

## *COVID19 and homeless migrants, spring 2020*

### *Kompasset testimonies*

Kompasset Kirkens Korshær  
<https://kbh.kirkenskorshaer.dk/sted/kompasset/>

#### **Written by:**

Elisabet Kass  
Kjersti Christiansen  
Nicholas Crofts  
Ana-Maria Cioraru

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## 1. Introduction

The following paper is a result of our desire to contribute to the collection of knowledge about experiences in the first months of the COVID19 outbreak, and particularly shed light upon how it was experienced by homeless migrants living on the streets of Copenhagen.

The first weeks of March brought about many different changes in everyone's daily routines. In Kompasset we had to adapt too, which brought up a series of concerns as to how do we, as an organisation best respond to the needs of the people who seek our assistance, what are their needs and added challenges they have to face, how do people make ends meet when the usual avenues of creating an income are not as easy to access as they used to be pre-COVID19?

We have put together experiences gathered through observations, our own internal statistics and from talks and interviews with those who sought our assistance, in a hope to share it with partner organisations and colleagues, and others interested or engaged in work with homeless migrants.

We build on our work experience and informal conversations with the users of our services as well as on 9 interviews<sup>1</sup>, which we conducted as a means to underline the salient points of concern. Furthermore, we draw on our internal statistics and other research already carried out on COVID19 and how it affects people experiencing homelessness to back up the findings from our chats and interviews. Though we interviewed only 9 persons, on average we received 53 people in Kompasset every day we were open, from March to April. The points of view expressed during the interviews and what we chose to present out of them, we found to be representative for the great majority of our guests. We used a blend of methods for compiling and understanding information as a means of minimizing bias. We keep in mind the principles of power balance and how it can affect the answers during interviews.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in analysing the data, we refer to the theory of 'crisis as context' as a means of bringing broader understanding of the background and methods of navigating employed by many of the people who use our services.

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<sup>1</sup> We conducted semi-structured interviews, using a questionnaire of 26 questions. In some interviews all questions were answered, in others some were left out. The interviews were conducted after the lockdown period in Denmark (July – September). The interviewee group is relatively representative of Kompasset's user group in terms of age, gender and nationality. Two of the interviewees are women, the rest are men. Six of the interviewees are EU-citizens and three are third country nationals with residency in Southern Europe. None of the interviewees had Danish CPR number

<sup>2</sup> All interviewees are people we know and have a relation with based on our position as counsellors in Kompasset and them as users of Kompasset's counselling services. This might therefore have influenced the answers in the interviews in different ways. We suspect there to be a risk that some think there are right and wrong answers to certain questions. I.e. conspiracies about COVID19 'being political' or 'made up' are prevalent in everyday conversations that we overhear amongst the users in Kompasset. Yet, in the interviews only one person mentions that 'corona is political'.

## **Kompasset's target group**

The great majority of the people who use our services at Kompasset Kirkens Korshær are homeless migrants, both EU-nationals and Third Country Nationals (TCN) with an EU residency permit, wishing to escape poverty by seeking new opportunities in Denmark. Whilst some travel to Denmark with an intention to settle, others engage in circular migration. That is, travelling back and forth in between their home country and Denmark or other European countries, with the purpose of providing for their families back home. Many encounter barriers in their attempt to access the Danish job market. Unable to find a job, many make an income by collecting bottles, selling Strada magazines or revert to begging. At the same time they sleep on the street or remain in homeless shelters, often for a much longer period of time than first anticipated on arrival. In Kompasset, we try to help migrants navigate the Danish system through understanding and exercising their rights, counselling on job related issues and registration steps, as well as providing a night shelter in the winter months, showers, tea and coffee and place to rest during the day. Some of our users suffer from severe mental health issues or problems with substance addiction. Some were homeless in their home countries, whilst others fall into homelessness and resulting addictions and vulnerabilities after arriving. *"The homeless migrants we meet, constitute the poorest and most marginalised part of the movement of people, who travel across Europe chasing their own future"* (Kastanje and Hoff: 2017 p. 10)

According to our last statistics from 2019, we have met people from 56 different countries. 79% of them are EU citizens and 21% come from countries outside the EU, but have residence in a EU country. Statistics from Kompasset's journal system for the first half of 2020 show that the number of Non-EU Nationals in contact with our services has reduced dramatically. EU migrants have constituted 90% of Kompasset's service users since 1. January 2020. The majority are not registered with a CPR number, which requires a residency address and a job, and gives access to health care and social services. Yet they have the right to be in Denmark, either as EU jobseekers or on a 90 days tourist visa.

## **COVID 19 outbreak in Denmark and overview of available social services**

On 27th of February 2020, Denmark registered the first case of Covid19 and on 11<sup>th</sup> March WHO declared the outbreak of Covid19 a pandemic<sup>3</sup>. Soon after, on 13<sup>th</sup> of March the Danish authorities introduced a series of internal and external restrictions, with the purpose of minimizing the risk of

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sst.dk/-/media/Udgivelser/2020/Corona/Status-og-strategi/COVID-19-i-Danmark-Epidemiens-foerste-boelge-Status-og-Strategi.ashx?la=da&hash=82C882C11953EE6C0B4FDFBBA9DA763809158B5>

transmission and infection. Internally, the temporary restrictions and regulations included; furloughing of staff not fulfilling 'critical functions', closure of bars, restaurants, cafés, cultural and sporting institutions, the closing of all commercial spaces except grocery stores and limiting gatherings to no more than 10 people. Externally, this meant closed borders and increased border control. Only non-danish residents with a worthy reason for travelling into Denmark were allowed entry. This meant that if one could show a job contract (even if they had not begun work), tax application or registration papers, they would be permitted entry into Denmark.

For some public and private social services, this meant temporary closure for the lockdown period. Others with a 'critical' or 'frontline' function remained open though with limited capacity to host and serve people. To ensure this, the Social Ministry financed the opening of several new emergency night shelters and freed funds for organisations to extend the opening period for existing ones.

**The day service** in Kompasset Kirkens Korshær opened Mon - Thu from 9.00 - 13.00. We could offer *coffee/tea, food, toilets, showers, counselling and buying of flight tickets*. We moved our day shelter outside to the front garden, where we continued to serve tea and coffee. During the first months we also served food. We allowed people inside, though within the limits proposed by the authorities (max 10 persons at the same time). Showers and toilets remained open all throughout. Since 1/3 of our counselling team was temporarily sent home, counselling was reduced to what we considered to be "emergency only". The mobile counselling team (outreach), was temporarily stationed in Kompasset and made itself available for accompaniment and follow up according to need.

**The night shelters** remained open longer than usual. Both Kompasset night shelter and Hellig Kors Kirke which open October- March stayed open until 31st May. In Kompasset night shelter the number of people allowed in was reduced from 36 to 25 . In Hellig Kors Kirke night shelter we continued to accommodate up to 40 people every night.

## 2. Main findings

When talking to those who seek our assistance, both during interviews and in our daily interactions, we are aware of the fact that most of them come from a background of poverty. They navigate and continuously seek new bearings in order to build a better life. They are often met with barriers, personal and structural, both in their home countries and in the country they find themselves in - in this case Denmark. In line with what Professor Henrik Vigh theorises to be "*crisis as context*" and we we propose the idea that for the majority of our users, crisis is not delineated by passing moments in time. For many

of them crisis is endemic, ever present. COVID19 could be understood as a time of exception for us. For many of our users these times of crisis are an ever-present possibility.

*“Crisis is normally conceived of as an isolated period of time in which our lives are shattered. It defines the loss of balance and the inability to control the exterior forces influencing our possibilities and choices. The phenomenon is seen as a temporary disorder, a momentary malformation in the flow of things. Yet for a great many people around the world the crisis is endemic rather than episodic and cannot be delineated as an aberrant moment of chaos [...]. For the structurally violated, socially marginalised and poor, the world is not characterised by balance, peace or prosperity but by the ever-present possibility of conflict, poverty and disorder [...]” (Henrik Vigh)<sup>4</sup>*

In February and March, soon after Covid19 broke out in different countries across Europe, we could see an increasing number of people asking us for help in buying tickets to return to their home countries. While experiencing this, we also continued to meet, on average, more than 53 people per day in Kompasset. We asked our interviewees why they chose to stay. Some of the reasons mentioned included: having unfinished business, being in the process of getting a job, receiving medical help. In general, people feared that leaving the country would make them unable to return. Among the ones we interviewed, 7 stayed in Copenhagen the whole time between March and May. Two travelled to their home countries and then they returned. This was possible because they both had valid job contracts.

A recurrent topic of concern for those who chose to stay in Denmark during this time, was that the situation in their country of origin was perceived to be worse. Some of the users, make a source of income by collecting bottles in Copenhagen. Even though they could not make as much money as they usually do during summer months collecting bottles at festivals, street parties, football games or in parks where people gather in the evening, they still could make more income than in their home countries. One of our interviewees, an EU citizen, told us he sends home about 400 kr/week to help his wife and children, who receives no social benefits during this time. Additionally another one of our interviewees, a TCN with residency in a EU country explained to us that in his country of origin, people who do not have a job do not get any social support when they are forced to stay home under the pandemic. 6 out of the 9 people we interviewed saw the conditions and the way in which the Covid19 outbreak has been managed in their country of origin as being worse off than in Denmark. People spoke of: severe restrictions of movement, little to no financial support for families who have to stay at home and who

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<sup>4</sup> Henrik Vigh (2008) Crisis and Chronicity: Anthropological Perspectives on Continuous Conflict and Decline, Ethnos 73:1, 5-24, DOI: 10.1080/00141840801927509

were already struggling with providing for their families as well as a perceived lack of political interest on behalf of their country's leadership for providing for people in need.

As Vigh argues, even though crisis can become a state of normality, it does not mean that people living under such conditions live a good life, simply because they have gotten used to it. Crisis is seen comparatively, measured and defined against the lives in other places, compared to what things could be like or should be like. Crisis becomes a “*terrain of action*”, within which people continue to navigate. It does not bring about passivity, but it can drive people to act according to the possibilities at hand.

*“... people actively seek new bearings and continue to have the ability to act even in situations of ‘disorder and ruin’. As crisis is fragmentation, it entails a loss of coherence and unity, yet this experience of fragmentation does not necessarily lead to passivity. Agency, in this perspective, is not a question of capacity - we all have the ability to act - but possibility; that is, to what extent are we able to act within a given context. [...] In chronic crisis we base action on fragmentation as circumstance - which makes life unpleasant but not impossible.  
“ (Henrik Vigh)*

That what we can do in Kompasset and that which can be done with the kind of expertise a social offer can bring is to expand the field of possibilities of people by providing basic services, support and information.

## **Shelter**

During the first months of the outbreak (march-may), the great majority of our users were able to find shelter and with the added emergency shelters and hotels collaborating with NGOs, there were no lotteries<sup>5</sup> deciding who gets a place to sleep.

There was a stronger collaboration between NGOs, public institutions and private partners (such as hostels). Some of the night shelters stayed open a few months longer than regularly and the municipality of Copenhagen opened up a new shelter to accommodate 40 people and a shelter where people without a house, who have been tested positive for COVID19 could go into quarantine. Additionally, some of the shelters who operate all year round can host homeless migrants as long as they qualify for the requirements of the §110 of the Service Law. 8 out of the 9 people we interviewed mentioned sleeping in either Bavnehøj Hallen, Cafe Klare, Blå Kors Grace, Hellig Kors Kirke or Kompasset. The initiatives to open additional shelters and to use the spaces available in hostels to host homeless people have been

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<sup>5</sup> The emergency shelters which open during the winter months (including the shelters in Kompasset and Hellig Kors Kirke) have limited number of spots. If at opening time, there are more people outside than available beds. the spots are filled by drawing a lottery. Everyone is given a number and the staff draws numbers until all the beds have been filled.



welcomed and appreciated. Yet, it does not provide any long term solution. Whilst homeless communities have not been affected by COVID19 to the extent it was feared (Owen 2020 webinar)<sup>6</sup>, there are still indicators saying that if homeless people contract COVID19 they are more likely to become seriously ill and die (FEANTSA 2020)<sup>7</sup>. Homelessness must thus be seen as a public health priority (FEANTSA 2020 p.21)<sup>8</sup>, and crowded night shelters with a high number of potentially vulnerable people sharing sleeping space is an inadequate response to a health crisis.

By the end of June, all emergency shelters were closed except Grace Blå Kors' hostel agreement, which remained open until the end of July. One of the persons interviewed chose to sleep outside as a protective measure, to keep distance. It was later, in June when he chose to move into Grace as he felt safer at that point, with the number of COVID cases decreasing.

We have encountered a few other situations, where people with medical problems chose to sleep outside or in cars, out of concern that they could catch the virus and their health situation would worsen.

### **Food, showers and washing clothes**

Some of the other basic needs mentioned were: food, showers and washing of clothes. It was difficult to quantify based on interviews, as they all answered the open questions differently. However, we can fill in the gaps with information we gather from our qualitative and quantitative data in Kompasset. Between March and May people could shower at night, in the shelters where they slept during the opening times. The situation was different during the day as most of the day shelters were only open for coffee/tea and food. Kompasset received, for shower, 166 people in March, 61 people in April and 25 people in May. The decrease in the number of people using it can be explained by the opening, of two additional shelters which also offered showers in the end of March (Bavnehøj and Blå Kors Grace).

Provision of food has been an important and needed service. Organisations served meals, especially in the mornings. COOP and 7 Eleven in partnership with The Red Cross and Kirkens Korshær offered vouchers with which food could be bought. Det Runde Bord rented a kitchen and cooked meals which they then delivered to shelters across the city for serving. However, it transpired from the interviews that the majority would rely on a combination of options: getting food from charities or shelter, buying

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<sup>6</sup> On Friday 25th of September, FEANTSA and the European Observatory on Homelessness, together with the University of Bergamo and fio.PSD held a webinar on the subject of Covid-19 and homelessness. The webinar consisted of three presentations from: Ruth Owen who spoke about the European context, Dennis Culhane who discussed the situation in the US and Steve Gaetz who spoke about the issue in Canada.

<sup>7</sup> FEANTSA, Fondation Abbe Pierre (2020) Fifth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2020: [https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/OHEE/2020/Fifth\\_Overview\\_of\\_Housing\\_Exclusion\\_in\\_Europe.pdf](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/OHEE/2020/Fifth_Overview_of_Housing_Exclusion_in_Europe.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> FEANTSA, Fondation Abbe Pierre (2020) Fifth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2020: [https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/OHEE/2020/Fifth\\_Overview\\_of\\_Housing\\_Exclusion\\_in\\_Europe.pdf](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/OHEE/2020/Fifth_Overview_of_Housing_Exclusion_in_Europe.pdf)

it themselves or cooking together with friends. One of our interviewees told us he *“bought food with whatever money he had”*, another one told us they *“ate whatever they found”* and a third one says *“he had enough food to survive”*. Our outreach workers also, experienced during their shifts out on the street, that people asked about food.

Another issue of concern has been the washing of clothes. Due to restrictions and measures taken by organisations to minimize the spread of the virus, there were not many places where people could get clean clothes. One of our interviewees mentioned getting clothes from Mændenes Hjem and a couple more mentioned Kompasset to have helped with a jacket and some other clothes. Doing laundry was also difficult during the three months. While one interviewee mentioned paying 50 kr. to a private laundry, another one said he washes his clothes by hand as the laundries have been closed. In Kompasset, we organised weekly trips to the laundry - though we could only take 3 users at a time so as to respect guidelines.

### **COVID19 prevention and regulations**

Beyond the basic needs of shelter and food, it has been relevant to look at what possibilities have people had to stay protected according to the advice coming from authorities. When most of the general population was sent to work from home, institutions and businesses were closed, people were advised to self-isolate, what kind of protection measures were available to those without a place to isolate? Where did they get their information regarding precaution measures and the restrictions in the public space?

Region Hovedstaden transformed their TB testing service into a mobile COVID19 testing service. This way, health care professionals drove out to shelters for homeless and socially marginalised people and performed and still perform COVID tests. Moreover, everyone tested positive without the possibility to self-isolate got and still gets access to a room in a building with health care professionals present to help observe needs for hospitalisation.

Initially, this service was exclusively for people with CPR numbers in Denmark. However, following protests from both NGO's and a number of politicians of Copenhagen Town Council, the service was extended to include all socially marginalised people, including those without CPR registration.

The only exception remained to be for people without legal stay in Denmark. The minister of immigration and integration Mattias Tesfaye sent out official guidelines regarding people without legal stay, who had access to testing and immediate treatment if necessary. However, they would have to be

isolated at two designated asylum centres, followed by deportation<sup>9</sup>. A public inquiry asking how many homeless migrants have been isolated at either one of the two asylum camps, showed that none had been isolated there. This procedure has been met with harsh criticism from different NGO's including the street lawyers, as it risks making people without legal stay reluctant to get tested in fear of the consequences of deportation<sup>10</sup>.

6 out of the 9 people interviewed had been tested for COVID-19. 5 of them were tested at one of the social places they visited, and all, had taken the test more than once. The sixth was tested upon admission in the hospital for a heart attack. None of them tested positive. The interviewees who were not tested said they did not know they could be tested but also did not feel ill or had any health problems of any kind. The majority of the people we spoke with said they had respected the regulations of keeping distance, washing hands and sanitizing. One of the users mentioned having been ill and being afraid of having Corona. At that point he feared he might pass it on to someone else. Another one expressed that *"you never know, anyone can die. I was thinking about it a lot"* and that he *"did not feel safe"*. Concerned about catching it and passing it on to others he chose to sleep outside, next to a football field where he could isolate and keep distance.

All of the people interviewed say they used hand sanitizer from entrances into shops and supermarkets. One told us *"I bought my own and I also bought water to wash my hands. It cost 20 kr. but it was an investment"*. Many of our users, under regular circumstances would use public toilets, toilets in libraries and toilets in the social services. However, public libraries and public toilets had been closed during the first weeks of the outbreak. Under new circumstances they had to quickly adapt and find ways of managing the new situation even though it was very difficult. One of our interviewees described the perceived paradox of the situation: *"It was normal situation – but in a bad way. They closed down to protect us, but then things get very difficult."*

### **Social distancing and social relations**

Most of the people we interviewed, as well as those who use our services daily, sleep in shelters. They sleep in rooms with several other people. Additionally, their activities, in general happen in groups and often in public places. That's not always by choice, but due to the type of available facilities and lack of alternatives; as one of the interviewees said *"homeless people are forced to be together"*. On the other hand, there is an aspect of isolation; even when in groups they live isolated from the rest of society,

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.information.dk/indland/2020/04/opraab-manglende-karantaeneplasser-migranter-covid-19-kan-faa- alvorlige-konsekvenser>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.information.dk/indland/2020/04/opraab-manglende-karantaeneplasser-migranter-covid-19-kan-faa- alvorlige-konsekvenser>

though in many cases they rely on contact with people to make an income like for example selling magazines, collecting bottles or when trying to seek jobs by asking in person. All of the people we interviewed mentioned making efforts to keep distance from other people sleeping in shelters. Three of them specifically expressed appreciation towards social services who made efforts to provide space for people to keep distance. When it comes to socializing, three of the ones we interviewed spoke of avoiding big groups and staying more isolated as a choice - in general, not only during Corona. For them, isolation became evermore important and they sought to sleep alone as much as possible. Three others spoke of how it was very difficult for them at the beginning because they are very social and they like to hug and shake hands. They felt more lonely and isolated but sought to adapt. As one of them told us *"life teaches you many things"*. The rest said that there was no significant change - things happened as usual, where they sought solitude after being to social services, or stuck to small groups of acquaintances.

For those with families back in their countries of origins, contact over the phone with them was important and consistent.

### **Information**

Information and access to information was yet another one of the topics we discussed. Both in Kompasset and during the shifts our mobile team did on the street, we encountered many questions regarding: rules and regulation concerning opening and closing of the borders. The questions were often not only about the borders of Denmark but also of other countries. This goes to speak to the dimension of the migration circuit people follow in their attempt to navigate new potentialities.

We set out to look at where people got their information about the outbreak and the restrictions imposed in Denmark. Half of the ones we spoke with got information from their friends and family about the situation in their home country. Upon observing the way in which the city emptied and businesses started closing down they figured *"the virus must have spread to Denmark too"*. A couple more were able to follow news in different languages. One other told us that *"there are people he hangs out with, who can read and write and understands other languages, and keep them updated."* In what concerns information regarding protective and preventive measures, the majority of them felt they have been informed by both the staff in the social offers they visit and used the drawing in public spaces as pointers

One aspect we find relevant to mention is that, it transpired from the interviews but also from daily chats that people in general have had the possibility to stay informed about how to stay protected (sanitizing, keeping distance, wearing masks when necessary). Information about regulations like, limitations of gatherings, requirements for entering Denmark, possibilities of getting tested, have not been as clearly transmitted. Our outreach workers experienced a big amount of questions which were

built on rumours and misinformation. People rely on their networks as well as social media for information. The outreach team spent a lot of time listening to and debunking all kinds of rumours about deportations, forced quarantine of bottle collectors and Strada<sup>11</sup> sellers.

### **Work and money**

From the people interviewed, 6 named collecting bottles as their source of income, 5 of which said it has been harder to find any because people did not go out. Among the challenges they faced, besides creating less income than they are used to they mention experiencing more distance, even social stigma “*When you collect bottles during Corona, people avoid you.*” Out of fear of getting the virus or spread it one chose to stop collecting bottles altogether even if that meant a total loss of income. There has also been one collector who says that it has not been that hard collecting bottles. He admits there are less to find, but also that there have been less people to do the same job.

For those of our users who were in the process of getting a job and starting the steps of registration, the main challenge were the delays in the registration system. It is important here to mention that, even though they had obtained a job contract, the registration process can be labyrinthian and slow. The process was further complicated due to restrictions and the closing of public institutions. When services of public institutions moved online those requirements that require you to show up physically, such as getting your residency permit, were closed down. In a survey carried out by the council for socially marginalised people in Denmark (Rådet for Socialt Udsatte)<sup>12</sup>, the problem with services moving online is also highlighted, and how this created challenges for people who are not digital, but dependant on going to the bank i.e. to take out money (Rådet for Socialt Udsatte)<sup>13</sup>.

According to our own internal statistics, in the first half of 2020 we already registered 343 job-related counselling session compared to 435 in the whole of 2019 and 168 sessions concerning the registration process compared to 238 in the whole of 2019. Even though the amount of users we received was significantly lower than the first half of the previous year, the need for repeated assistance in looking for jobs, applying for jobs, making contact to the right public institutions or private partners was a big part of the counselling needs.<sup>14</sup> This can also be explained by the fact that those who remained in

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<sup>11</sup> Strada is a magazine, created and distributed by the Danish organization *Minoritet*. Sellers can buy the magazine for 10 kroner and sell it for 20 kroner. <http://gademagasin.dk/>

<sup>12</sup> Rådet for Socialt Udsatte (2020) Organisationer og lokale udsatteråds vurdering af problemer og løsninger på udsatteområdet ved nedlukningen og den langsomme genåbning af samfundet.

<sup>13</sup> Rådet for Socialt Udsatte (2020) Organisationer og lokale udsatteråds vurdering af problemer og løsninger på udsatteområdet ved nedlukningen og den langsomme genåbning af samfundet.

<sup>14</sup> Between January – June 2020 we registered 206 new users while between January – June 2019 we registered 282 new users.

Denmark and continued to visit our services, have often been people with least resources and who require extra support.

### **3. Conclusion**

Like many other homeless services in Denmark, both Kompasset and the people who access Kompasset's services have been deeply affected by COVID19. This has translated into a steep reduction in overall numbers of people using the services and a scaling back regarding what could be offered and how, especially during the period March – May 2020. During the day, Kompasset reduced opening hours, limited its offers and furloughed staff, while at night the shelters prolonged their opening hours until the end of May to cover the needs. Strict border controls based on one's relationship to Denmark have further reduced numbers and limited the access of both mobile EU citizens and Non-EU citizens to their normal survival mechanisms in the country. Those who chose to stay in Denmark often took this decision comparing their possibilities in Denmark to their possibilities in their country of origin. The majority of them come from a background of poverty and declared having access to little social support in their countries of origin. All of the people we spoke with talked about the financial difficulties made even harder by the outbreak of COVID19. Making an income from activities such as collecting bottles, selling magazines and even seeking jobs was made additionally harder by lockdowns. As such people relied even more on social services to offer support for basic needs. Swift efforts to get people off the streets have been successful, with many night shelters extending their opening period and additional funding being channelled into creating more sleeping spots. The future remains however uncertain, as the response for homeless migrants has mostly been emergency shelters with limited capacity. None have developed into long-term solutions. We have encountered a few situations where people chose to sleep outside or in cars, concerned they might otherwise catch the virus from other people in shelters.

While night offers prolonged their opening periods, many day social offers shortened their opening hours and saw a need to reduce the services offered. This brought about other kinds of challenges: limited access to showers and toilets making it difficult for homeless people who usually visit them to maintain a consistent hygiene. Public toilets and fountains closed temporarily which limited even further access to clean water and hygiene. When public laundromats, second hand stores and social services offering free clothing were closed, washing clothes became a salient need.

Access to information was good but limited. People found the visual information available in the form of posters about washing hands and maintaining distance useful. On the other hand, many people got additional information second-hand through relatives, friends in their own countries or their inner

circles on the street. This led to the formulation of all kinds of rumours regarding quarantines, deportations and imposition of travel bans.

So far there has been very low incidence of infection with COVID19 among homeless migrants. It is hard to explain why that was so. From our chats and interviews it transpires that people, even the most reluctant ones continue to respect the rules regarding social distancing, washing hands and do overall try to stay healthy. As mentioned before, however, there are indicators to show that if homeless people contract COVID19 they are more likely to fall seriously ill and die. Homelessness must therefore be seen as a public health priority.

### **Recommendations:**

- Provision of clear and relevant information regarding developments in Denmark, made easily accessible and in multiple languages
- Coordination of services so as to provide for basic needs all throughout the day
- Opening of day shelter for longer hours
- Opening of quarantine sites where people who await test results can be housed, even if they do not have Danish CPR registration

Copenhagen, October 2020