



# COMING HOME: HOMELESSNESS AMONG TRANS PEOPLE IN THE EU

POLICY BRIEF





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## **Coming Home: homelessness among trans people in the EU**

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TGEU is a membership-based organisation working to strengthen the rights and wellbeing of trans people in Europe and Central Asia. TGEU was created in 2005 and has established itself as a legitimate voice for the trans community in Europe and Central Asia. TGEU currently has over 170 member organisations in 47 different countries.

[tgeu.org](http://tgeu.org)



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## Summary

Many trans and gender non-conforming people have experienced homelessness, sleeping rough, or other difficulties in access to permanent housing at some point in their lives. This is due to direct and indirect factors, including that trans people, particularly young people, are at significant risk of experiencing family rejection and being kicked out of their homes. At the same time, trans people face an inaccessibility of housing: one-fifth (21%) of trans respondents to the FRA LGBTI Survey (2019) reported experiencing discrimination when looking for housing in the 12 months preceding the survey.

Structural discrimination that creates barriers to education and stable employment forces many trans people into cycles of poverty, homelessness, and violence that can be hard to escape. Trans people who become homeless may experience further violence and violation of other human rights, and face additional barriers to access healthcare, education, and employment that might otherwise have the potential to free them from the cycle.

Trans people who experience discrimination and marginalisation relating to intersecting dimensions of their identity, such as trans sex workers, youth, and Black and persons of colour, face additional risk of homelessness and barriers to permanent housing, which in turns feeds in a cycle of violence, poverty. and homelessness. Indeed 40% of those who had experienced homelessness also identified as belonging to an “ethnic minority (including migrant background)” according to the 2019 FRA Survey. The COVID pandemic has only exacerbated the challenges faced by trans people, worsening the socio-economic situation of many trans people and with it the ability to rent or remain in housing.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding its prevalence, trans people’s experiences with homelessness is grossly under-researched and the needs of vulnerable trans people are often not considered in emergency accommodation or mainstream housing programs. Trans-led organisations and drop-in centres, on the other hand, are the first port of call for many trans people in crisis. These organisations need support and engagement from public authorities to ensure they have the resources they need to function and that follow up services are available.

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<sup>1</sup> Boglarka Fedorko, Anwar Ogrm, and Sanjar Kurmanov (2021) *Impact assessment: COVID-19 and trans people in Europe and Central Asia*. TGEU. p5 <https://tgeu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/impact-assessment-covid19-and-trans-people-in-europe-and-central-asia.pdf>; Dodo Karsay (2021) *Trans and Poverty*. TGEU

This policy brief intends to raise awareness of the situation of trans people and homelessness in Europe today among the general public, trans advocates, and other stakeholders working at national, regional and EU level. It will describe how trans people experience homelessness, why trans people are vulnerable to poverty and homelessness, and the impact of the COVID crisis; the actors currently working to eliminate homelessness among trans people and what they are doing; and it will identify the needs of the community, possible solutions, and finally draw up policy recommendations.

# What is the situation of homelessness among trans people in the EU?

## Who is homeless and why are trans people at risk?

Many trans people in Europe have experienced homelessness, which can include sleeping rough or in a public place, as well as staying in overnight emergency shelters, or “sofa-surfing” with friends or family. Homelessness amongst trans people is both a cause and consequence of numerous interconnected factors.

Trans people face widespread structural and institutional discrimination leading to barriers to education and stable employment which in turn contribute to the risk of poverty and homelessness<sup>2</sup>. People experiencing homelessness have difficulty accessing appropriate health care and often suffer from poor health. A homeless person in Europe is estimated to die on average 30 years earlier than the rest of the population<sup>3</sup>. One can only assume with the rates of violence trans people face, and considering difficulties accessing health care, this figure is higher for trans people alone; however, trans-specific data on this is lacking. Homeless trans people can lack access to essential ongoing health care as well as emergency care, putting them at risk of degrading physical and mental health and poor quality of life. Without a safe home base, it is very difficult to access education, employment, and health care, and trans people can very easily become trapped in a cycle of poverty and homelessness.

Within trans communities, those most affected by this structural discrimination and exclusion from stable, formal employment, including (un)documented trans migrants, trans youth, and trans Black and people of colour are more likely to turn to informal or criminalised settings, including sex work, to survive. The informal or criminalised nature of this work is more likely to lead to trans people in these communities getting trapped in a vicious circle of violence, precarity, poverty, and housing instability.

The Fundamental Rights Agency’s 2019 LGBTI Survey offers a valuable insight into the experiences of trans people and access to housing, or lack thereof, that can help guide policy solutions intended to help them. This data supports what organisations on the ground observe.

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<sup>2</sup> OHCHR (2015) *Ending violence and discrimination against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex People* [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Discrimination/Joint\\_LGBTI\\_Statement\\_ENG.PDF](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Discrimination/Joint_LGBTI_Statement_ENG.PDF)

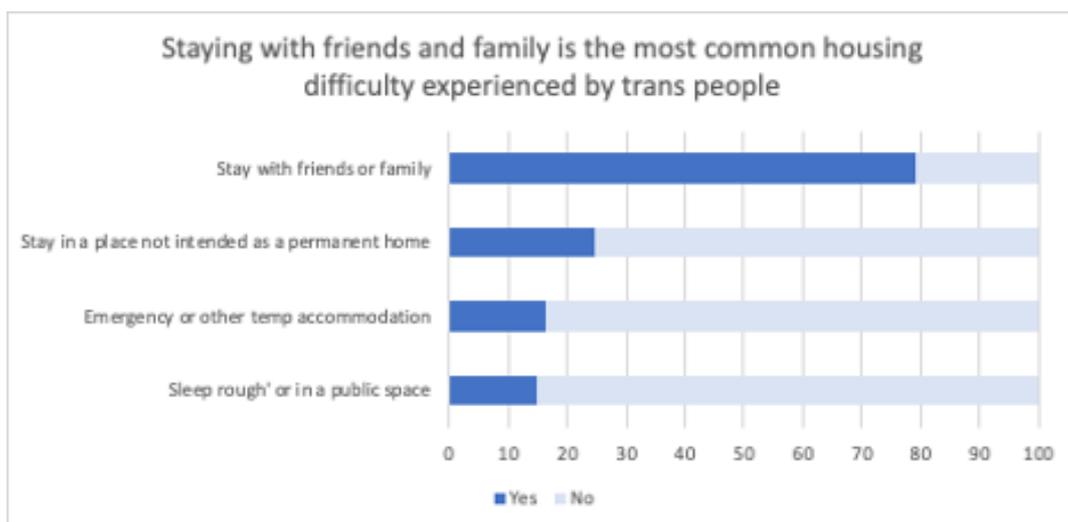
<sup>3</sup> FEANTSA Youth, ILGA-Europe & True Colours United in Cooperation with the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe (2019) *Building Bridges: How the LGBTIQ & Homeless Sector Can Work Together*. p13

## What do we know about trans people’s experience with homelessness?

1. *A quarter of trans people report having experienced homelessness or housing difficulties in some form, including sleeping rough, at a friend’s house or in a shelter. This is higher than for LGB groups.*

One quarter (25%) of trans respondents to the 2019 Fundamental Rights Agency’s LGBTI survey indicated they had experienced homelessness or housing difficulties at least once in their life; this share is slightly higher for trans women at 26%<sup>4</sup>. Of those trans people who experienced difficulties, 79% had stayed with friends or family, 25% had stayed somewhere that was not intended as a permanent home, 16% had used emergency or other temporary accommodation, and 15% had slept rough or slept in a public place. This highlights the importance of considering all forms of homelessness, including those less visible.

On average, 3% of trans people in the EU reported that they have slept rough or in a public place at least once in their life, compared to 2% of their LGB peers.



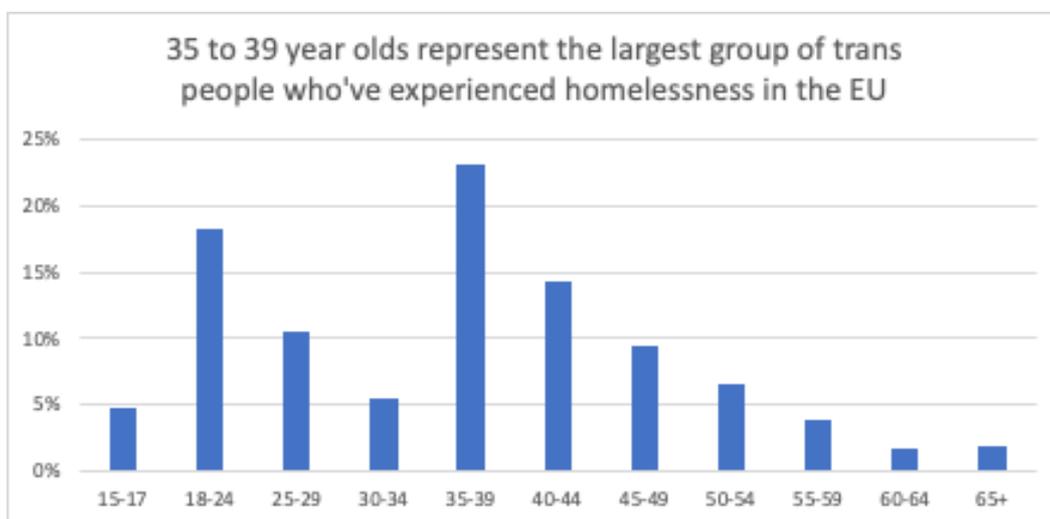
Source: EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2019)

2. *The share is higher for younger trans people, trans people with migration or ethnic minority backgrounds, and trans people with disabilities.*

23% of all trans people who had experienced housing difficulties fell in the 35- to 39-year-old age group, the greatest frequency of any age group. This was followed by

<sup>4</sup> EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020) *A long way to go for LGBTI equality*  
<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/eu-lgbti-survey-results>

the 18 to 24 age group (18% of all trans people who had experienced housing difficulties), highlighting the significance of the youth trans homelessness problem. It is concerning that 5% of all homeless trans people are aged 15 to 17. Young people are at greater risk of being exploited, experiencing trauma, and being trapped in cycles of homelessness.<sup>5</sup>



Source: EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2019)

Within their own age group, more than a third (35%) of 30- to 34-year-olds had experienced housing difficulties, followed by 35- to 39-year-olds (34%) and then 25- to 29-year-olds (34%). All these are above the average of 25% of trans people across the EU. 11% of young trans people aged 15 to 17 years have experienced homelessness. 40% of trans respondents who identified as having a disability had also experienced one of the listed housing difficulties. The same share of trans respondents with a migration or ethnic minority background (40%) also reported they had experienced housing difficulties at least once in their life.

Organisations on the ground supporting trans homelessness confirm this trend. For example, Trans United Europe, a network of Trans BPOC NGOs and individual BPOC trans activists in Europe (more information about TUE is in Section 3, below), has found that migration experience contributes significantly to the risk of homelessness among trans people<sup>6</sup>. They report that this is due to a lack of family support, either because of distance to family or because of rejection by family; difficulties accessing the labour market; and an increased risk of poverty. Almost half the respondents to

<sup>5</sup> FEANTSA Youth, ILGA-Europe & True Colors United in Cooperation with the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe (2019) *Building Bridges: How the LGBTIQ & Homeless Sector Can Work Together*. p18

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Dinah de Riquet-Bons from Trans United Europe. EPATH Conference 12 August 2021, *Round table 6: On the rough – taking on trans homelessness in Europe*

the 2020 survey conducted by ILGA Europe, True Colors United, and The Silberman Center for Sexuality and Gender of organisations working with homeless people also reported their clients included LGBTI migrants, immigrants, and refugees.<sup>7</sup>

This data shows how important an intersectional approach to homelessness is. Given intersecting systems of oppression (based on gender, race, disability, class, among others) create unique dynamics and can reinforce each other, all forms of inequality must be analysed and addressed simultaneously. As seen above, a trans person who has a disability, or a migration background is more likely to experience homelessness than a trans person who does not have these experiences. Tackling access to stable housing for trans people alone – without including other dimensions such as (dis)ability, race, socio-economic status, and immigration status – may inadvertently reinforce inequalities among trans people.

- 3. Trans people report experiencing homelessness most often because of financial problems and relationship and family difficulties. For young people, family conflict is the biggest factor.*

The most commonly-reported reason for experiencing housing difficulties among trans people of all ages is financial problems or insufficient income (48% of those who experienced difficulties) followed by relationship or family difficulties (39%). For 15- to 17-year-olds, the biggest reason was relationship or family difficulties (61% of those who had experienced housing difficulties); for 18 to 24-year-olds this share was 48%. “Identity-related family conflict” is also reported by FEANTSA as the most common reason for LGBTIQ youth homelessness, followed by a lack of institutional support.<sup>8</sup> Due to abusive and unaccepting family members, many trans people, especially young people, are denied the chance to express their gender identity and may be kicked out of home or leave seeking a safer environment. Trans United Europe reports that family and social exclusion are significant driving factors too for the housing crises trans people experience.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Shelton, J., Stakelum, R., & Dodd, S.J. (2020). *LGBTIQ Youth Homelessness in Europe: Findings from a Survey of FEANTSA Membership Organisations*. FEANTSA, True Colors United, and the Silberman Center for Sexuality and Gender at Hunter College. p10. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Perceptions%20-%20ILGA%20Europe%20Compressed.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p13

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Dinah de Riquet-Bons from Trans United Europe. EPATH Conference 12 August 2021, *Round table 6: On the rough – taking on trans homelessness in Europe*

4. *On top of that, trans people face discrimination and systematic exclusion from an already difficult housing environment.*<sup>10</sup>

When looking to rent or buy housing, 21% of trans respondents said they had experienced discrimination in the past 12 months, higher than for other LGB groups (15%). This share is significantly higher for trans women (31%) and unemployed trans people (40%). Housing discrimination against unemployed trans people is especially significant considering that only 51% of trans people reported being in paid work, as compared with 74% of the broader population.<sup>11</sup> These figures may also be higher in reality, given the FRA survey is conducted online, which will present a natural bias towards those who have access to the internet and are therefore more likely to be in a more comfortable socio-economic position.

This occurs on top of the fact that housing in large cities in Europe has become increasingly difficult for all people in recent years due to increasing prices and decreasing availability of housing, fuelled by rising rates of speculation and a capitalist pursuit of profit. This effects half of trans people who report living in cities.<sup>12</sup>

When considering emergency accommodation, the issue is not always that beds are unavailable, but that either shelters may refuse trans people's access to gender-segregated shelters or trans people themselves do not feel safe because of harassment and abuse from other clients or from staff and therefore more dangerous than remaining on the street.

Lack of access to housing effects access to essential health care, including sexual health care. Lack of stable housing is an impediment to trans people living with HIV or other health conditions in having access to regular and monitored medication.<sup>13</sup>

Violence, too, plays a significant role in homelessness: Studies estimate that 70-90%

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<sup>10</sup> Boglarka Fedorko (2016) *Sex Work Policy*. TGEU. p2 [https://tgeu.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/TGEU\\_SexWorkPolicy\\_en.pdf](https://tgeu.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/TGEU_SexWorkPolicy_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020) *A long way to go for LGBTI equality* <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/eu-lgbti-survey-results>; Eurostat (2021) Euro Employment data, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsi\\_emp\\_a\\_h/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsi_emp_a_h/default/table?lang=en)

<sup>12</sup> EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2014) *Being Trans in the EU* p124 [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-being-trans-eu-comparative-0\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-being-trans-eu-comparative-0_en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> European and Public Health Alliance (2016) *Homelessness and Poor Health: it's Time to Break the Link* <https://epha.org/homelessness-and-poor-health-its-time-to-break-the-link/>

of women experiencing homelessness have experienced gender-based violence either prior or during homelessness.<sup>14</sup>

For other detailed discussions of the cycles of poverty and homelessness that many trans people get trapped in, as well as the interdependent factors affecting trans people's access to the labour and housing market, see other reports such as TGEU's 2017 report 'The vicious cycle of violence: Trans and gender-diverse people, migration, and sex work'<sup>15</sup> and TGEU's 2021 report 'Trans and Poverty'.<sup>16</sup>

## What has been the impact of COVID-19?

The global COVID-19 crisis that reached Europe in early 2020 has been devastating for the trans community, especially regarding trans homelessness.<sup>17</sup> The crisis has exposed the cracks in the system that were already present and exacerbated the structural inequalities that leave trans people behind, particularly trans women, trans Black people and people of colour, trans sex workers, migrants, d/Deaf trans people, and trans people with disabilities.

Trans support organisations on the ground reported the severe impact of the crisis on trans people's access to work and housing.<sup>18</sup> In addition, TGEU's 2020 COVID impact study found that many trans people were 'locked down' in abusive or unsupportive home environments and many left to seek safety.<sup>19</sup>

## Sex work, COVID-19, and homelessness

Many trans people who worked in precarious or informal work at the onset of the pandemic, including sex work, lost access to income overnight and faced high risk of

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<sup>14</sup> FEANTSA Youth, ILGA-Europe & True Colors United in Cooperation with the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe (2019) *Building Bridges: How the LGBTIQ & Homeless Sector Can Work Together*, p12

<sup>15</sup> Boglarka Fedorko and Lukas Berredo (2017) *The vicious circle of violence: trans and gender-diverse people, migration, and sex work*. TGEU. <https://transrespect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/TvT-PS-Vol16-2017.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Dodo Karsay (2021) *Trans and Poverty*. TGEU

<sup>17</sup> Boglarka Fedorko, Anwar Ogrm, and Sanjar Kurmanov (2021) *Impact assessment: COVID-19 and trans people in Europe and Central Asia*. TGEU. p17 <https://tgeu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/impact-assessment-covid19-and-trans-people-in-europe-and-central-asia.pdf>; Interview with Dinah de Riquet-Bons from Trans United Europe. EPATH Conference 12 August 2021, *Round table 6: On the rough – taking on trans homelessness in Europe*

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Dinah de Riquet-Bons from Trans United Europe. EPATH Conference 12 August 2021, *Round table 6: On the rough – taking on trans homelessness in Europe*

<sup>19</sup> Boglarka Fedorko, Anwar Ogrm, and Sanjar Kurmanov (2021) *Impact assessment: COVID-19 and trans people in Europe and Central Asia*. TGEU. p7 <https://tgeu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/impact-assessment-covid19-and-trans-people-in-europe-and-central-asia.pdf>

homeless.<sup>20</sup> Many subsequently lost housing and access to healthcare. ILGA Europe's rapid assessment reported the impact of the crisis on trans sex workers in Georgia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Tajikistan, and Turkey. Most trans sex workers lost the ability to work and therefore their income and housing. While options to work were severely reduced, violence against trans sex workers continued to be rampant: In 2021, 58% of murdered trans people globally whose occupation is known were sex workers, signifying only a slight decrease compared to 2020 (62%).<sup>21</sup> For those able to work, they had to choose between protecting themselves from the virus and earning an income to survive. For example, sex workers in the Netherlands could not access state support. In Germany, access to support programmes was severely limited for trans sex workers, and forms for accessing assistance only had binary gender marker options, making it difficult for those with nonbinary legal gender markers to access programmes.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p17

<sup>21</sup> TGEU Trans Murder Monitoring update 2020 and 2021 <https://transrespect.org/en/tmm-update-tdor-2020/>; <https://transrespect.org/en/tmm-update-tdor-2021/>

<sup>22</sup> ILGA Europe (2020) *COVID-19 impacts on LGBTI communities in Europe and Central Asia: A rapid assessment report* p8 <https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/covid19-lgbti-assessment-2020.pdf>

## What regional European frameworks and programmes exist to address homelessness?

This section will outline the human rights frameworks, initiatives, and tools in place at the EU and European level that aim to eliminate homelessness and support the search for housing among trans people.

### European Pillar of Social Rights (EU)<sup>23</sup>

The European Pillar of Social Rights is a European Commission initiative launched in 2017 that “aims to promote social rights with joint collaboration and responsibility of the European institutions together with Member States, civil society, social actors and social partners.”<sup>24</sup>

Housing and assistance for the homeless forms Principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights and includes, in addition to access to quality housing, protection for vulnerable people from forced eviction and adequate services that promote social inclusion.<sup>25</sup>

### European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EU)<sup>26</sup>

The platform was launched in June 2021 with the goal to “trigger dialogue, facilitate mutual learning, improve evidence and monitoring, and strengthen cooperation among all actors that aim to combat homelessness.”

The platform includes EU funding for action tackling homelessness through:

1. **European Social Fund+** (ESF+):<sup>27</sup> The ESF+ is the EU’s primary instrument for investment in employment, education and skills, and social inclusion. The EU’s LGBTIQ Strategy mentions the Commission will promote the use of ESF+ funds for projects that support access to the labour market and improve the

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<sup>23</sup> European Commission (2021) *European Pillar of Social Rights* [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights_en)

<sup>24</sup> EPR (2017) *European Pillar of Social Rights* <https://www.epr.eu/what-we-do/policy-analysis/european-pillar-of-social-rights/>

<sup>25</sup> European Commission (2019) *European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 Principles* [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

<sup>26</sup> European Commission (2021) *European platform to combat homelessness is launched* [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_3044](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3044)

<sup>27</sup> European Commission (2021) *European Social Fund Plus* <https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en>

socio-economic position of LGBTIQ people in general, and trans people specifically.<sup>28</sup>

2. **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**<sup>29</sup>: Includes funding for affordable and social housing projects.
3. **Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)**:<sup>30</sup> Provides basic necessities and social inclusion support; 7% of recipients in 2018 were homeless people.<sup>31</sup> Initially, the Fund was adopted only for years 2014 to 2020, but has been extended to 2022 to support those most effected by the COVID-19 crisis. In the future it will be merged with the ESF+.

## EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy

The EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy is the first document by the EU Commission acknowledging the high rates of homelessness among trans people compared to other LGB people, and the particular risk of poverty and homelessness they face due to high rates of informal work.<sup>32</sup> The Strategy indicates that full and proper implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive would see victim support services, including emergency shelters, be available and accessible to trans people.<sup>33</sup> This would have a direct and positive impact on trans people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

In addition to the above-mentioned funding through the ESF+ in support of trans people's socio-economic position, the Strategy also mentions Commission-led studies into barriers to social protection and employment for trans people that will inform guidelines to Member States and employers on improving trans people's access to the labour market.<sup>34</sup> Although not legally binding, guidelines can significantly help to raise awareness of and to promote good practice.

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<sup>28</sup> European Commission (2020) *Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025*.

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lgbtiq\\_strategy\\_2020-2025\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lgbtiq_strategy_2020-2025_en.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> European Regional Development Fund [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/erdf/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/erdf/)

<sup>30</sup> Fund for European Aid to the most Deprived <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1089>

<sup>31</sup> FEAD (2020) Key facts and figures factsheet <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=22709&langId=en>

<sup>32</sup> European Commission (2020) *Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025*. p6.

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lgbtiq\\_strategy\\_2020-2025\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lgbtiq_strategy_2020-2025_en.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p14

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p9

## European Social Charter (CoE)<sup>35</sup>

Since 1961, the European Social Charter, a Council of Europe human rights treaty, has guaranteed a set of social rights relating to employment, safety at work, health, social protection and welfare, housing, and education. It emphasises the protection of vulnerable groups.

It is the only legally binding European instrument that contains an explicit right to housing: In Article 31, “Everyone has the right to housing”.<sup>36</sup> For Member States that have signed the respective protocol<sup>37</sup> but have not taken adequate steps to address trans homelessness, it is possible to launch a complaint with the Social Charter Committee for failure to uphold this right.<sup>38</sup>

## The Social Cohesion Platform (PECS)<sup>39</sup>

PECS was established as a committee to promote “equal and effective enjoyment of social rights”. Its work emphasises protection of fundamental rights, of which access to adequate housing conditions is one, to ensure full participation in society, social cohesion, and therefore wellbeing of all members of society.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Council of Europe (2021) *European Social Charter Overview* <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter/overview>

<sup>36</sup> Council of Europe (1996) *European Social Charter (Treaty text)* <https://rm.coe.int/168007cf93>

<sup>37</sup> Council of Europe (1998) *Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter Providing for a System of Collective Complaints (ETS No. 158)* <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treaty-num=158>

<sup>38</sup> Council of Europe (2021) *Collective complaints* <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter/collective-complaints-procedure>

<sup>39</sup> Council of Europe (2021) *European Social Cohesion Platform* <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter/european-social-cohesion-platform-about>

<sup>40</sup> Council of Europe (2017) *European Social Cohesion Platform* <https://rm.coe.int/pecs-mainstreaming-of-social-cohesion/16807809f1>

## Who is involved in trans homelessness at community level and what is being done?

Because of low engagement from mainstream policymakers and homeless service providers, community responses have been developed that cater directly to the needs of homeless and poor trans people. This was true before the COVID pandemic but has been exacerbated since. Undocumented migrants and those working in informal sectors, including sex workers, lost access to income but were also ineligible for social support; as a result, many faced homelessness. Across Europe, local trans organisations and community centres have stepped in to provide the necessary support to trans people in crisis.

In this section we will describe key community-level actors and their current intervention strategies. It is by no means exhaustive, and TGEU would welcome information about other initiatives to support trans people experiencing poverty and homelessness, especially vulnerable and marginalised trans communities.

**Trans United Europe**<sup>41</sup> is a sex worker-led network of trans organisations and individual trans activists advocating for Black and people of colour, migrant, and refugee trans people. TUE provides health and emergency housing support, as well as access to legal advice. In May and June 2021 TEU ran two conferences for trans Black and people of colour with migration and sex work backgrounds, focusing on housing, safe living and access to employment.<sup>42</sup>

TUE's members run trans-led drop-in centres in different European cities, such as Amsterdam (Trans United Nederland) and Paris (Acceptess-T). They see a lot of migrants and refugees who, without a fixed address, are unable to access health clinics or hospitals, highlighting the gap that the drop-in centres fill. TUE's members also organised deliveries of food and medical supplies to apartments inhabited by undocumented migrants unable to leave their apartments during the COVID lockdowns because they had no papers and could not risk being stopped by the police.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> <http://transunitedeurope.eu/>

<sup>42</sup> [http://transunitedeurope.eu/?page\\_id=199](http://transunitedeurope.eu/?page_id=199)

<sup>43</sup> Dodo Karsay (2021) *Trans and Poverty*. TGEU

Across Europe there are many incredible organisations working hard to support trans and LGB youth and adults facing homelessness or housing difficulties. Here is just a selection of community organisations and their work:

- **Acathi**<sup>44</sup> is an LGBTIQ organisation based in Barcelona, Spain, that runs many programs, including shelters and emergency housing and programs that have provided employment support for trans women.
- **Acceptess-T**<sup>45</sup> is a trans-led organisation in France that provides healthcare and HIV support, social support, and support to trans migrants and refugees. A member of TUE, they have a trans drop-in centre in Paris that gives undocumented and uninsured trans people access to hormones, HIV therapy, STI and HIV testing, medical check-ups, and emergency health care. This often leads to conversations with doctors, nurses, and peers about experiences with rape, violence, poverty, and homelessness.<sup>46</sup>
- **Ljubljana Pride**<sup>47</sup> in Slovenia connects LGBTIQ youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness with safe host families. They also support other organisations become LGBTIQ-friendly and inclusive through training.
- **QueerUp**<sup>48</sup> is an LGBT organisation based in Zagreb, Croatia; housing is an issue they focus on.
- The **RainboWelcome**<sup>49</sup> program connects LGBTIQ-friendly shelters and organisations all over the EU to with refugees who are seeking asylum based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Participating organisations include Acathi in Barcelona, and Le Refuge across France and in Brussels.

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.acathi.org/en/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.acceptess-t.com/>

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Dinah de Riquet-Bons from Trans United Europe. EPATH Conference 12 August 2021, *Round table 6: On the rough – taking on trans homelessness in Europe*

<sup>47</sup> <https://ljubljanapride.org/en/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/QueerUp-101286124588884/>

<sup>49</sup> <https://rainbowelcome.eu/>

- **Streha**<sup>50</sup> is a community service for LGBTIQ youth in Albania. They provide housing and psycho-social support, among other services, for LGBTIQ youth who are experiencing homelessness and are victims of domestic abuse.
- **Trans United Nederland**<sup>51</sup>, another TUE member, runs a drop-in centre in Amsterdam for trans Black people and people of colour, and trans sex workers. It remained open during the COVID lockdowns, supplying vaccines to trans people who did not or could not receive an invitation to receive a vaccine.

Focusing on research and advocacy, **FEANTSA**<sup>52</sup> is a membership-based network of organisations in Europe working on advocating for housing rights and developing prevention and support strategies.

- FEANTSA conducts research on homelessness in Europe and facilitates information exchange and awareness raising. Their surveys on LGBTIQ youth homelessness provide key insights into the experiences of trans and LGBTIQ organisations working with homeless people when data on their experiences is scarce.
- FEANTSA supports the **Housing First model**,<sup>53</sup> a rights-based approach to lifting people out of homelessness that provides permanent, non-emergency accommodation up front, and then follow up with support in access education and employment. Finland, the only country in Europe to see a declining homelessness population, credits its success to a nationwide approach using the Housing First model.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the actors mentioned above, since the beginning of the COVID-crisis countless other trans and human rights organisations have turned to providing emergency shelter to members of the community who lost their houses due to loss in income or escaping violence at home.<sup>55</sup> Some national and municipality governments have found housing solutions for trans people during the pandemic. For example, in

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<sup>50</sup> <https://strehacenter.org/>

<sup>51</sup> <http://transunitedeurope.eu/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.feantsa.org/en>

<sup>53</sup> <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/countries/finland/>

<sup>55</sup> Boglarka Fedorko, Anwar Ogrm, and Sanjar Kurmanov (2021) *Impact assessment: COVID-19 and trans people in Europe and Central Asia*. TGEU. p18. <https://tgeu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/impact-assessment-covid19-and-trans-people-in-europe-and-central-asia.pdf>

Italy, some municipalities provided housing to LGBTI people most in need and some domestic violence shelters were opened to LGBTI people.<sup>56</sup> However, in general the response from public authorities across the EU during the pandemic has largely ignored the significant need for income and housing support in trans communities.

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<sup>56</sup> ILGA Europe (2020) *COVID-19 impacts on LGBTI communities in Europe and Central Asia: A rapid assessment report*. p14. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/covid19-lgbti-assessment-2020.pdf>

# What is needed to support trans people experiencing homelessness?

Based on the data of trans people's experiences with homelessness presented in section 1 and the findings of organisations and initiatives already in place that are tackling trans homelessness, the following summarises the top five elements that would best support trans people experiencing or at risk of homelessness:

## 1. Strengthen trans community homelessness resources

As front-line service providers, trans-led drop-in centres and trans organisations on the ground must be adequately financed. These organisations are the first port of call for most trans people in need, be it related to access to hormones, supporting mental or physical health, housing, or other aspects of wellbeing. At present, states are not meeting the needs of marginalized trans communities, so they must instead direct funding to organisations that can and are doing this work. In general, trans organisations receive less funding than LGB organisations, and rely heavily on volunteers. During the COVID crisis, many diverted funding to emergency relief.<sup>57</sup> Their resources are stretched thin, yet they are doing absolutely essential and lifesaving work.

*"We need continuous, core, and flexible funding."* Trans Mreža Balkan

Trans United Europe emphasises that trans people come to their shelters seeking hormones and other medical support first, and through informal and non-judgmental conversations, housing difficulties and other vulnerabilities can be uncovered. Yet their work and the work of other similar organisations is threatened, "because anti-sex worker and anti-trans radical feminists have been undermining your work from different angles with their lobby, trying to make sure that you don't get funding".<sup>58</sup>

There are other key reasons to support drop-in centres staffed by trans people and allies:

- Trans people in crisis avoid accessing shelters out of fear of transphobia or violence. Staff at trans organisations can be trusted to understand and

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<sup>57</sup> Dodo Karsay (2021) *Trans and Poverty*. TGEU.

<sup>58</sup> Trans United Europe, quoted in *ibid*.

support trans clients' needs, including using correct names and pronouns and understanding their experiences of violence and trauma.

- Stigma around poverty and sex work, as well as other experiences of discrimination, prevents trans people from seeking medical help. HIV-prevention is made easier when doctors are available who are non-judgmental and prepared to support an informed-consent model.<sup>59</sup>
- Staff who are proactively working for the benefit of the trans community can, for example, directly ask clients if they know others who need help. As one example, a trans organisation in Moldova providing support during COVID lockdowns asked clients if they knew of anyone in need of services who did not have access to the internet.<sup>60</sup>
- Trans youth who are homeless for extended periods are at particular risk of being trapped in cycles of homelessness and of being pressured into exchanging sex for housing, food, or money.<sup>61</sup> Staff who understand these risks can provide non-judgemental guidance and suggest alternative pathways.

## 2. Municipality support for trans-specific interventions

Cities and municipalities are responsible for key elements of housing. While the specifics vary city to city, municipal competency usually includes social housing (either directly or through municipal companies), providing housing benefits or subsidies, regulating approval for housing projects, and providing social support measures to prevent forced evictions.<sup>62</sup>

With this responsibility over key measures relating to housing provision for their citizens, any solution will see municipalities central to providing support for trans people with housing difficulties. It is essential that municipality-led housing programs are established that, for example, will use trans people's chosen names and pronouns;

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Dinah de Riquet-Bons from Trans United Europe. EPATH Conference 12 August 2021, *Round table 6: On the rough – taking on trans homelessness in Europe*

<sup>60</sup> ILGA Europe (2020) *COVID-19 impacts on LGBTI communities in Europe and Central Asia: A rapid assessment report* p8. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/covid19-lgbti-assessment-2020.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Housing First Europe (2020) *Housing First for Youth*. p22. <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/assets/files/2020/05/HF4Y-Full-V5.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Eurocities (2020) *European Pillar of Social Rights: Cities delivering social rights*. p8. <https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/EUROCITIES-report-EPSS-principle-19-on-housing-and-homelessness.pdf>

will not be a threat to undocumented migrants; are not judgemental of sex workers or drug users; and actively seek to include trans people, including trans migrants and trans people with disabilities, in their programs.

Housing First programs, for example, have seen great success in lifting people out of homelessness across Europe, and could be developed in partnership with trans organisations so that trans people in need can be referred to housing programs that are 'safe'. Although more expensive up front, these programs have been shown to be cost effective and more efficient in the long run.<sup>63</sup>

In general, municipal homeless service providers need to be connected with trans organisations. Surveys show that knowledge of trans identities and trans people's needs is a challenge for many homeless service providers and that coordination is needed.<sup>64</sup>

Municipalities need to focus other services, like health care, on reaching marginalised trans people at risk, especially migrants, sex workers, people living with HIV, and those with low incomes. This need not be done alone, as not all municipalities have the knowledge or skills to support trans people. When it comes to addressing the socio-economic needs of trans people, many trans organisations forge alliances with municipalities, for example under the umbrella of 'harm reduction' rather than LGBTI-specific work. Trans United Europe noted how valuable it is to "have a stakeholder that believes in your work and knows that it's really important for the community."<sup>65</sup>

### **3. Ensuring trans people's intersectional experiences are mainstreamed by service providers**

Knowing that family rejection or other family and relationship troubles are the leading cause of the homelessness among trans young people, and that trans people experience extraordinary rates of violence and discrimination that likely contributed to their being homeless, any services that are provided for trans people must be sensitive to the trauma and oppression they experience in their lives. Further, it is discrimination that has caused many trans people to be homeless in the first place, so

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<sup>63</sup> FEANTSA Youth, ILGA-Europe & True Colours United in Cooperation with the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe (2019) *Building Bridges: How the LGBTIQ & Homeless Sector Can Work Together*. p15

<sup>64</sup> Ibid p26; Shelton, J., Stakelum, R., & Dodd, S.J. (2020). *LGBTIQ Youth Homelessness in Europe: Findings from a Survey of FEANTSA Membership Organisations*. FEANTSA, True Colors United, and the Silberman Center for Sexuality and Gender at Hunter College. p17. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Perceptions%20-%20ILGA%20Europe%20Compressed.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Dodo Karsay (2021) *Trans and Poverty*. TGEU.

housing solutions must reduce the risk of further discrimination. The trans community needs targeted and specific strategies that recognise and address the specific intersecting vulnerabilities of trans people.

Concretely this would mean, for example, that a trans person who has not yet changed their legal gender marker will still have access to the correct gender space, or that homeless shelters set aside at least one bed specifically for trans people in a safe space. To support trans youth experiencing housing crises, who have often experienced family or social rejection already, centres could offer social gatherings and low threshold and unintimidating counselling. Service providers must be open and accepting of the diversity of experiences of their clients, be non-judgemental of sex work or criminal history, and must pose no threat of reporting to authorities if their clients are undocumented migrants.

#### **4. Better research into the experiences of trans people with homelessness and access to housing**

Echoing the conclusions of studies by FEANTSA, ILGA Europe and others, better dedicated research to the needs of trans people regarding access to housing, poverty, health, and violence is essential. It would improve our understanding of the situation and needs of trans people and would better inform policymaking.<sup>66</sup> Research is especially lacking in areas like the race, income, and migration nexus, and how this impacts access to housing.

#### **5. Legal gender recognition**

Transparent and accessible legal gender recognition procedures based on self-determination is a fundamental necessity for trans people's enjoyment of human rights, including the right to housing. Complete identity documentation are key for many trans people to access and retain employment, education, and housing. Access to legal gender recognition therefore plays a critical role in breaking the cycle of social and economic exclusion for trans people.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> ILGA Europe (2021) Survey finds that LGBTIQ organisations and homeless services across Europe are dealing with large numbers of LGBTIQ youth homelessness. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/news/latest-news/survey-finds-lgbtqi-organisations-and-homeless-services-across-europe-are>

<sup>67</sup> Dodo Karsay (2021) *Trans and Poverty*. TGEU, p10.

## Policy recommendations for tackling trans homelessness

Despite being a basic human need and precondition for the enjoyment of many other rights, such as access to employment and participation in society, many trans people lack access to housing throughout their lives. This policy brief has identified clear needs of trans people at risk of homelessness and gaps in current policy tackling homelessness and housing deprivation among trans people. Below are concrete calls for action for policymakers to assist in filling this gap.

### We call on the EU to:

- Ensure that provision of public funding, including from the ESF+, ERDF and FEAD for housing and other poverty support services is tied to the condition of being trans-inclusive and that targeted funding is set aside specifically to support trans people, especially trans women, and trans people of colour.
- Promote projects that support employment and social integration for the most vulnerable within the trans community, such as trans youth, trans women and trans femmes, Black trans people and trans people of colour, trans people with disabilities, older trans people, non-binary people, trans migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, trans people living with HIV, trans sex workers, and trans people living in poverty.
- Support research on trans homelessness with meaningful community-involvement and in collaboration with local actors who have access to information on homeless and at-risk populations.
- Directly tackle transphobic rhetoric and legislation coming from Member States' governments and national media. This backlash threatens trans people's safety and the ability for trans organisations to support their community. There should be legal consequences for actions that go against EU values as laid down in the EU Fundamental Rights Charter.

### We call on national governments to:

- Intervene to end speculation in the housing sector and ensure housing policy benefits not only wealthy investors but also those vulnerable to

homelessness and exclusion from housing, including trans people, undocumented migrants, and sex workers.

- Ensure COVID-response mechanisms seize the post-COVID recovery period to transform homeless policy so that it supports trans people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Do not allow housing to sit empty while citizens are experiencing housing difficulties.
- Fund trans organisations that are supporting trans people find housing and employment, especially focusing on the most marginalised groups within the trans community.
- Ensure social and unemployment services are available to trans people also working in the informal sector, including those who move to another part of the country.
- Introduce quick, transparent, and accessible legislation for legal gender recognition based on self-determination.
- Coordinate and collaborate with local governments, municipalities, and local trans organisations in providing services for trans people.

### **We call on municipalities to:**

- Work with and fund trans organisations providing support services for poor and homeless trans people already. Reach out and find out what the needs are in the local area and build alliances.
- Stabilise rental prices. Cities must make affordable, sustainable housing available to its citizens.
- Increase the housing stock of social and affordable housing and earmark a share of this for the most vulnerable trans populations at risk of homelessness or currently experiencing homelessness.
- Establish housing-led or 'Housing First' programs that actively target the most vulnerable trans populations and that reach out to trans drop-in centres to connect trans people in need with housing. The COVID crisis showed that it was possible to find housing for people on the street and vulnerable people.

- End forced evictions for trans people affected by the COVID pandemic.
- Ensure municipal emergency shelters and other accommodation services are safe places for trans people experiencing homelessness or housing crises that respect and protect their dignity. This means:
  - housing trans people based on their self-identified gender identity;
  - having separate beds put aside for trans people;
  - ensuring intake forms and protocols are trans-sensitive, and clients can be registered even if their legal name and gender marker does not match lived experience; and
  - establishing clear policies on how to deal with transphobic and racist incidents by both staff and other service users.
- End criminalisation of homelessness, including begging bans and anti-homeless infrastructure.

## Conclusion

Homelessness is a serious issue in the trans community, due to many interacting factors of discrimination, violence, and abuse. Marginalised groups such as trans people of colour, trans people with disabilities, trans people with a migration background, and trans sex workers are at even greater risk. Despite its prevalence, trans homelessness is not well understood and poorly addressed by local, national, and regional authorities. Trans-led community organisations work hard to fill this gap but need further support to continue the incredible work they do.

This policy brief seeks to fill the gap in information around trans people's experiences of homelessness and define clear recommendations for policy action.

To get in contact with TGEU with questions about anything in this report or to inform us of initiatives in support of trans homeless please email [tgeu@tgeu.org](mailto:tgeu@tgeu.org).