



People Experiencing Homelessness Ask EU Leaders to Listen and Talk to Them

A Collection of Testimonials from People with Experience of Homelessness in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe



The best way to understand someone's problems is by listening to them. In this case, people with experience of homelessness speak directly to European leaders about the problems they face and how the institutions could improve their situation. Listening to these people is paramount to developing adequate policies and measures at EU level that ensure access to housing for all and contribute to ending homelessness.

FEANTSA works to make sure that the voices of individuals who live in marginalisation and in homelessness reach the attention of European leaders and institutions. To this aim and with support from our members, we collected testimonials from people with experience of homelessness in several countries across the EU. We asked people what challenges they face in their everyday life, what are their expectations from the EU and how do they think European leaders should engage and support people living in homelessness.

This collection of testimonials aims to contribute to the consultations conducted under the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), a process which FEANTSA has been involved in throughout 2021. The Conference on the Future of Europe is presented as a unique and timely opportunity for European citizens to debate on Europe's challenges and priorities. The European Union wants to hear from citizens across all member states on topics of importance to them. The European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission have committed to listen to European citizens and to follow up, within their sphere of competences, on the recommendations received.¹ By spring 2022, the Conference is expected to reach conclusions and provide guidance on the future of Europe.

Across 2021, civil society organisations have come together to raise awareness on the need of including the voices of marginalised individuals in the consultation processes of CoFoE.² To this end, FEANTSA has joined a campaign for an inclusive Conference on the Future of Europe and supported, among other initiatives, calls to **conduct a diversity assessment of the composition of the Citizens' Panel and to ensure the representation of marginalised communities in the Conference Plenary.**³

According to the latest progress report of the CoFoE Multilingual Digital Platform,⁴ from its launch in April and up to the beginning of November 2021, a total of 29,012 contributions were made (9,337 ideas, 16,017 comments, and 3,658 events) as part of the consultation processes. All EU countries have been active in the platform (though with significant differences: Germany made 5,289 contributions and France made 2,914 contributions, while Cyprus had 59 entries and Estonia only 41). Demographic characteristics of participants seem to confirm the need **to include more marginalised voices and to diversify the profiles of contributors.** The progress report shows that manual workers (6.9%), self-employed (9.1%) and unemployed people (2.6%) have been relatively less active on the platform. While more than a quarter (27.8 %) did not provide information on their gender and 0.4% identified as non-binary,⁵ only 15% of contributors declared that they were women. These figures, even if not conclusive, do point to the need for more diversity and actions to ensure inclusion.

FEANTSA continues to raise awareness on the importance of including the voices of marginalised people in the CoFoE as well as in any other European consultation action, and we wish to contribute to this purpose by presenting several perspectives from people with experiences of homelessness.

1 Contributions can be made to the consultations in different ways, either by [registering](#) on the platform created for the CoFoE or by joining or creating events under the umbrella of the Conference. See more at <https://futureu.europa.eu/pages/about?format=html&locale=en>

2 <https://citizenstakeover.eu/blog/open-letter-to-executive-board-civil-society-organisations-call-for-conference-to-include-marginalised-communities/>

3 <https://citizenstakeover.eu/blog/open-letter-to-conference-plenary-ensure-the-inclusion-of-marginalised-communities/>

4 <https://tinyurl.com/CoFoEprogress>

5 NB: organisations can also make entries and this may affect the percentages when registering gender.

What Do People Experiencing Homelessness Want the EU Leaders to Know?

- ▶ Homelessness is not a choice!
- ▶ Housing is a right for all!
- ▶ You need to go to the streets to learn about problems and challenges – speak to people experiencing homelessness, ask them questions directly and learn about their problems from themselves!
- ▶ European institutions should make it a priority to support people in need!
- ▶ It is the duty of European institutions to help people experiencing homelessness and make sure that everyone has adequate housing!
- ▶ The EU should collect more data on homelessness, directly and by involving the homeless sector.
- ▶ European authorities/representatives must be involved in research & activities for combating homelessness.
- ▶ Resources should be allocated to the cause of ending homelessness.
- ▶ Monitoring processes should accompany the resource allocation.
- ▶ The Housing First approach needs to be implemented as a model.
- ▶ European governments must listen to people experiencing homelessness and to the foundations and organisations who work on the streets.
- ▶ Invest more in the homelessness sector and involve more workers with experiences of homelessness (peer workers) to ensure reaching more people.
- ▶ The safety of women in homelessness must be ensured.
- ▶ Employment is a right for all – the EU should facilitate access to jobs for people experiencing homelessness (including intra EU migrants).
- ▶ EU legislation should be respected by all member states to ensure access to employment and housing for destitute and people experiencing homelessness (including intra EU migrants).
- ▶ The rights of people experiencing homelessness (including women and mobile EU citizens) should be better known and respected by governments and institutions, such as the police.
- ▶ The EU must oversee the regulation of the private housing market in MS and promote the use of social housing projects instead of private ones.
- ▶ EU bodies should work to prohibit forced evictions of individuals without offering an alternative.
- ▶ The EU must facilitate giving people a chance to raise their voices in public without stigmatisation and prejudices, and listen carefully to critical and unusual comments.

Testimonials

Maja, woman living in homelessness in Slovenia

I think that helping people in need should be a priority for the European institutions. That day centres should be open for a longer period of time so that the homeless can also be somewhere warm during the day, not just at night. Above all, women should also have separate shelters, or places where only women could gather, where they would feel safe and have their own privacy. The safety of homeless women is really an issue.

My message to the European institutions would be not to work only for people from whom they themselves benefit. We are all human beings and we all need to be treated equally, whether we're living on the streets or are employed in Parliament.



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[SLOVENIAN]

Mislím, da bi pomoč ljudem v stiski morala biti za evropske institucije prioriteta. Da bi dnevni centri morali biti odprti dlje časa, da bi bili brezdomni lahko tudi čez dan kje na toplem, ne le ponoči. Predvsem pa, da bi imele tudi ženske ločena zavetišča, oziroma prostore, kjer bi lahko bile samo ženske, kjer bi se počutile varne in bi imele svojo zasebnost. Varnost brezdomnih žensk je resnično velik problem.

Moje sporočilo evropskim institucijam bi bilo, naj ne delajo zgolj za ljudi, od katerih imajo sami kakšno korist. Vsi smo ljudje in vsi moramo biti enako obravnavani, ne glede na to ali smo na cesti ali zaposleni v parlamentu.

Dejan, man living in homelessness in Slovenia

I think that the European institutions are also here to help the homeless. We have them to do something good. There are a lot of vacant apartments in the cities, for example, from people who have no descendants. Such apartments should be given forward so that they don't remain empty or in the hands of a handful of people. Some have as many as twenty or thirty apartments, they should be taken away from them and given to those who need them.



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(SLOVENIAN)

Mislím, da so evropske institucije tu tudi zato, da pomagajo brezdomnim. Zato jih imamo, da delajo nekaj dobrega. Po mestih je ogromno stanovanj, ki so prazna, recimo od ljudi, ki nimajo potomcev. Takšna stanovanja bi bilo treba dati naprej, da ne ostajajo prazna ali pa so v rokah peščice ljudi. Eni imajo kar po dvajset, trideset stanovanj, tistim je treba to vzeti in razdeliti med te, ki jih potrebujejo.

M.F. – 77 years old, person formerly experienced homelessness in Barcelona, now lives in a flat.

I think the European lawmakers should gather information about this problem; they must realise our needs and be able to help by providing resources. People who sleep on the street are not homeless by choice; they have lost their home, or their job and they don't enjoy sleeping rough. If someone ends up on the street, it is because they have no place to go. (...) If financial support is provided, it needs to be assured that the money goes to the cause. There must be control, not only resources. It would be a good idea if the European authorities took part in a survey, like the one we carry out each year at Arrels, for example. They need to get to know the reality on the streets first-hand.

[CATALAN VERSION]

En primer lloc, crec que és important que les autoritats europees s'informin, que vegin les necessites que tenim i que facin el possible, que és aportar recursos, per tal d'ajudar. Les persones que viuen al carrer no estan per caprici, han perdut la seva feina o la seva llar i no estan al ras perquè els agrada. Si estàs al carrer, és perquè no tens on anar. (...) Si es dediquen recursos s'ha de vigilar que els diners siguin destinats a la causa per la qual es donen. Hi ha d'haver control, a més de destinar recursos. Convido a les autoritats europees a que participin en un cens com el que fem a Arrels, per exemple, que surtin al carrer i coneguin la realitat de primera mà.

P.C. – 43 years old person, currently homeless and sleeping rough in Barcelona.

Everybody has the right to housing and work.

[CATALAN]

Tothom té dret a una casa i feina.



©Juan Lemus / Arrels Fundació



H.U. – 64 years old, formerly homeless person in Barcelona, now lives in a flat

Politicians see the problem of homelessness, but they do nothing. Not only here, but in all countries not enough is done. We need the Housing First model to be implemented. We need housing. Governments know this, but they do not collaborate. In Spain, I think we've got resources, but homelessness is a big problem.



The European governments must listen to us. They must also listen to the foundations and organisations who currently work on the street, alongside the homeless people, since these organisations know how many people are sleeping on the streets and how much housing is needed. This is the real source of data, not someone from the European Parliament explaining our situation. Because they don't know what happens on the streets. Speak with the organisations helping people and only then will we be able to start making small changes.

[CATALAN VERSION]

Els polítics veuen el problema de les persones que viuen al carrer, però no fan res. No només aquí sinó en tots els Estats, no fan prou. Necessitem que s'implementi el housing first, necessitem allotjaments. Els governs ho saben, però no col·laboren. Aquí en Espanya crec que tenim recursos, però hi ha un gran problema per les persones que viuen al carrer.

Els governs europeus ens han d'escoltar, han de saber el que expliquem les persones que vivim al carrer. També han d'escoltar a les fundacions i organitzacions, que són les que trepitgen carrer, que estan amb la gent que viu al carrer i saben quantes persones són, que saben quants habitatges necessitem. Aquesta és la veritable font d'informació, no una persona del Parlament Europeu explicant-li a una altra la nostra situació. Perquè no saben sap què passa al carrer. No, parleu amb les entitats que ajuden la gent i llavors podrem avançar pas a pas.



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Anonymous, currently homeless person from Romania, sleeping rough in Copenhagen

Yes! Who are you for us!? We don't even know you; we know only the social workers. Do you really exist as an institution? If yes, why don't we meet you on the street and why don't you ask us directly these questions? [It's] Simple! More involvement! But from the warmth and comfort of your office you will not manage. You need to listen to us, to provide us with advice, and by case, to support and help us integrate into society.

(ROMANIAN VERSION)

Da! Cine sunteți pentru noi!? Nici nu vă cunoaștem, noi știm doar lucrătorii sociali. Chiar existați ca instituție? Și dacă da, de ce nu vă întâlnim pe stradă și de ce nu ne întrebați voi direct aceste întrebări? [Este] Simplu! Mai multă implicare! Dar din căldura și confortul biroului, nu veți reuși. Trebuie să ne ascultați și să ne dați sfaturi, și după caz să ne ajutați să ne integrăm în societate.

Anonymous, currently homeless person from Romania, sleeping rough in Copenhagen⁶

The EU is not helping us with anything. Even though member states get EU funding, they do not do anything for us. I want EU to help us with [accessing] work. The EU laws should be respected by all member states, because we migrants are not helped with anything, we are seen as garbage. Our rights are not respected, and the police are abusive towards us. We are very marginalised and many times we cannot defend ourselves. Even though funding is coming from the EU for shelters, food and so on, we still do not feel respected. I feel like the government and police are trying to get rid of us. We get fines, we are often stopped by police when collecting bottles and we need more support for [accessing] our rights.



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(ROMANIAN VERSION)

Uniunea Europeană nu ne ajută cu nimic. Chiar dacă țările primesc finanțări, pentru noi nu fac absolut nimic. Vreau ca UE să ne ajute cu munca. Legile UE ar trebui respectate de toate țările membre, pentru că noi migrații nu suntem ajutați cu absolut nimic, suntem văzuți ca gunoaie. Drepturile noastre nu sunt respectate și poliția e abuzivă cu noi. Suntem dați la o parte, și de cele mai multe ori nu ne putem apăra. Chiar dacă vin finanțări de la UE pentru adăposturi, mâncare sau altceva, noi tot nu ne simțim respectați. Eu simt că poliția și guvernul vor să scape de noi. Suntem amendați, de multe ori ne oprește poliția când umblăm după sticle, și chiar avem nevoie de mai mult ajutor pentru [a accesa] drepturile noastre.

Anonymous, currently homeless person from Romania, sleeping rough in Copenhagen

(...) They need to think about how to help people in homelessness, but they need to understand what the problems are. On the streets you can learn what the problems are. If you work up there for the EU and you have never been in contact with a homeless person, you will never know how hard it is to sleep outside in winter, to not have family, to not have money to buy food and to try constantly to find a job and be faced with the problem that you do not have an address or documents. Unfortunately, you cannot have an address or residence if you do not have a job. And when you tell employers at a job interview that you sleep on the street, they do not give you a chance whatsoever.

[ROMANIAN VERSION]

(...) Ei trebuie să se gândească cum să ajute oamenii care stau pe stradă, dar trebuie să înțeleagă care sunt problemele. Pe stradă poți să vezi care sunt problemele. Dar dacă lucrezi acolo sus pentru UE și nu ai fost nicio dată în contact cu o persoană fără adăpost, nu o să știi cât de greu e să dormi afară iarna, să nu ai pe nimeni, familie, să nu ai bani să cumperi ceva de mâncare, să tot încerci să găsești ceva de muncă și să te confrunți cu problema că nu ai adresă sau documente. Din păcate, nu poți să ai adresă sau reședință, dacă nu ai de muncă. Și când spui unui angajator la un interviu că stai pe stradă, nu îți dau nici măcar o șansă.

⁶ Denmark has set up a recycling system for beverage recipients, based on a principle of economic compensation: for each can or bottle returned a fix amount is paid back. Bottle picking and recycling has become an important source of money for destitute migrants in Denmark, especially during the big festivals across the country.



Anonymous, man with previous experience of homelessness, currently a peer worker in Vienna, Austria

My message to the European institutions is: try to understand the living reality of marginalised people. It's not only a question of organising a support system, **we must make sure that the offers of this system are being used.** To achieve this goal it is very important to build and maintain contact with "forgotten" people, who might not be so easy to reach. To do this, we need more workers who really know the situation of being homeless. Their knowledge will help to reach people living far away from the support system.

My hopes and expectations are: living space for everyone. Regulation of the private estate market, social housing projects instead of private ones. Housing for everyone is a political question and should not be in private hands! Prohibition of being kicked out of a flat is more important than any gain of landlords!! This should be selfspeaking for persons of public influence in this question.

How to involve marginalized groups... Respect the voices of marginalized communities, even if they aren't able to express themselves in a politically correct manner. Give them a chance to raise their voices in public without stigmatisation and prejudices. Listen carefully to critical and unusual comments. (...) **So my advice to people with political responsibility: Visit marginalized people in their world, get in contact, talk to them and look into their eyes. Then you will find and create paths that are unthinkable yet.**

[GERMAN]

Meine Botschaft an die europäischen Institutionen: Versuchen Sie, die Lebenswirklichkeit der marginalisierten Menschen zu verstehen. Es geht nicht nur darum, ein Unterstützungssystem zu organisieren. Die Angebote müssen auch genutzt werden. Für dieses Ziel ist es sehr wichtig, den Kontakt zu "vergessenen" Menschen aufzubauen und zu festigen. Wir brauchen mehr Mitarbeiter, die die Situation der Obdachlosigkeit wirklich kennen. Ihr Wissen wird helfen, Menschen zu erreichen, die weit weg vom Unterstützungssystem leben.

Meine Hoffnungen und Erwartungen: Lebensraum für alle. Regulierung des privaten Immobilienmarktes, soziale Wohnungsbauprojekte anstelle von privaten. Wohnraum für alle ist eine politische Frage und sollte nicht in privater Hand sein! Das Verbot, aus einer Wohnung rausgeworfen zu werden, ist wichtiger als jeder Gewinn der Vermieter!!! Dies sollte für Personen mit öffentlichem Einfluss in dieser Frage eine Selbstverständlichkeit sein.



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Wie man Randgruppen einbezieht... Respektieren Sie die Stimmen von Randgruppen, auch wenn sie nicht in der Lage sind, sich auf politisch korrekte Weise auszudrücken. Geben Sie ihnen eine Chance, ihre Stimme in der Öffentlichkeit zu erheben, ohne Stigmatisierung und Vorurteile. Hören Sie kritischen und ungewöhnlichen Kommentaren aufmerksam zu. Manchmal verbirgt sich die Bedeutung von Aussagen hinter den Worten.(...) Deshalb mein Rat an Menschen mit politischer Verantwortung: Besuchen Sie marginalisierte Menschen in ihrer Welt, treten Sie in Kontakt, sprechen Sie mit ihnen und schauen Sie ihnen in die Augen. Dann werden Sie Wege finden und schaffen, die noch undenkbar sind.

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- ▶ Arrels Foundation, Barcelona
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<http://www.kraljiulice.org>
- ▶ Neunerhaus, Vienna,
<https://www.neunerhaus.at/konzepte/peer-campus/>

The photos included in this document are also a product of the organisations that contributed. The photos credited to Fedtekælderen Kirkens Korshaer are a product of the *Invisible Eyes* exhibition, organised by the staff of Fedtekælderen. All photos from this exhibition are taken by homeless beneficiaries of their day service and have been exhibited in Copenhagen at the end of 2020 to raise awareness on the situation of those living in homelessness in the city. More information on the exhibition and more photos are available here <https://tinyurl.com/kirkenskorshaerkbh>.

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For more information on FEANTSA's work regarding participation of homeless people in designing and implementing services please check our website at <https://www.feantsa.org/en/themes> or contact us at simona.barbu@feantsa.org.





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