

FEANTSA Statement

14 March 2022, Brussels

FEANTSA members call for a swift reception of refugees from Ukraine, including increased support to homelessness services engaged in the management of the current humanitarian crisis

By day eighteen of the war, the Russian invasion has caused more than 2.5 million people to flee Ukraine, and over 1 million are estimated to have been internally displaced. The EU expects the number of refugees from Ukraine to reach as many as 7 million, while 18 million are expected to be affected by the war within the Ukrainian territory.ⁱ Many have already found refuge in neighbouring countries, primarily Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary and Moldova, where civil society, private individuals and governments have organised support, including members of FEANTSA who are active on the ground.

FEANTSA acknowledges that the European Union is facing a humanitarian crisis which threatens its democracy and safety. This is a time to defend the founding values of the Union. We welcome the immediate reaction of the European Commission and the European states, particularly neighbouring countries, to facilitate the arrival of people who seek refuge after fleeing war and leaving everything behind to save themselves.ⁱⁱ

In the face of the humanitarian emergency in Ukraine, FEANTSA calls on the EU and all European countries to manage the arrival of refugees in accordance with international and EU law, to respect access to the right to asylum for all and to implement joint action to establish mechanisms of shared solidarity, including guaranteeing minimum reception conditions. Considering the high number of people who will be fleeing Ukraine, **shared responsibility of all EU Members** is key in ensuring safety for those exiled. In this respect, FEANTSA welcomes the decision by the European Commission to propose temporary protection for people fleeing war in Ukraine as well as guidelines on border controls. The existence of legal avenues such as the activation of the Temporary Protection Directiveⁱⁱⁱ in case of a mass influx of displaced persons will certainly facilitate the reception of Ukrainian people throughout Europe. This protection allows for dignified reception conditions, with clear rights and helps to avoid creating competition between vulnerable people. We further underline that guarantying a minimum social welfare support by MS as part of this protection for those seeking asylum is essential in achieving integration.

FEANTSA and its members who provide services for people experiencing homelessness, among them asylum seekers and refugees, commend the rapid responses from member states and the EU in this situation of crisis and remain engaged in supporting people who have been displaced across Europe. Moving forward, facilitating access to EU funding for civil society organisations is also extremely important, as concerns amount that funding at national level will most probably be minimised. FEANTSA members are aware that the displacement of millions by the conflict in Ukraine is likely to lead to pressure on homeless services in some contexts. We underline that adequate resources and support are required to cope and to deliver a dignified response. Homeless services were already struggling to cope with the level of need.

In these troubling times we must apply international human rights standards **for all**, irrespective of their origin country, ethnicity or skin colour. The reports of differential treatment at borders^{iv} and experiences

of discrimination^v amidst a war against innocent people are appalling and have no place in our societies. Particular vulnerabilities have to be acknowledged, and equal treatment for everyone in search of safety needs to be ensured. Furthermore, member states must be aware of those who lack required documentation to cross borders. Member states have to adequately address these requirements to allow for swift passage of people.

Too often, asylum seekers experience unacceptable and, in some instances, inhumane treatment in Europe.^{vi} Experiencing homelessness, living in overcrowded facilities, and waiting several months before receiving replies to their applications render individuals vulnerable to exploitation, particularly in those countries that are entry points to Europe. These realities of asylum seekers in Europe must be avoided in the context of the current humanitarian crisis and should, equally, be addressed when already happening on European territory.

"The EU and its members states response has been unanimous in condemning Russian attacks in violation of international law. We call on them to be equally forceful in respecting the right of Ukrainians and citizens of other countries fleeing from Ukraine to seek asylum and we urge them to offer minimum reception conditions, when necessary," says Freek Spinnewijn, FEANTSA director.

ABOUT FEANTSA

FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. We are the only European NGO focusing exclusively on the fight against homelessness. Our goal is an end to homelessness in Europe. FEANTSA works with over 115 members across 28 countries including 24 EU Member States. Our members are predominantly NGOs working with homeless people, but also include other stakeholders involved in the fight against homelessness such as public authorities, social housing providers, foundations, and research entities.

ⁱ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472>

ⁱⁱ ECRE has compiled a non-exhaustive [document](#) of measures taken by European countries to address the arrival of Ukrainian nationals on their territory following the invasion in Ukraine.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52022PC0091>

^{iv} <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20220228/statement-ill-treatment-africans-trying-leave-ukraine;>

<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220228-pushed-back-because-we-re-black-africans-stranded-at-ukraine-poland-border>

^v <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/06/world/ukraine-russia?referringSource=articleShare&fbclid=IwAR2-RWeUuq2R3hZz6wZDMNjqtzbzRPeiTG86PvHQtbLj4Zawx0vDKTTI0jQ#as-ukraines-president-implores-citizens-to-resist-he-pushes-for-outside-help>; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/05/ukraine-african-refugees-racism/>

^{vi} <https://www.feantsa.org/en/feantsa-position/2021/12/21/exiled-and-homeless-new-asylum-crisis-in-europe-same-lack-of-responses?bcParent=27>