



POVERTY is not a CRIME



Campaign against the criminalization of homelessness

8 May 2012
Brussels

Dear members of the Social Platform,

Housing Rights Watch and FEANTSA are campaigning to expose the criminalization of homelessness and poverty. We want to draw attention to the increasing number of laws, policies and regulations that force a growing portion of our communities into precarious social, economic and legal existence.

The criminalization of the homeless is only the most blatant form of the criminalization of poverty. Our campaign will expose how homeless people are punished doubly: first, they are criminalized by the penal system for simply being *homeless*, second, they are excluded from diminishing social aid programs for being *criminals*. The solution to homelessness is access to appropriate housing; not turning homeless people into criminals.

How can you get involved?

Our campaign starts on 8 June 2012, but this is only the beginning. As we raise awareness about the impact of this criminalization, we can work together to defeat these unfair and ineffective laws. We will publish the first European report on the criminalization of homelessness in Autumn 2012, organize events in several EU countries, and fight for the fundamental rights of people experiencing poverty and homelessness.

We're asking you to join the campaign – your action can be as simple as signing up to the campaign on the website (watch for it in early June), but for those organizations whose members feel the affects of these policies, there are many other ways to become involved.

1. Firstly, we want to support existing campaigns that are fighting against the criminalization of homelessness and poverty. For example, The City is for All in Budapest works tirelessly to try to reverse the outrageous new national law that makes it illegal to be homeless in Hungary.

We want to partner with organizations working directly on these issues, who can share testimonies about the interactions of your clients with the penal system.

Housing Rights Watch wants to support local organizations by providing comparative information from other cities and countries in the EU. We will publish an advocacy manual for organizations fighting to reverse laws and regulations that criminalize homelessness and poverty, and provide examples of successful policy approaches and cooperation.

2. Housing Rights Watch is conducting a research project on the criminalization of homelessness in 10 EU countries. The preliminary results will be available in early summer 2012. We are looking into the following topics – please let us know if you can help to provide information about: examples of local laws/regulations/ordinances; the impact on homeless people; the cost of penalization versus cost of social services in the different national/regional/local contexts.

We are also looking for outlets to diffuse our own research – please let us know if your organization is interested in receiving updates about the research.

3. We also want to collaborate with organizations that encourage their clients to express themselves through different media. Specifically, we are interested in creating media and art installations expressing the experiences of the criminalized.