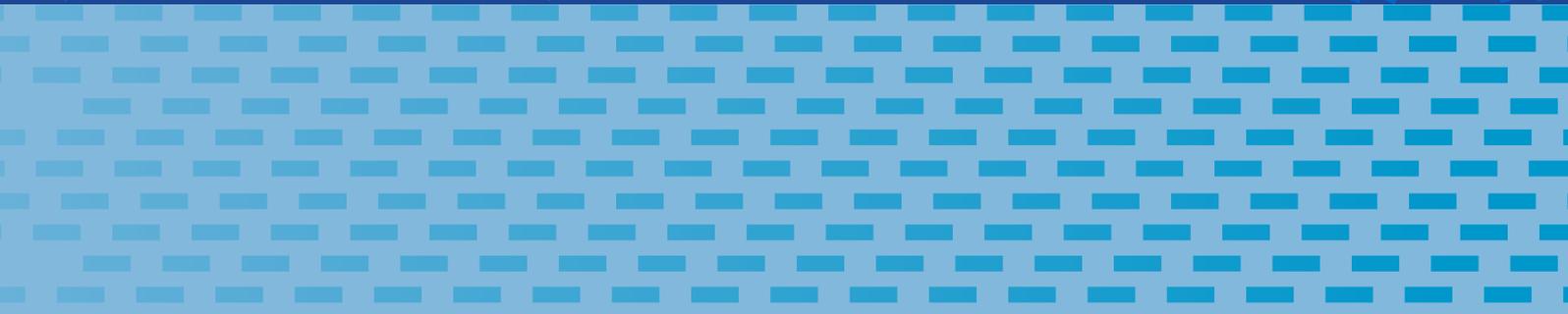


# 16

## **Good practices**

to support mobile EU citizens  
living in homelessness





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For more information check our project "PRODEC - Protecting the Rights of Destitute EU mobile Citizens - 2nd phase (2019 - 2021)" at <https://www.feantsa.org/en/project/2019/08/28/prodec-protecting-the-rights-of-destitute-eu-mobile-citizens-2nd-phase?bcParent=418>

FEANTSA is the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. We are the only European NGO focusing exclusively on the fight against homelessness. Our goal is an end to homelessness in Europe. FEANTSA works with over 120 members across 28 countries including 24 EU Member States.

# Contents

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Foreword.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Background.....	7
Methodology.....	10

## **16 Good practices**

<b>1</b> The Federal Working Group for Homeless Aid eV (BAG W).....	11
<b>2</b> Kirkens Bymisjon, the Church City Mission, Department for destitute migrants.....	13
<b>3</b> Fondazione Casa della Carità, in partnership with Ce.A.S.....	16
<b>4</b> Stockholms Stadsmission, Crossroads.....	18
<b>5</b> DIOGENES.....	20
<b>6</b> Bischof-Hermann-Stiftung, Europa.Brücke.Münster plus (EBM+).....	22
<b>7</b> GEBEWO.....	25
<b>8</b> Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG).....	28
<b>9</b> Hope Housing (Bradford) Ltd.....	31
<b>10</b> Kirkens Korshaer, Kompasset.....	33
<b>11</b> Médecins du Monde (MdM) Sweden.....	36
<b>12</b> neunerhaus.....	38
<b>13</b> No Fixed Abode (Vvary).....	41
<b>14</b> NOAH Enterprise.....	43
<b>15</b> Public Interest Law Centre (PILC).....	46
<b>16</b> Roma Support Group.....	49

# Foreword

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The strength of the European Union is said to lay in unity, in the capacity of bringing together diverse and multicultural communities, while promoting respect and defending human rights. Despite continuous challenges and an ongoing global health crisis that put the EU in an unprecedented situation, the values that the European community was built on continue to be at the heart of the European project. Institutions and civil society have worked relentlessly to ensure that the slogans “United in diversity” and “No one left behind” become a reality and not mere words.

As one of the most important milestones in the construction of the European Union, **free movement** is a right enshrined in the EU Treaties and regulated through Directive 2004/38/EC. Currently, it is estimated that 13.3 million EU citizens have exercised the freedom to move across the EU. In the light of events such as Brexit or the Coronavirus pandemic, this right has been under threat. Many had their free movement limited, which meant being confronted with increased destitution or separation from families and friends. But even before the pandemic, mobile EU citizens often faced multiple legal and administrative challenges, which prevented them from fully enjoying their rights and participating on equal footing in their host societies.

The European Commission has announced its intention for 2022 to update their guidelines on free movement,<sup>1</sup> aiming to clarify certain aspects in the implementation of the Directive 2004/38/EC, and to adjust legislation to recent court rulings showing that many times MS fail in transposing correctly the European legislation. At FEANTSA, we believe the new guidelines can be a chance to realise the rights of mobile EU citizens. We strongly encourage the European Commission to address the situation of those vulnerable citizens in the upcoming Communication. Protecting the right to free movement is even more important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the UK withdrawal.

The link between free movement in the EU and homelessness is very important for FEANTSA, a topic we worked on for over 10 years.<sup>2</sup> FEANTSA members on the ground have experienced how the number of mobile EU citizens they support increased over these years, therefore we developed tools and built knowledge on how to better claim the rights of EU citizens. This work involved a wide variety of activities such as legal fitness checks, guides for professionals, training modules, study visits, or comprehensive reports on the living conditions of mobile EU citizens experiencing homelessness in several European cities. We work



1 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eu\\_citizenship\\_report\\_2020\\_-\\_empowering\\_citizens\\_and\\_protecting\\_their\\_rights\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eu_citizenship_report_2020_-_empowering_citizens_and_protecting_their_rights_en.pdf)

2 <https://www.feantsa.org/en/resources/resources-database?search=free+movement>

ruthlessly with European institutions to bring forward on their agenda the issue of mobile EU citizens experiencing homelessness.

This publication contributes to this purpose and presents a number of 16 good practices in supporting mobile EU citizens. We believe it is time to take stock of these great initiatives, which are a result of many years of work with and for EU citizens. I highly recommend institutions and authorities to get inspiration from these good practices, and consider, where appropriate, transferring or replicating them in their context. For this, you will count with the support of FEANTSA and our members.



**Kjell Larsson**  
FEANTSA President

## Introduction

This booklet presents 16 good practices, identified by FEANTSA, for supporting mobile EU citizens who are destitute and/or live-in homelessness across Europe. Despite the high percentage of mobile EU citizens who relocate successfully to another Member State of the EU, a significant number of individuals who exercise their right to free movement need structural support with obtaining information and for counselling on their rights, as they experience destitution and live in insecure conditions in Europe's cities.

FEANTSA is working to raise public awareness about the complexity of homelessness and the multi-dimensional nature of the problems faced by homeless people. FEANTSA has been studying the situation of mobile EU citizens experiencing homelessness for almost a decade now. Together with our members, we have worked at national and European level to raise awareness about the factors that contribute to pushing EU citizens into destitution and we call for including mobile EU citizens in public policies. We strongly believe that there is a need to increase support from local and European level in this area.





With this booklet, we aim to promote the scaling-up of the existing good practices of services for destitute mobile EU citizens and to involve local authorities to a higher extent in supporting mobile EU citizens to exit homelessness and destitution. While long term support (in housing as well as in all other areas of life) is of course the final goal, we acknowledge that these types of measures remain difficult to put in place so we advocate for multiplying and developing the good practices identified here to achieve our objective of ending homelessness among mobile EU citizens.

As part of this work and under the framework of the project Protecting the Rights of Destitute mobile EU Citizens (PRODEC) we identified 16 good practices which are transferrable and can be used for inspiration in designing services for destitute mobile EU citizens across Europe. These practices have been developed as a response to the high number of mobile EU citizens who have been met by services. They involve a complex set of support measures, starting with meeting basic needs for emergency accommodation, ensuring everyday food provision or simply offering a place to relax and create social connections and working to empower mobile EU citizens to reclaim their rights. The good practices identified show that the most important areas of intervention for supporting mobile EU citizens are:

- ▶ Support to exit or prevent homelessness.
- ▶ Counselling for information on and how to realise mobile EU citizens' rights.
- ▶ Support in accessing healthcare.
- ▶ Counselling for accessing the labour market (incl. preparing CVs, applying for jobs, registration in the national system, etc.).

- ▶ Basic needs support: day shelter (incl. social networking), emergency night shelter, food, shower, clothes, etc.
- ▶ Housing and social support.
- ▶ Advocacy and awareness raising on the situation of mobile EU citizens and their rights.
- ▶ Support with legal representation and legal case-work, strategic litigation.
- ▶ Research and communications around mobile EU citizens' rights.

Several important principles have been repeatedly underlined during the interviews held with representatives of the organisations working to support mobile EU citizens. Ensuring a holistic approach where people are offered support in all areas of life is one of them, as it allows individuals to build the capacity they need to succeed in life. Stabilising the housing situation as an initial step is a common approach among the good practices identified. Where possible, housing is secured for the long term, which consequently allows people to focus on other important aspects of their lives such as gaining employment, improving language skills, clarifying their immigration status or the educational situation of their children. The issue of language is of utmost significance and most services employ people who come from the origin countries of mobile EU citizens, or who have learnt the languages their beneficiaries speak, so as to enhance communications. Engaging with people from the same communities is also relevant in terms of creating bridges and improving knowledge and communication between mobile EU citizens and the host societies. Flexibility is key as well, since people are diverse and have different needs.

It is important to respect the agency of mobile EU citizens, therefore the services featured in this booklet are services that build their work around the needs that individuals (or families) consider to be the most important at the moment they are met. Participation is also key, most practices develop means by which to involve their beneficiaries in their everyday activities, for some this includes training and employing mobile EU citizens with experience of homelessness to work in their services. Several projects engage with certain issues more closely, for example, with the education of young people, fighting discrimination against mobile EU citizens (particularly of Roma origin) or implementing legal casework to defend people's rights.

Advocacy, together with research and communication regarding the situation of destitute mobile EU citizens, is another important area of work which all the good practices identified here engage with. It is unanimously acknowledged that we need to communicate more about the situation of mobile EU citizens at a societal level. Further awareness raising and advocacy with authorities, public services and potential employers on mobile EU citizens' rights is also a key activity. Official guidelines and training are still lacking on this topic and should be further developed by MS and the European institutions. Fostering a rights-based approach among homeless service providers is essential, as is monitoring the realisation of mobile EU citizens' rights and holding authorities accountable for the way they implement free movement legislation at national level.

Though success is difficult to measure (and can be also difficult to achieve), the good practices in this booklet have managed to contribute to raising awareness

about the situation of destitute mobile EU citizens and improving knowledge among public services and authorities within their respective countries on this topic. Moreover, they have brought improvements in people's lives, supporting mobile EU citizens to access healthcare, exit homelessness and gain employment.

We hope that the practices identified will serve as inspiration both for the homeless sector and for the local authorities who are all invited to consult the booklet and to transfer these types of measures as much as possible to their work with destitute mobile EU citizens. These practices prove that it is possible to develop services that can serve and support destitute mobile EU citizens, lifting them from homelessness and poverty, by following a human rights-based approach and enabling people's access to rights.

## Background

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**Freedom of movement for workers is a fundamental principle of the EU, guaranteed to its citizens by Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. In agreement with this principle, a high number of mobile EU citizens relocate to another Member State to look for employment, with a high success rate. In 2019, 3.3% of the working age (20-64) of EU citizens resided in an EU country other to that of their citizenship, according to Eurostat.<sup>3</sup>** The profiles of mobile EU citizens are diverse. The countries that EU citizens leave from the most are: Romania - in 2019, Romanian citizens of working



<sup>3</sup> Eurostat, EU citizens living in another Member State - statistical overview, Data extracted in June 2020, accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021 at <https://tinyurl.com/8pvjzmz8>

age (20-64) residing abroad within the EU accounted for about a fifth (19.4%) of the population residing in Romania; next are Croatians (16.1%), Bulgarians (11.4%) and Portuguese (10.8 %).<sup>4</sup> The most numerous national groups of mobile EU citizens aged 20-64 in 2019 were those from Romania (2 280 000 persons), Poland (1 079 000 persons), Italy (965 500 persons) and Portugal (655 600 persons).<sup>5</sup>

Eurostat shows that the employment rates for mobile EU citizens are higher than among the resident population of their country of citizenship and that this proportion has been increasing over the last decade: mobile EU citizens were employed at a rate of 75.5% in 2019, compared to an EU average of 73.1% overall. Despite the overall successful free movement of workers in the EU, in the past years, it has also become apparent that mobile EU citizens are increasingly being pushed to destitution and left without protection in moments of hardship. A possible connection between homelessness and migrant status (in particular reinforced by ethnic discrimination) was confirmed by the ESPN study in 35 European countries, where in countries such as Denmark, Germany, Finland, the Netherlands

or Sweden, reports of overrepresentation of some ethnic minority populations and/or of recent rising trends in homelessness were made.<sup>6</sup> Despite a lack of comprehensive data, research from big cities in Europe confirms this trend, which has also been reported by FEANTSA members. To provide several examples: in London, 31% of those seen rough sleeping in 2018/19 were from Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries with Romanians continuing to represent the single biggest non-UK nationality group (16% of all rough sleepers).<sup>7</sup> In Copenhagen, in 2017, 88% of migrants living rough (rough sleeping and in overnight shelters), were coming primarily from Central and Eastern European countries.<sup>8</sup> Homeless services in Brussels also write about an increase in the numbers of the EU citizens they support: in 2018, the outreach service of Diogenes was in contact with 228 mobile EU citizens, compared to 225 Belgians,<sup>9</sup> while data from Samu Social, the main provider of emergency accommodation in the city show that 15.3% of the total amount of their beneficiaries in 2018 are EU nationals (385 Romanians and 147 Polish).<sup>10</sup> Germany is following the same trends: BAGW's estimation model shows 678,000 homeless people in 2018 with a proportion

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 European Social Policy Network, Fighting homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe. A study of national policies Isabel Baptista and Eric Marlier, European Commission, 2019, accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021 at <http://www.praxis.ee/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/homelessness.pdf>

7 Greater London Authority (GLA), Rough sleeping in London (CHAIN reports) accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021 at <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>

8 Ibid 6.

9 Mauro Striano, Factors Contributing to Vulnerability Among Destitute Mobile EU Citizens in Brussels, FEANTSA, 2020, accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021 at <https://www.feantsa.org/download/report-en4173526389729689354.pdf>

10 Samu Social, Observations sur le public accueilli, 2018, accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021 at <https://rapportannuel.samusocial.be/observations-sur-le-public-accueilli/>



of 17% EU citizens (an increase from 4.7% in 2010).<sup>11</sup> BAGW also finds the proportion of EU citizens who are roofless is around 50%, especially in large cities.<sup>12</sup> In Barcelona, a report from 2019 shows that the situation of mobile EU citizens has deteriorated in the past ten years, 45% of those found sleeping rough came from other EU countries, compared to 28% from Spain.<sup>13</sup> In the UK, a very popular destination for mobile EU citizens, the increase of those experiencing or being at risk of homelessness is also confirmed by a CRISIS report from 2019,<sup>14</sup> while since 2009/10 over 50% of the non-UK nationals found to be rough sleeping through The Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) have been people from Central and Eastern European countries.<sup>15</sup>

The factors that lead to homelessness among mobile EU citizens are complex. They can begin from the level of preparation that each person does before leaving their home country. Many people do not go through a recruiting process prior to departure, so they do not have a work contract when they arrive in another MS. They are not prepared for the administrative requirements they might be faced with for registering in the host MS and some simply might not know or be afraid to demand their rights as a mobile EU citizen.

Further challenges appear in the recognition of worker status. Where MS assume a restrictive interpretation of the notion of worker and deny mobile EU citizens worker status, they, in consequence, bar them from social protection. Administrative obstacles might also contribute to destitution in some cases. This could be because EU citizens are not aware of the procedures required for registration in a MS or there is a lack of clarity about what documentation should be provided. Some mobile EU citizens also face barriers in not knowing the language of the host MS or not knowing it well enough to be able to manage in relation to public services. They need support overcoming these barriers, and, where this support lacks, are confronted with reluctance from authorities (e.g.: in opening a bank account, in accepting the national ID card for registration with the job centres, etc). Challenges in accessing social benefits and services are also an issue, based at times on the misconception that EU citizens are trying to take advantage of the welfare system of MS or based on a misinterpretation or lack of knowledge of the legislation by public servants. Not being able to access social benefits and services leaves EU citizens vulnerable to destitution.



11 Current figures from the statistics report can be found here: <https://www.bagw.de/de/themen/zahl-der-wohnungslosen/index.html> [last accessed on 06.05.2021]; the entire BAGW statistical report for 2018 is here: [https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/STA/STA\\_Statistikbericht\\_2018.pdf](https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/STA/STA_Statistikbericht_2018.pdf) [last accessed on 19.05.2021].

12 Ibid 11.

13 Albert Sales Campos (Institut d'Estudis Regionals i Metropolitans de Barcelona), Who's sleeping rough in Barcelona?, Area of Social Rights Barcelona City Council, 2019, accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021 at <https://tinyurl.com/ym4rs8zd>

14 Sophie Boobis, Ruth Jacob and Ben Sanders, A home for all: Understanding migrant homelessness in Great Britain, Crisis, 2019, accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2021 at <https://tinyurl.com/ek74aycx>

15 Greater London Authority (2019) CHAIN annual report: Greater London 2018/19. Greater London Authority.

A lack of access to the labour market severely influences the chances of success for mobile EU citizens, as they are confronted with difficulties and challenges, especially in Member States where there are very strict criteria when it comes to hiring foreigners or because the public services are not knowledgeable about the rights of mobile EU citizens. Fake promises of jobs and discrimination are other factors that may affect access to the labour market.

After obtaining a job, mobile EU citizens may face additional challenges related to precarious working conditions that push them into destitution. These might have to do with inadequate working conditions, job insecurity in the host society, low wages, accommodation which is directly connected to the employer, or a lack of social protection, which is not always guaranteed within their work contracts. Personal circumstances can contribute to the deterioration of people's situation and may lead to homelessness in the case of mobile EU citizens. Episodes related to poor or deteriorating health, addictions, substance misuse, family disruption or domestic violence (particularly for women) can put a big mark on people's lives. It is especially difficult to exit such situations as a mobile EU citizen when access to social protection and social rights is complicated and limited.

The consequences of these factors point to a constant need to protect and promote the rights of mobile EU citizens, especially as the number of those citizens experiencing destitution and homelessness in MS is increasing. FEANTSA's objective is to contribute to this by promoting the scaling-up of the good practices identified under our PRODEC project.

## Methodology

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The good practices presented in this booklet have been collected through an open call launched by FEANTSA between March and August 2021. The organisations that applied and that worked to support mobile EU citizens were interviewed by FEANTSA staff as part of the selection process. The practices were assessed by both a grading system and consultations with our FEANTSA migration cluster. We are grateful to everyone who contributed to this process, and we truly believe that the transference and scaling-up of these practices at national and local level can contribute to lifting mobile EU citizens out of destitution and homelessness.



# 5 DIOGENES



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## AREAS



- ▶ Building a bridge between homeless people and the rest of society through outreach work, psychosocial support and awareness-raising
- ▶ Support in accessing health care
- ▶ Support to exit or prevent homelessness for mobile EU citizens
- ▶ Counselling for ensuring mobile EU citizens' rights
- ▶ Counselling for accessing the labour market (incl. preparing CVs, applying for jobs, registration in the national system, etc.)

## SHORT DESCRIPTION

**“Médiation Interculturelle”:** Intercultural mediation is a practice implemented by DIOGENES since 2003, which requires specific cultural and linguistic knowledge. The main purpose of this action is to support destitute mobile EU citizens to achieve inclusion in the Belgian society and open access to their rights while in Belgium.

## ABOUT THE GOOD PRACTICE

DIOGENES is a service providing support to homeless people in the Brussels-Capital Region through

outreach work. In the Intercultural mediation project, Polish and Roma intercultural mediators meet mobile EU citizens on the streets of Brussels daily, to inform them about their rights, to build up a relationship, to listen and support them in their own life choices. The activities are organised around people's needs in a holistic manner. Support is offered to people in all areas of life where they consider they need help, from accompanying homeless mobile EU citizens when accessing public services to finding housing or receiving financial support from the state. Support is also provided from DIOGENES' team with searching and applying for jobs, enrolling children to school, accessing healthcare, informing people about their rights and supporting them in procedures to access their social rights.

DIOGENES also takes on an “awareness-raising role” by mediating with the authorities and working to break their stereotypes about mobile EU citizens (e.g., Roma people, who are often discriminated against and stigmatised).

Advocacy activities are also organised regarding the rights of destitute mobile EU citizens, by discussing with authorities and building bridges between society and homeless mobile EU citizens. DIOGENES also works to collect data on the situation of destitute and homeless mobile EU citizens and to put the subject on the national and European political agenda.

The intercultural mediation program focuses on destitute mobile EU citizens (Roma and Polish people). 30% of the women DIOGENES worked with in 2020 are mobile EU citizens of Roma background.

The intercultural mediators come from the same communities and they speak the same languages as the beneficiaries, respectively Romani, Romanian and Polish.

## OUTCOMES

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- ▶ In just 6 months, 110 people were reached for the first time, and 276 interventions were made (guidance and other kinds of support).
- ▶ The number of people reached increases every week.
- ▶ Raising awareness on Roma culture and identity by holding lectures on this subject to public authorities.
- ▶ Success stories: people who were helped to access housing and jobs (even during the pandemic), and to receive healthcare support (including treatment for alcohol addiction).

## WHAT RECOMMENDS THIS PRACTICE TO BE TRANSFERRED?

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The cultural and language aspects of the project are very important; therefore, DIOGENES recommends transferring them to other cities. Involving people who come from the same communities and who have similar understandings and perceptions is one of the strengths of the project. It also helps to understand the situations that mobile EU citizens are confronted with from a distinct perspective – engaging someone who can build the bridge between cultures, people and institutions is particularly important. Intercultural mediators are also experts in the difficult situations

**“At DIOGENES, we always put the person in the centre of their own life, we always start from what their needs are.”**

which people in migration processes face. In the case of DIOGENES, the Roma intercultural mediator is an expert in migration law, while the Polish mediator maintains a privileged link with the Polish consulate in order to help beneficiaries best.

## PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

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In general, at DIOGENES, the beneficiaries are involved to some extent in shaping the services they use.

There is a partnership with the university KU Leuven, Hogeschool Odisee, Foyer vzw & Kenniscentrum Kinderrechten (KeKi) to produce policy-oriented research on homelessness, with a focus on the topic of begging.

## FUNDING

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The intercultural mediation project was funded for 6 months (January-June 2021) by the [COCOM](#), but the aim is to make this project a long-term one.

## LINKS FOR OTHER RESOURCES

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- ▶ Annual activity report for 2020: <https://www.diogenes.brussels/fr/pages/19-rapports-d-activites-2020> (p.44)
- ▶ Press article in Belgian newspaper “Le Soir”: <https://www.diogenes.brussels/file/268/download>
- ▶ To know more about intercultural mediation: <https://www.diogenes.brussels/fr/sections/36-mediation-interculturelle>





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