

7 Measures

Public Authorities Must Take to Protect Homeless People from Covid_19



Europe is now the epicentre of the escalating Covid_19 pandemic. Homeless people are especially vulnerable to the virus and cannot be "left behind" by public authorities' responses to the crisis. FEANTSA calls for public authorities at local, regional, national and European level to take seven measures to protect homeless people and public health:



Test homeless people

People experiencing homelessness should be prioritised for testing. They are a medically vulnerable group. They are forced to live in places that are dangerous in a pandemic – public space, encampments, shelters, temporary accommodation. Testing is the only way to stop these places becoming clusters of infection.



House homeless people

Public authorities should take all possible measures to provide homeless people with adequate emergency housing. This should allow them to self-isolate i.e. have private space for eating, sleeping and washing. Public authorities should take urgent action to mobilise quickly appropriate housing for this purpose: vacant housing, tourist apartments, hotels, student housing, barracks etc.



Make homeless services as safe as possible

All measures should be taken to ensure that people relying on homeless services like shelter and food distribution are as safe as possible. Public authorities should provide guidance and resources to facilitate social distancing and hygiene measures. They should ensure contingency planning. Urgent measures are required to protect staff and volunteers working with homeless people.



Ensure access to healthcare for homeless people

It is well established that homeless people struggle to access health services, especially primary healthcare and public health information. Targeted outreach is required to ensure that homeless people can access healthcare during the pandemic.



Ensure access to food and hygiene for homeless people

Access to food and hygiene can be a daily struggle for people experiencing homelessness. Many of the services they rely on for this – public toilets, soup kitchens, day centres - are being cut off or made unsafe by the pandemic. Public authorities must act urgently to ensure that homeless people are not left without access to safe hygiene, sanitation or food.



Stop people becoming homeless

The economic impact of the Covid_19 crisis will put many people at risk of homelessness. Public authorities must act swiftly to prevent a wave of people losing their homes due to the pandemic. They must take steps to prevent evictions, secure incomes, provide support for those struggling with rental or mortgage costs. They must ensure that support and alternative housing is available to victims of domestic violence and abuse, who are not safe in their own home during the pandemic.



Protect homeless people from punitive enforcement measures

Homeless people must not be punished for not staying at home. They must be protected from fines and other sanctions, and provided with safe alternatives.