, shops, transportation, toilets, food and restaurants, banks, post offices, information, special assistance, healthcare and even arts in some cases. And, in terms of relationships, they facilitate connections between people.

The new station concept aims at attracting people, and it works, including for those who are not always welcome. Homeless people, or people in distress in a broad sense, are regular customers here, actual *stationgoers*, so to speak – to some station managers’ discontent.

Yet, it seems as though the presence of this community in the station goes along with its quality standards: the better it is, the more things it can offer, the more homeless persons tend to like and frequent it. Studies<sup>5</sup> have proven that small peripheral stations, with time-limited commuter traffic, no shops and no security, are totally unused by homeless people, except in a few isolated cases. Urban anthropologists maintain that homeless persons are obviously, above all, persons. Although they lead a life that the majority of other people cannot really understand, they are not that far from everybody’s necessities, and also taste. New, big railway stations, with all the services they provide, respond to several needs: a place to stay, nice architecture, cleanliness, safety, light, warmth or air conditioning (depending on the weather), food, money (both legal and illegal), human relationships, routine, help, solidarity. Who could wish for more than that? For those who do not currently have more, namely a home, a job or a family, a better place is hard to find. A look at a city map will show that many needs are unlikely to be entirely met elsewhere. The neighbourhood in which the station is located, as previously mentioned, is rather inhospitable. The other areas of the city may be fine in the daytime, but they may not provide shelter and safety at night for rough-sleepers. Houses provide that inviolable shelter we all need. Those who do not have a house must look for a substitute, and the station happens to be, nowadays, the best alternative available on the free market. Best

[A] (difficult) balance between public and private interests and the mixtures of activities and services have today turned the station into a very inviting place for a broad spectrum of people.

1 The authors wish to thank the ONDS researchers Franca Iannaccio and Gianni Petiti in particular for their help in writing this paper.

2 [www.onds.it](http://www.onds.it); [www.europeconsulting.it](http://www.europeconsulting.it); [direzione@onds.it](mailto:direzione@onds.it)

3 [www.fsitaliane.it](http://www.fsitaliane.it)

4 *Foreclosed: Rehousing the American Dream* is an exhibition shown at the MOMA, New York City, from February 15 to August 13, 2012, an exploration of new architectural possibilities for cities and suburbs in the aftermath of the recent foreclosure crisis. Responding to The Buell Hypothesis, a research report prepared by the Buell Center at Columbia University, teams - lead by MOS, Visible Weather, Studio Gang, WORKac, and Zago Architecture - focused on a specific location within one of five “megaregions” across the country to come up with inventive solutions for the future of American suburbs. <http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/foreclosed/>

5 See VV.AA., *HCM - Help Center Mobile: Un Osservatorio sul disagio e la solidarietà nelle stazioni del Lazio*, EC edizioni, 2011, <http://www.onds.it/biblioteca/ricerche-sociali/19>



available doesn't mean absolute best, though. In fact, the station is not the right place for a homeless person to stay 24/7. Needless to say, everyone has the right to spend some time at the station, as many retired people do daily, enjoying people-watching and killing time. Living there, sleeping there - being stuck there - is another story. The acknowledgement of this simple statement, that homeless people deserve better living conditions, by all the stakeholders involved in this issue, is the starting point of the Help Center project in Italian railway stations, which celebrates its first decade of life this year.

The Help Center is a place where homeless people, or any other person in need, have free access to a service directing them to social services available in the city. It is not a shelter itself, nor a drop-in centre. It is designed as an office where people can go, receive attention, be listened to, and helped, if possible. The goal is to offer homeless persons an alternative and effective answer to their needs, outside the station. Today, Help Centers are located in 14 Italian railway stations, from North to South, mainly in medium/large cities. There are some exceptions, concerning small cities or small stations in larger urban areas, where homelessness or marginalisation (e.g. food poverty or Roma people) have become an issue.

Generally, Help Centers are based on cooperation between the railway company, that provides the spaces for free, a third sector organisation, providing the service, and local Public Administrations, providing financial support where possible, or institutional support if public funds can't allow any other contribution. Funds are also provided, in most cases, by different donors, namely Foundations, or by State or specific EU projects. In this setup, third sector organisations play the role of facilitator to ease the dialogue between the railway company and the local authority, which might be tempted to consider marginalised people wandering in the stations as one another's problem. Both *Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane* and local authorities, though, have started working seriously on homelessness in the last few years, building strong partnerships and acknowledging each other's issues and areas of intervention, and allowing NGO's to perform their tasks under no other pressure

than the common good, in full respect of the railway's needs, security and citizens' rights and obligations.

The biggest achievement of this cooperation is the creation, in 2006, of the ONDS (National Observatory on Poverty and Solidarity in railway stations), both a network of Help Centers and a working think-tank, where studies, strategies, analysis, data and best practices are shared and developed, in order to make social intervention more effective. The ANCI (Italian National Association of Cities) has been working with the ONDS since the beginning, to grant the commitment of local administrations in giving assistance and relief to the most vulnerable citizens (as a matter of fact, Italian legislation provides that municipalities are in charge of social and housing policies for the residents; the lack of national policies results in very varied levels of assistance from town to town).

This tripartite approach - railway company, local authorities, third sector - along with other crucial stakeholders, such as police and security, volunteers, railway agents and employees, shopkeepers and passengers, are all part of a system, whose goal is to fight homelessness, and not homeless people as if they were contemptible, dreadful enemies. And it is certainly the opportunity to share better knowledge of this social phenomenon that led to a different and more constructive attitude towards it. In fact, if there is a domain in which prejudice has played and still plays a crucial role, it is homelessness. The ONDS has taken up this issue since the beginning, developing advanced IT instruments to keep records of all the interventions and to create personal files for everyone who has benefited from the programme, which has resulted in a very complex e-diary now available to all the Help Centers in the network. Data-protection legislation and protocols strictly regulate the recording of data, and all the users are fully aware that they provide personal information to the Help Center operators. This is necessary, for example, to book a medical examination: the operator will be requested to communicate some user's personal data to the hospital. Beyond the everyday use of this information, the e-diary has two primary functions. First of all, it keeps a record of the development of social intervention for each user assisted, and allows



all the operators to be aware of what has been done, so that no time is wasted in tracking back actions, or in doing anything twice, or wrong. In addition to this, as the e-diary is shared within the ONDS network, if a homeless person who has been assisted, say, in Rome moves to Milan and finds him or herself at the railway station dropping in to the Help Center, any operator will be able to access his/her personal file and assist him/her with all the necessary information.

The second function of the e-diary is to provide, in real time, a picture of homelessness in railway areas, with a very high level of accuracy. Age, sex, physical and mental conditions, addictions, but also needs, expectations, housing conditions, job skills, education, can be investigated by the e-diary query system, building up a detailed demographic description.

Combining geography, anthropology and demography it is possible to revise intervention plans, methodology and services, and hopefully to come up with customised solutions on the one hand, and with useful advice for policy makers on the other. As an example, numbers of young immigrants are dramatically increasing among homeless people, as well as elderly Italians with health problems.<sup>6</sup> Do we thus need "old-fashioned" night shelters, or do we rather need stronger labour inclusion strategies for the former and 24/7 nursing homes or hospices for the latter? The development of social services is absolutely dependent on a clear picture of the phenomenon, as funds have dropped and client numbers have grown.

And this is now a EU-wide occurrence. In 2008, *Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane*, following the framework set out by ONDS and with the cooperation of the SNCF (France), SNCB (Belgium) and CFL (Luxembourg), founded *Gare Européenne et Solidarité* (European Stations and Solidarity), the first network of railway companies dedicated to social policies in station areas, which now counts 12 members from as many European countries. The EU itself has shown interest in this subject and has financed two projects, *Hope in Stations* and *Work in Stations*, in the framework of the PROGRESS programme, to develop new social and labour inclusion tools for the most vulnerable citizens, starting from railway stations and reaching out to the entire city.

So, it is possible, as stated in the Buell Hypothesis, to change suburbs by changing private houses or, in this case, railway stations. These European projects, the broad partnerships gathered around them and around other initiatives concerning homelessness, are, little by little, changing the city and its social strategies, moving from self-standing initiatives to cooperation. The project to extend the ONDS e-diary to other social organisations providing services for people in need goes in this direction. Also, paradoxically enough, it is basically like going back to the time when social networks were not virtual, but real.

**[C]rucial stakeholders [...] are all part of a system, whose goal is to fight homelessness, and not homeless people as if they were contemptible, dreadful enemies.**

6 See *ONDS Annual Report 2011* on [www.onds.it](http://www.onds.it)



## The Work of the Samur Social in Barajas International Airport

By **Darío Pérez Madera**, *Head of Department, Samur Social and Homeless People Division, Family and Social Services Unit, Madrid City Council, Spain*

[A]irports are public spaces where the presence of homeless people is a reality [...] because the conditions in them facilitate the existence of people who are far removed from the governmental social assistance network.

### WHAT IS THE SAMUR SOCIAL?

In June 2004, Madrid City Council set up the Samur Social, a social service that assists homeless people living on the streets. The Samur Social also responds to social emergencies (unexpected and unforeseen situations in time and space) that create social problems that must be solved, such as an elderly person abandoned in an airport. These areas of intervention are different but they both take place in the same space: on the street. That is why the Samur Social service fulfils these two functions.

The Samur Social, as a street outreach service for homeless people, is connected to the municipal network of services for this social group, which has more than 700 spaces in public shelter services at its disposal. Its area of intervention, as already mentioned, is street outreach and outreach in public spaces where citizens find themselves in situations of extreme exclusion.

The Samur Social is a municipal service made up of 12 street teams, each composed of social workers and supporting staff. Every day, they go out into the streets of Madrid, responding to the needs of homeless people they find there. In addition, eight vehicles support the aforementioned street teams.

In this way, the Samur Social is the main entry point for homeless people into the local social assistance network. Above all, it is a bridge between people experiencing social exclusion and the possibility to create new opportunities, thanks to the resources that the Samur Social provides them with.

### THE AIRPORT AS AN IMPORTANT PUBLIC SPACE

There are many examples in literature and film that show the important role airports play as public spaces where several, varied, economic, social, relational and collective activities take place. By the same token, nowadays, in many European cities, it is possible to find homeless people who have decided to make their life in the airport.

Indeed, airports provide a number of facilities that make this easier to do, because people can find facilities that take care of the basic necessities required for survival: central heating, air conditioning, food, toilets, etc. and, above all, the "generosity" and "altruism" of citizens present every day in the airport who, in many cases, give the spare change they cannot convert back into their own currency to the homeless people in the airport.

As a result, it can be said that airports are public spaces where the presence of homeless people is a reality in many European cities because the conditions in them facilitate the existence of people who are far removed from the governmental social assistance network.

### THE SAMUR SOCIAL IN BARAJAS AIRPORT

In February 2006, Madrid City Council and *Aeropuertos Españoles y Navegación Aérea* (Spanish airports and airspace) signed an agreement saying that one of the accepted airport activities is that of the Samur Social responding to social emergencies and looking after homeless people in situations of extreme social exclusion who use the airport as a place to stay. The agreement gives legitimacy to the presence of the Samur Social in Madrid-Barajas airport. Thus, this cooperation takes place against a backdrop of a stable and legitimate professional relationship.

The Samur Social's tasks in the airport are designed to respond effectively and efficiently to the needs of people who spend the night in Barajas. Once a week, on a different day each week, a mobile unit and a street team, provided by the Samur Social, look for homeless people in the airport and look after them once they have found them. The aim is to help the homeless people who are known to the unit but also to come into contact with new homeless people who have just arrived in the airport. Thus, the outreach activities are preventative in that they find new cases and provide assistance to the people who are already known to the team.



In both cases, the goal is to bring homeless people into contact with the social assistance network, or to other services adapted to their needs. Of course, not everyone accepts the help offered straight away, so it is also necessary to set mid-term objectives that can help to change the person's mind and lead them to accept help.

Similarly, the Samur Social team will go to the airport any time they are called by the different services (security, information services, police, hygiene facilities) in order to help homeless people spending the night in the airport receive assistance and for any reason given by the aforementioned services. These requests take the form of a telephone call to the central Samur Social service since there is a stable and specific system of cooperation between the airport and the Samur Social.

The Samur Social, as an emergency social service, also goes to the airport in order to solve any emergency for which its expertise is required. These requests usually come from local and national police units present in the airport and from other professionals working there. Examples of situations encountered are disorientated elderly people, lost children, citizens who are passing through and have been robbed or have lost their belongings.

Equally, as part of its responsibilities as an emergency social service, the Samur Social cooperates with the rest of the Madrid emergency services, looking after the families and lightly wounded victims of any serious accident that occurs in the airport, as happened following the crash of a Spainair flight in August 2008. In this respect, the Samur Social has participated in several simulations of similar situations and how to respond to them in which the Madrid emergency services take part.

## A FEW FIGURES

These are the figures from 2011 that show the work of the Samur Social in Barajas Airport.

Different outreach searches found around 40 homeless people sleeping in the several airport terminals: there were between 20 and 30 people in Terminal 4, only four permanently resident in Terminal 2 and around six in Terminal 1. All of them received assistance from the Samur Social.

Throughout 2011, around 15 of these homeless people agreed to accept help from the homeless services. The rest still refuse our help, but we are working on changing their mind. It is important to underline in this instance the cooperation with the Mental Health Team that helped the Samur Social reach five homeless people, who had been in the airport for a year and, for health reasons, were taken into the services without having given express consent. They all had serious mental health problems and, in cooperation with the Mental Health Team, the Samur Social managed to have them admitted into a psychiatric hospital. Today, these people are taking part in the various processes of social inclusion and are present in the various services provided by the municipal network of assistance for homeless people.

It is also important to mention that, during 2011, the Samur Social helped more than 40 people needing social assistance (elderly people, people with disabilities, children), responding to unexpected social emergency situations.



## The Creation of the “Bois de Vincennes MOUS (Social and Urban Project)”

By **Nicola Iodice**<sup>1</sup>, *Coordinator of the Emmaüs Solidarité Outreach Patrol in the Bois de Vincennes, France*

“Many of the rag-pickers who live in rented rooms prefer to sleep in the fields when the weather is good in order to save money. A rag-picker earns between 15 and 20 sous (pennies) a day. They have a nomadic and virtually wild life. They are remarkable for the bold and rough nature of their lifestyle.”<sup>2</sup>

Located on the eastern edge of Paris’ 12th arrondissement, which it extends beyond the périphérique or ring road, the bois de Vincennes covers an area of 995 hectares. It is made up of laid-out lawns, woodland areas and four lakes that are connected to one another by streams. Roads serving the municipalities in the Val de Marne, which are adjacent to Paris, run through the woods.

The camps for homeless people first began to appear in this area, which has not been designated for building, in the first few years after the Second World War. Since 1993, when the law prohibiting vagrancy was repealed, the city of Paris authorities have opted for a tolerant attitude towards vulnerable people who have sought refuge in these camps. From the year 2000, the city authorities have been providing services to these people living in the woods through the homeless assistance unit, which is composed of safety inspectors and social workers and which has been entrusted with the task of undertaking evaluation and orientation patrols.

The growing number of people living in the woods and the death of three of them in November 2008 led the city authorities to change method and, in agreement with the Regional and Inter-departmental Directorate for Accommodation and Housing (DRIHL-75), a decision was taken to allocate specific funding, in the framework of a Social and Urban Project (known by its French acronym, MOUS), to a community-based operator capable of using its skilled staff to provide full-time services to the homeless people in the bois de Vincennes. The specifications of the mission, which was initially scheduled to run for 15 months, recommended that a “*personalised assessment of all of the people living in the bois de Vincennes*” should be carried out, “*so as to be able to propose appropriate accommodation and housing solutions to the people living in the woods.*”

Having won the tender to provide these services, the EMMAÛS Solidarité association began its mission to provide a social outreach patrol in January 2009. This mission is perfectly in keeping with the objectives pursued by the EMMAÛS Solidarité community-based project, which is designed to lead homeless people

out of a precarious situation towards a more dignified life and to enable them, through the creation of relationships based on trust, support and guidance throughout the various administrative procedures they have to face, to move away from their precarious existence and “welfare dependency” so that they can re-discover their lost stability and independence. As a result of this approach, which is based on “*reaching out*” to the homeless, it has been possible to identify the neighbourhoods and the places where people set up their camps in Paris and the Paris region. In this way, patrol services have been established, first of all in the centre of Paris, in the area covered by the first four arrondissements (1999), before being extended to the terminal buildings at Roissy airport (2007-2012) and the neighbourhoods in the north of Paris (2008).

### WHAT THE PATROL DOES

The bois de Vincennes is a challenging environment for social workers. The people living in the woods live in tents, shelters covered by tarpaulin and permanent shacks made out of boards. Indeed, some of the camps look like real camping sites, with barbecues, tables and chairs.

These living conditions, which are more or less decent and just about “comfortable”, make it very difficult for the members of the patrols to approach the people they meet and to begin to establish a relationship with them, so that they are eventually in a position to provide them with the guidance and the support they need with a view to their future reinsertion into society as responsible and involved citizens. As well as being intent on responding to requests for housing and helping people to find their way back into employment, the members of the Emmaüs Solidarité outreach team also try to ensure that, once all of the right conditions have been put in place, they are able to provide support for the applications made by the homeless people to be re-housed in social and private housing. Emmaüs Solidarité has made a conscious, ethical decision to provide services to homeless people whilst respecting their choices and the pace at which they wish to go and to approach them empty-handed, without offering to provide food or clothes.<sup>3</sup> A further difficulty encountered when trying to get

1 [niodice@emmaus.asso.fr](mailto:niodice@emmaus.asso.fr)

2 Honoré Antoine Frégier, *Des classes dangereuses de la population dans les grandes villes et des moyens de les rendre meilleures*, Paris 1840, quoted by Eric Hazan in *Paris sous tension*, Paris 2011, p. 86.

3 In winter, we distribute duvets and parkas, primarily to those who have no resources of their own.





some of the homeless people out of the woods is that some of them have spent many years as vagrants and have become accustomed to this lifestyle. These people attend day care centres and meet distribution services which provide them with the things they need. The EMMAÛS Solidarité patrol, on the other hand, prefers to provide practical and socialising solutions, such as handing out vouchers for social restaurants, providing the addresses of public washrooms and helping people to apply for financial support. This approach gives a greater sense of responsibility to the people being helped and helps them to emerge from their sense of isolation by mixing with people from different backgrounds and meeting other social workers.

A working area, which was opened in the woods in November 2009 as a no strings attached, three half-days a week reception centre, enables the outreach workers to provide the homeless people with a place in which they may be listened to and in which the members of the team can work directly with the homeless. The aim behind this idea of giving the homeless people the possibility to visit the outreach workers in their own premises in the woods so that they can voice their needs, is to transform the homeless person from being someone who is part of a passive process in which they are visited by an "intruding outreach worker", into someone who is part of an "active process" who goes to meet a social worker having established a good relationship with him or her.

The assessments performed at the very outset by the outreach patrol served to quickly reveal the diversity of the population present in the woods. Some of the people living in the bois de Vincennes have been there for 20 years, whilst others have only recently arrived. Since 2010, there has been a considerable influx of people from Romania and Bulgaria. Many of these Rumanian and Bulgarian homeless people have spent a significant amount of time living in these woods and these periods have been only interrupted by occasional visits to their country of origin<sup>4</sup>. A large number of the people in the woods have not been in employment for a long time and receive the RSA<sup>5</sup>. The people who have no means of their own earn their livelihood by collecting scrap metal, as well as by hawking objects they are able to salvage from dustbins. By constantly monitoring the camps,<sup>6</sup> the patrols are able to evaluate quickly the situation faced by new arrivals and this enables them to respond effectively to emergencies.

From the very beginning, the Bois de Vincennes patrol has always been in a position to offer housing to people who request it. Since the support offered must be part of a general approach, it is also necessary to be able to provide responses to the other elements of insertion related to the activity being carried out, notably with regard to helping people to find employment, as well as providing support to vulnerable groups such as families with children who

are still minors, people with an addiction or those who have pets. Once the intervention strategy, which is a combination of an individual approach and the creation of group dynamics, has been introduced, it has to be consolidated in order to create the conditions for the establishment of global insertion actions, which are designed to lead to innovative re-housing solutions.

By carrying out this work, in 2011 we were able to help 96 people to find emergency accommodation and were able to place 25 people in to stabilisation accommodation centres. We came across 12 families and they were all taken under the wing of the 115 provision.<sup>7</sup> With regard to the provision of support for people seeking employment, we were able to steer two people towards reinsertion through employment projects and 15 towards Emmaüs Communities. In order to address these issues, our patrols are accompanied by psychiatric nurses, as well as by special needs workers from institutions specialised in the prevention of alcohol and drug-related risks. As a result of this aspect of our work, we have placed three people in detox programmes and have taken several people to public hospitals for treatment for a range of health problems.

### COORDINATING THE PARTNERS

A second aspect of the mission entrusted to Emmaüs Solidarité required it to ensure the coordination of all of the partners engaged in the provision of services to the homeless in the bois de Vincennes. Since the association had no prior knowledge of the woods, the identification of the location of the camps and their occupants was a key aspect of its mission. From this point of view, the work carried out by the Homeless Support Unit (UASA) of the Protection and Prevention Department (DPP) of the City of Paris, a field practitioner which has been working in the Bois de Vincennes for many years, certainly helped to facilitate this lengthy mapping exercise, which needs to be repeated on a periodical basis in order to update our maps and information. The exploration of the Bois was carried out through the rationalisation of the patrol activity in the sense that the area to be explored was divided up into 5 sectors so as to organise the routes followed by the patrol through the woods in the best possible way.

Other patrols, such as the Homeless Support Brigade (BAPSA), the volunteers from the Secours catholique in both Paris (75) and Créteil (94), as well as the Homeless Mission from the *Garde Républicaine à Cheval*, also regularly run patrols in the woods. Meetings are held on a fairly regular basis with these partners in order to take stock of the overall situation or to resolve issues with the local residents.

As part of a response to particular needs and requests, many other partners carry out specific patrols with the Emmaüs social workers in order to visit to people who may have an addiction or homeless people who do

Since the association had no prior knowledge of the woods, the identification of the location of the camps and their occupants was a key aspect of its mission.

4 In 2011, we met 12 families living in the woods and they were all successfully directed towards emergency accommodation via the 115 provision.

5 Active solidarity income, which is €450 per month.

6 The number of people living in the woods varies according to the season. In 2011, we identified close to 120 people living in the woods in the winter and as many as 250 in the summer.

7 This is an emergency number which enables callers to ask for emergency accommodation in a CHU or hotel.



not speak French, such as those who speak Bulgarian or Romanian.

As a result of the efforts made to coordinate the various partners, it is possible to carry out joint actions in the field with the different practitioners present in the Bois and to define a multi-disciplinary approach with actors who have complementary areas of expertise.

### THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED

The main difficulties encountered are related to the efforts made to provide support to people who have lived in the woods for several years.<sup>8</sup> Very often, these people live in shacks and have become cut off from the outside world and perhaps this is why the outreach work undertaken is only successful in collecting a handful of requests to leave the woods each year. However, we have been able to help someone who had been living in the woods for 23 years to find a place in a stabilisation accommodation centre. The variety of the profiles of the homeless people living in the woods means that customised solutions have to be found for each of them and this requirement is at odds with the inflexibility of the SIAO (Integrated Care and Support System). This body, which has been recently created in order to manage the allocation of emergency housing and insertion services according to criteria listed on an evaluation sheet, limits the possibility of making use of the partnerships that have

been established for a long time with the accommodation centres and the other community-based practitioners working in the field of social housing.

However, during the winter season, when temperatures sometimes dip as low as -15 degrees, the possibility of directly managing the allocation of places in emergency accommodation in real time<sup>9</sup> has allowed for the provision of immediate solutions for persons in a highly vulnerable situation.

By creating this mission, the public authorities had hoped that the field presence of a practitioner specialised in the provision of social support to people living rough would be capable of quickly and definitively removing the camps and bringing an end to any efforts to set up new shelters in the bois de Vincennes. However, both the work carried and the results achieved, including the objective of ensuring that there would be no further deaths amongst the people living in the woods, are not consistent with the reduction in the number of homeless people "camping" in the woods envisaged by the public authorities at the time when they devised this mission to establish a social outreach patrol in the bois de Vincennes. However, having given due consideration to the housing solutions that have been offered, the large number of people who have left the woods and the continuous arrival of new people, the public authorities have decided that the project should continue in the future.

8 Of the 120 people who spend the winter in the woods, at least 40 of them have lived in the woods for more than 5 years and around ten of them have lived there between 5 and 20 years.

9 In 2011, the DRIHL allocated 25 places to people living in the Bois de Vincennes



## The Work Carried Out by the Aurore Maraude Ouest (Western Patrol) in the Bois de Boulogne: Its Target Group, Objectives and Partners

By **Michel Dorin**, *Head of Service of the Maraude Ouest (Western Patrol) of the AURORE Association, France*

The Aurore Maraude Ouest team was created in March 2009 and it operates in the western area of Paris (the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> arrondissements), the Bois de Boulogne and Montparnasse station from 8 am to 11 pm, Monday to Friday. These times may be changed upon the introduction of Level 2 of the winter plan.<sup>1</sup> The team is composed of six social workers, including a psychologist, two assistants and three special needs workers and disability support workers. It is financed on a 50/50 basis by the public authorities and the City of Paris.

As described in the service project, the outreach work in the west of Paris takes the form of social interventions designed to get people off the streets on a permanent basis, by working alongside the people concerned where possible in order to help them gain access to housing and to rebuild their life.

Here is a description of the support services provided by the team:

Initially, the most important element is to make a connection with the homeless people. This connection is the starting point for the establishment of a relationship. It defines the strategy that the team is going to adopt when reaching out to the person concerned in order to establish the necessary degree of trust.

The approach adopted by the team varies according to the profile of the people it meets.

However, generally speaking, the support may be described as follows:

- Establishing contact
- Establishing a case history
- Listening
- Support
- Evaluation
- Orientation
- Guidance

### UNDERTAKING OUTREACH SERVICES IN THE BOIS DE BOULOGNE

Turning to the Bois de Boulogne in particular, a two-person team operates in the Bois two or three times a week in collaboration with our partners, including the Homeless Unit of the Directorate for Protection and Prevention of the City of Paris.

The people encountered by our team in the woods are in an extremely vulnerable and precarious situation and in most cases they have been living rough for many years. These people do not make use of the various structures available because they have already rejected the existing provisions because they do not meet with their expectations or because the collective facilities on offer are not adapted to their needs and are always full anyway. Furthermore, the majority of these people no longer even bother to make use of the social support structures.

Not only do a good number of the people we have come across in woods suffer from a variety of addictions, many of them also have mental health issues.

Since their living conditions mean that they are often victims of a certain form of isolation from the rest of the world, this means that many of them find it more difficult to socialise with others than those living in the other areas of the capital. The team has also found that the people living in the woods have a greater tendency to settle and to try to make a claim on their own territory (the establishment of equipped camps, which are designed to be almost as autonomous as conventional forms of housing, is increasingly frequent).

It is particularly difficult to work in this area due to the complexity of the people living in the woods, the majority of whom have been settled in the woods for several years (indeed, the majority of the people encountered by our teams have been living in the woods for a very long time and several have been there for between 10 and 15 years) and refuse to accept the offers of accommodation made by the 115 and SIAO,<sup>2</sup> whilst others have mental health issues or are chronic alcoholics. During the winter periods when level 2 of the plan is implemented, the team and its partners spend the majority of their time monitoring the people in the woods and keeping a very close eye on them.

During 2011, the team met 45 people and 17 of them accepted some form of assistance, including a few who accepted social and educational support. Only one person accepted the offer of emergency accommodation.

<sup>1</sup> If a particularly cold spell is forecast, then the prefect of the Ile-de-France region activates Level 2 of the winter plan in the capital and across the whole of the Ile-de-France. Under the terms of Level 2 of the winter plan, which is implemented when the temperature is between -10°C and -18°C, extra places are provided in hotels and emergency accommodation.

<sup>2</sup> The accommodation placements are made available through the provisions of the 115 (Social SAMU emergency regulation) and the SIAO (Integrated Care and Support System), both of which have an overview of the places available so as to be able to manage them in the best possible way, according to the defined modalities.



# The Pilis Park Forest Programme – The First Steps Towards a New Approach in Hungary

By **Andrea Szabó**,<sup>1</sup> *Public Foundation for the Homeless, Hungary*

Street workers have a very special challenge in these areas: to motivate a really unique target group to move on and to try to integrate them into mainstream society.

## INTRODUCTION

The Public Foundation for the Homeless plays a very special role in the Hungarian service system for homeless people. The term “Public Foundation” explains the dual role of the organisation: on the one hand, our goal is to provide services for homeless people – like any other foundation; on the other hand, as a state agency, we allocate governmental funds from the annual national budget to service providers nationally.

The Pilis Park Forest Programme was developed in cooperation with the Pilis Park Forest Company<sup>2</sup> in 2005-2006 to provide appropriate housing solutions for homeless people living in the forests managed by the company.

## RURAL AND URBAN HOMELESSNESS IN HUNGARY – THE GAPS ARE PRACTICALLY THE SAME

As in many other European countries, homelessness in Hungary is not only a problem in the capital. According to the latest figures of the “3<sup>rd</sup> of February” annual survey,<sup>3</sup> more people are living in homeless shelters and sleeping rough in other big cities of the country than in the capital. The characteristics of homelessness differ in every city, but some general issues are the same nationally. One of them is (still) the high number of rough sleepers and the lack of appropriate and affordable housing opportunities for homeless people. The service system is mainly designed for isolated men with good cooperation skills, controlled mental health issues and limited substance use problems. Also, many shelters cannot provide good-quality accommodation (bunk beds and often many beds in the same room etc.). Therefore, homeless people with complex needs and/or living with a partner often sleep and live rough.

In Budapest, for economical, historical and geographical reasons, there are large areas of forests, abandoned industrial sites, or railways surrounded by brushwood. Most of the forestry areas are managed by the Pilis Park Forest Company and used as a recreational area for city-dwellers and are also excellent hiding places for homeless people. The living conditions and the lifestyle of these people are very

different from the well-known urban homelessness in the city centre. Homeless people here usually live in self-made huts, abandoned caves, or tents and have very basic amenities in their household like a fireplace, household items, a TV, or even a fridge. Couples, small but very close communities, and also isolated single persons live on these hidden sites. Most of them have pets, usually dogs, for their safety, but also as company. Many of them have severe mental health issues, addiction problems and also physical illnesses.

Street workers have a very special challenge in these areas: to motivate a really unique target group to move on and to try to integrate them into mainstream society. The task is even harder because of the lack of affordable housing in the capital and also the lack of any appropriate institutional solutions. Homeless people living in the forests see their tents, caves, or huts as a long-term “home”, where they do not have to follow rules, or pay for the utilities. Exchanging this inappropriate “home” for a shelter or a small flat could have high costs and would require a lot of effort. Often the social workers cannot see the right solutions either, and help to maintain and even develop this form of accommodation (such as by giving them heaters, blankets, sleeping bags, etc.).

## THE HISTORY OF THE PROGRAMME, FUNDED PROGRAMMES

In 2005, the Pilis Park Forest Company decided to start a cleaning process in the park forests. The company aimed to develop the hiking ways and picnic areas and to encourage city dwellers to use them. For the first step in 2005,<sup>4</sup> they helped to assess the number and living conditions of homeless people in the woods. Secondly, the company asked for the help of the Ministry of Social Affairs<sup>5</sup> and the Public Foundation to provide appropriate alternatives for them. In 2006, consultations started between the Ministry, the Public Foundation, the Park Forest Company, and the street work service providers led by Miklós Vecsei,<sup>6</sup> the Ministries Commissioner for Homelessness. The Pilis Park Forest Company covered the costs of the cleaning process - collecting and delivering the waste from the woods - and the Ministry provided the funding for the Pilis Park Forest Programme which was allocated by the Public Foundation.

1 [szabo.andrea@hajlektalanokert.hu](mailto:szabo.andrea@hajlektalanokert.hu)

2 The Pilis Park Forest Company manages 65,000 hectares of forests owned by the state. The forests are in the area of 117 municipalities, including 16 districts of Budapest.

3 The report of the latest survey is available online: <http://www.bmszki.hu/f3/2012ango1>

4 In cooperation with the street work services

5 Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, from 2010 Ministry of National Recourses, from 2012 Ministry of Human Resources

6 Miklós Vecsei: 2002-2007 Ministries Commissioner for Homeless, 2007-2010 Chairman of Board of Trustees at the Public Foundation for Homeless, now the Vice President of Hungarian Maltese Charity Service



In February 2007, the Public Foundation published the first call for street work services working in the areas around the Pilis Park Forest to provide social services and rent supplement for homeless people. At that time, the applications of 5 organisations were funded to support 105 homeless people. In March 2008, a second call was published, partly for the aftercare of people who were supported in the programmes of the first call, and partly to start new programmes. At that time, aftercare for 44 people in the first 5 programmes, and 5 new programmes supporting 40 people were funded.

The call limited the average costs of supporting one person to 1,035 EUR:<sup>7</sup> 828 EUR for any material or financial support for the homeless people and 207 EUR for the costs of social work. Furthermore, the social work services had to draw up a written agreement with the forestry company on cooperation during the programme. The programmes had to include personal development and support plans and the budget had to meet individual needs while keeping within the limited budget covering average costs.

The Pilis Park Forest Programme brought many new aspects to the Hungarian homeless service system: this was the first project specifically aimed at integrating the difficult target group of long-term rough sleepers with complex needs. There were integration programmes providing rent supplements before, but those were mostly designed to support people with a regular income and good cooperation skills. Social workers in this programme faced new gaps and challenges but also new forms of success. By the time the programmes started, social work services had no protocols to help this target group into integrated housing solutions. "Housing First" and "housing led" approaches were barely known in Hungary. But service providers had a strong long-term contact with the target group and they know exactly why institutional approaches are inappropriate for these people and why they do not want to move into a shelter.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMMES AND SUPPORT FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE**

For the first step in the programme, foresters and social workers visited the homeless people in the forests and together explained the programme to them. The foresters spoke about the cleaning and restoration process in the hiking areas, the social workers tried to convince the persons to engage with the support they could offer. This joint effort was crucial in the programme: the impossibility of living at these sites any longer, and the offered support/housing options together could lead to success.

After the first assessment of the applications, we could see mostly rented flats as housing solutions, and in some cases the individual assessment found the person to be unable to live independently (severe mental or physical disabilities) so the aim was a nursing home or long-term care for people with psychiatric illnesses. 65% planned to move into a rented flat (with rent supplements); 10% found a temporary shelter to be the right solution. The others wanted either to move into a workers' hostel, move back to the countryside, or regain contact with their family, buy a caravan and live there, or rent a small piece of land in order to be able to pitch a tent on that legally. The individual plan was always based on mutual understanding between the social workers and the participants.

The Public Foundation organised regular meetings for the social workers in the programmes to help the exchange of experiences and good practices. After a few meetings, it was clear that the plans did not match the reality in many cases. Working with a target group with complex needs means that one has to change plans and priorities from time to time. The Public Foundation agreed to follow the new information or needs and not to stick to the initial planning. There were also changes in the target group: social workers lost contact with some people because of imprisonment or disappearance; some people died before or during the programmes. Also, in many cases, social workers realised that the initial plan was not appropriate.

Most of the time, the first task was to reassess the health issues (both mental and physical), financial opportunities and social or family connection networks of each person. This new type of personalised, intensive casework was very different compared with the previous street-work contact. Both the social workers and the homeless people had to adapt to the new situation and the new ways of working together. Another issue was the need to find affordable rented flats for the programme, and to fight against the prejudices of the owners.<sup>8</sup> In a number of cases, the social workers decided to offer an option between an integrated private rented flat and the woods: they bought a caravan for the participant and parked it at a legal, official camping area. In this case, access to water and electricity was provided and the caravan owners had to pay a small amount for the services. Also, heating and a safe private area were guaranteed. Lifestyle changes were much less pronounced than in the case of moving into a flat, but this accommodation option is not integrated into mainstream society and still cannot be called a secure solution.

<sup>7</sup> 1 EUR = 290 HUF

<sup>8</sup> Please note: in Hungary, the social housing sector is very small, and waiting lists are full. None of the people in the programme could move to a social-rented flat.



**Street-work services in Budapest strictly cover specified areas – every service has one target area in the city.**

When the participants had moved into their new places, social workers reported some difficulties in keeping up regular contact with them, and also the visiting (in-house) social work was new for them. Street-work services in Budapest strictly cover specified areas – every service has one target area in the city, but the rented flats and other housing solutions were scattered throughout the capital and in some cases also in small towns in the countryside. Distances were therefore an issue when it came to keeping regular contact. The other big effort for social workers was to learn new methods of social work in the role of a “visitor” in the home. The participants had to learn new everyday life skills regarding a tenant role and settle into the neighbourhood; helping them to do so was also a new task for the street workers. Regular meetings during the programmes were of critical importance: sharing experiences and mutual learning helped street workers to provide quality services for the participants and to develop new skills and methods of social work.

### **STEPPING FORWARD – NEW PROGRAMME FOR CHRONIC ROUGH SLEEPERS IN HUNGARY**

Despite the gaps and problems, the Pilis Park Forest Programme showed us a new perspective regarding the target group: intensive and individualised social work; appropriate and diverse housing options and targeted and adequate support can help chronic homeless people with complex needs to give up street life and to integrate into society.

The programme also proved: the aims of a public authority (in this case, the Pilis Park Forest Company) and social service providers can meet. With good cooperation between the stakeholders, successful programmes can support the integration of homeless people, and a reduction in the number of rough sleepers.

Based on the results of the Pilis Park Forest Programme, the Public Foundation designed a new pilot programme in 2011 to promote long-term solutions for chronic rough sleepers with complex support needs in Hungary, the “Back from the Streets Programme”. The Ministry of National Recourses<sup>9</sup> agreed to provide financial resources for reducing the number of rough sleepers in the country. During an 8-month period 207 chronic rough sleepers will be helped to access long-term housing options, mostly in the private rented sector.

9 2010 Ministry of National Recourses, from 2012 Ministry of Human Resources





**FEANTSA is supported by the European Community  
Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity  
(2007-2013).**

This programme was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals in these fields.

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For more information see:

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FEANTSA is supported financially by the European Commission. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and the Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

The cover image was produced in the Singul'art workshop for homeless people in Lyon.

**European Federation of  
National Organisations working  
with the Homeless, AISBL**

194, Chaussée de Louvain  
1210 Brussels

Belgium

Tel: +32 (0)2 538 66 69

Fax: +32 (0)2 539 41 74

Email: [information@feantsa.org](mailto:information@feantsa.org)

