

Abstract: Congress on Migration and Mental health

Homeless and mentally ill – between stigma and health risks of sleeping rough

The project „Frostschutzengel plus“ offers low-threshold support to homeless mobile EU citizens in Berlin.

Our experience shows that the vast majority of our clients move to Berlin in order to find work and better living conditions. In many cases, their job search is unsuccessful, furthermore they lack financial resources and cannot rely on a social network. Due to an exclusionary legal framework on social benefits and language barriers, migrants experience particular difficulties in accessing the regular support services for physical and mental health. They end up sleeping rough and relying only on low-threshold services for homeless people.

Living on the street in absolute deprivation can lead to stress, depression, anxiety disorders and suicide and increased substance abuse as a coping mechanism.

Our outreach team meets our clients in poor physical and mental health. The vast majority of our clients do not have valid health insurance - this makes possibilities for sustainable mental and physical recovery extremely limited.

Homeless people are stigmatized for being mentally ill, and their mental health issues are cited as their reason for ending up on the street. On the other hand, the negative impact of homelessness on mental health is often disregarded.

In this presentation we focus on sharing our experience in psycho-social counselling for homeless EU citizens. Pointing out the direct synergies between homelessness and mental health we give examples of how ending homelessness can improve mental health. In order to use health services such as hospitals and therapy centers, access to social and health rights has to be established. We share ideas on how to support mentally ill homeless people in enforcing their rights to health and housing support.

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