



FEANTSA Opposes Decree Criminalising Homelessness in Budapest

On 27th April 2011, Budapest City Council adopted a decree that makes sleeping in the street an offence and subjects people sleeping rough to fines and detention. FEANTSA opposes this punitive measure which leads to the criminalization of homeless people and points out the worrying trend towards repressive and coercive measures against homelessness in other major European cities.

The decree declared habitual residence in public spaces an offence. Those who sleep rough may be sanctioned to pay a fine of up to 200 Euros. Since homeless people cannot pay such a fine, they are likely to face police harassment and detention.

The decree is contrary to the constitutional principles in Hungary as well as international human rights law. In the name of public order it restricts the most vulnerable people's rights to equality and human dignity. It aims to conceal the problem of homelessness rather than offering any real solution.

There are thousands of people sleeping rough in Budapest. The City Council has adopted a punitive measure while it has recently annulled its contracts with NGOs providing services for homeless people, has not even increased the number of beds by a single one and significantly decreased the budget allocated for the fight against homelessness. All this is happening against the backdrop of the government's recent decision to partially lift the eviction moratorium, as a result of which tens of thousands of people will be at risk of becoming homeless.

It is an alarming development that major European cities, including Madrid, London and Prague are proposing and adopting repressive and coercive measures, threatening to expel homeless people from public spaces. While governments of EU Member States have committed to developing integrated homeless strategies and are promising to take steps towards ending homelessness, municipal administrations are offering responses that would only exacerbate the social exclusion and human rights violation of people experiencing homelessness. These measures are cruel, since they punish the poorest and most vulnerable. They are also ineffective, since they only make homeless people invisible by hiding them from the wider society but do not offer any real solutions to tackle homelessness.

FEANTSA strongly opposes any measure that criminalizes homelessness and recommends improving the services and conditions of homeless shelters, increasing the social housing stock and increasing housing assistance. We also recommend developing a long-term and strategic approach towards ending homelessness.

Freek Spinnewijn, FEANTSA Director, made the following comment: *"In the current context where the European Union has made commitments to work towards ending homelessness, it would be interesting to hear a reaction from the European institutions against the criminalisation of homeless people in certain European cities and in favour of integrated, sustainable solutions to homelessness."*

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Notes for Editors

1. FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless. It is an umbrella of not-for-profit organisations which participate in or contribute to the fight against homelessness in Europe. Established in 1989, FEANTSA represents today more than 150 organisations working with people experiencing homelessness in about 30 European countries which provide a wide range of services to people experiencing homelessness, including housing, health, employment support, social protection, rights and participation. It is the only major European network that focuses exclusively on homelessness at the European level. More information is available at: www.feantsa.org
2. In recent years, a growing number of national and local strategies have been put in place across Europe with the aim of reducing, and even ending, homelessness. See [this webpage](#) for information on different strategies.

*For further information on this Press Release and others, please contact [Suzannah Young](#),
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