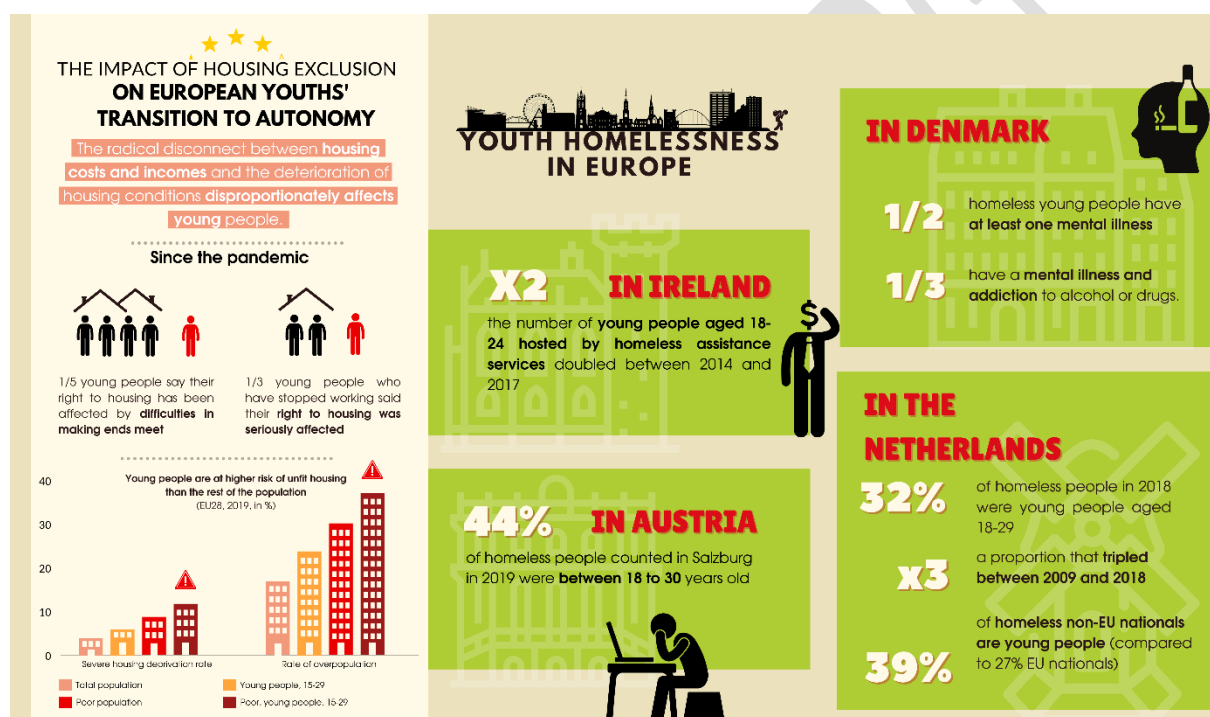


# The Sixth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2021 Executive summary

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL WEDNESDAY 5 MAY AT 12:00**

The Abbé Pierre Foundation and FEANTSA will publish their Sixth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe on 6 May 2021. This latest report focuses on young people, who are worse affected by housing exclusion than other groups, especially when they are poor, which was the case even before the pandemic took hold. The report also takes stock of the wave of poverty that has engulfed Europe more than a year after the pandemic began.

## Rising housing exclusion: youth at risk!



Source: Abbé Pierre Foundation and FEANTSA, Sixth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2021.

**Young people are on the front line of the pandemic** and are particularly affected by poverty and the structural dysfunction of housing markets.

According to Caritas, the demand for food aid in western Europe increased by approximately 25-30% between March and May 2020 alone.<sup>1</sup> **In France**, since the beginning of the pandemic, 20% of young people aged 18-24 have had to resort to food aid while 35% are worried that they will not be able to pay their housing costs in 2021.<sup>2</sup>

Regarding employment, one in three employees aged 18-24 in the **United Kingdom** lost their job or were dismissed due to the pandemic, compared to one in six adult employees aged over

<sup>1</sup> 'Escala la pobreza – Coronavirus en Europa: largas filas para pedir bolsas de comida, otra postal de la pandemia' ['Scale of Poverty – Coronavirus in Europe: long queues for food aid, another sign of the pandemic'], *Clarín Mundo*, 16 May 2020, available at: [https://www.clarin.com/mundo/coronavirus-europa-largas-filas-pedir-bolsas-comida-postal-pandemia\\_0\\_p\\_8b2B4Sr.html](https://www.clarin.com/mundo/coronavirus-europa-largas-filas-pedir-bolsas-comida-postal-pandemia_0_p_8b2B4Sr.html)

<sup>2</sup> Ipsos survey of 1,000 people exclusively carried out for the Abbé Pierre Foundation – 14 and 15 January 2021.

24.<sup>3</sup> In **Ireland**, 15–24-year-olds experienced the highest rate of job loss and furloughing. In April 2020, some 46% were furloughed and more than a fifth - i.e. 22% - lost their jobs.<sup>4</sup>

Even before the pandemic, **young people, especially those living below the poverty line, were already worse affected by housing exclusion than other groups.**

- Young people routinely struggle to **leave the family home** or end up returning to live there – if their parents' resources and family relations allow it – because they cannot afford to live on their own. In **Denmark**, the number of young people 'boomeranging' back to their parents' home increased by 12% between 2009 and 2018.
- Young people pay **especially high rents**. In some capital cities with particularly strained housing markets, the average rent for a two-room apartment<sup>5</sup> can represent more than 100% of the median income of a person aged 18 to 24. This is the case in Amsterdam (EUR 1,675 average rent compared to EUR 1,605 median income), Helsinki (EUR 1,398 average rent compared to EUR 1,363 median income) and Lisbon (EUR 1,105 average rent compared to EUR 910 median income), not forgetting cities like London, Paris and Barcelona.
- Young people live in **poor-quality housing**, i.e. substandard conditions, energy poverty and forced cohabitation. Some 23.5% of 15–29-year-olds were living in overcrowded conditions in 2019 compared to 15.6% of the general population.<sup>6</sup>

**These housing conditions have a negative impact on young people's pathway to independence.**

Governments must **make this pathway more secure** in terms of both housing and employment, with **a minimum income, access to a universal rent guarantee and better housing benefits** all acting as tools that offer a safety net when entering the world of work.

In **Denmark, for example**, welfare payments for young people have been cut since 2014<sup>7</sup> resulting in a 104% increase in the number of young people among the country's homeless population between 2009 and 2017, and demonstrating the key role that adequate financial support plays.

**Customised housing offers and innovative solutions** are required, i.e. developing student housing, small affordable housing units, assisted housing for young jobseekers and workers as well as increasing intergenerational or multicultural housing.

**Until now, European policies have focused on employment and training, without taking into account the importance of dignified and affordable housing as a prerequisite to independence.**

**If prevention policies specifically targeting the mass exclusion of young people are not rapidly introduced in the European Union, a new destitute cohort of this generation will soon swell the ranks of the homeless.** With accommodation systems already overcrowded

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<sup>3</sup> Resolution Foundation Study, 2020, in Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2021), UK Poverty 2020/21, available at:

<https://www.irf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2020-21>

<sup>4</sup> Central Statistics Office (2020), Employment and Life Effects of Covid-19, available at:

<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/elec19/employmentandlifeeffectsofcovid-19/>

<sup>5</sup> In terms of centrality and proximity to employment and training hubs and in terms of habitable space – apartments with one separate bedroom. EUROSTAT & HOUSING ANYWHERE data – Average and median income by age and sex – EU-SILC and PCM surveys (ilc\_di03)

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/data/database> and <https://housinganywhere.com/rent-index-by-city>

<sup>6</sup> Eurostat, 2021 – Rate of overcrowding by age, sex and income group – general population – EU-SILC survey [ilc\_lvho05a].

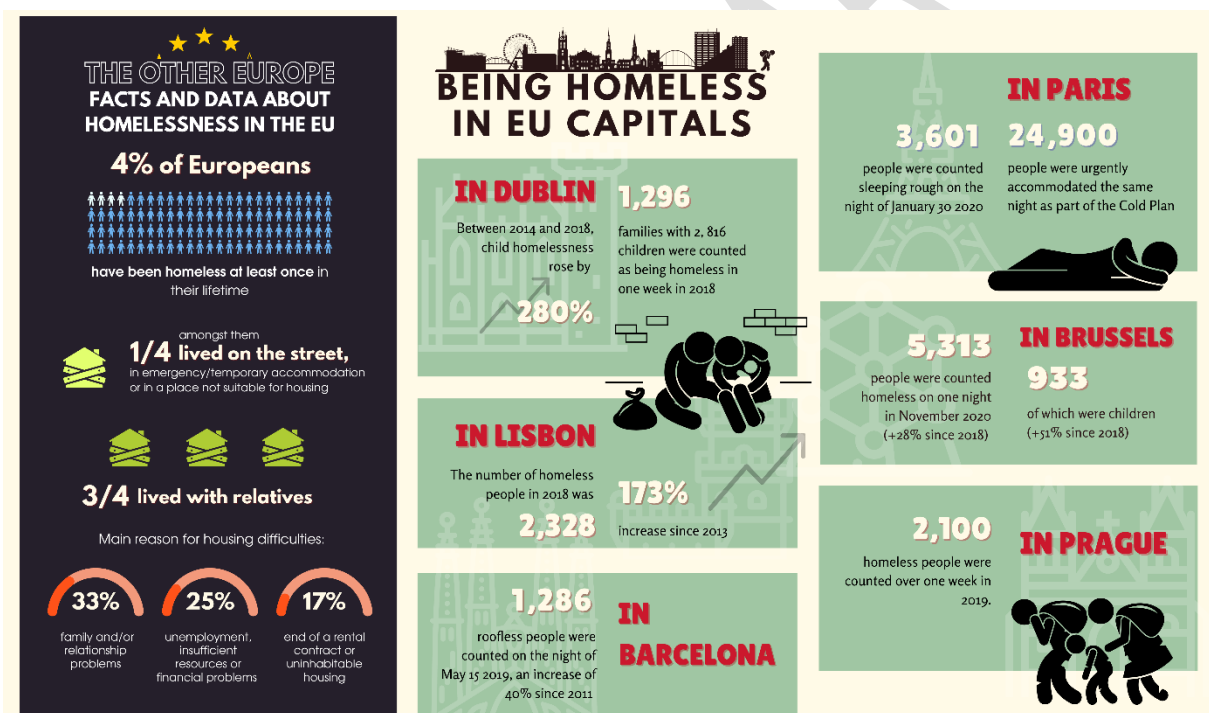
<sup>7</sup> Danmarks Statistik – FEANTSA/FAP Questionnaire Denmark 2021.

in all Member States, people will not be able to live with dignity and will be drawn into a spiral of extreme poverty, becoming the chronically homeless adults of tomorrow's 'other Europe'.

According to a study by Dennis Culhane, the number of homeless young people which exploded in the United States in the 1980s was the result of a major economic crisis, and these chronically homeless people are still living on the streets of US cities. More recently, the British government estimated that 30 years from now, 630,000 young people will not be able to pay rent on the private housing market when they retire, and is predicting a future crisis in homeless retirees if this issue is not addressed immediately.<sup>8</sup>

**This danger is a reality that the European Union and the Member States must face;** although it is urgent, there is still time to act.

## The pandemic and homelessness – governments must stem the tide



Source: Abbé Pierre Foundation and FEANTSA, Sixth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2021.

According to a Eurostat study, **four out of every 100 people report that they have been homeless at least once in their lives; ranging** from one in every 100 in Hungary to ten in every hundred in Denmark. Three in every 100 people have had to live with relatives temporarily, while one in every 100 people reports having lived rough, in emergency or temporary accommodation, or in a place not intended as a home.

A third of those surveyed, reported that family and/or relationship problems were the main cause of housing difficulties — particularly in Hungary and the United Kingdom, where this had affected more than 45% of people surveyed. **Some 25% cited unemployment, insufficient**

<sup>8</sup> Best, R. & Martin, A. (2019).

**resources or financial problems and 17% cited the end of a rental contract or uninhabitable housing.**

The number of homeless people living in unfit conditions that violate the most fundamental human rights, reached unprecedented levels in several European cities – yet more evidence of the overwhelmed accommodation systems across Europe.

**Emergency budgets and services are consistently being increased** without yielding satisfactory results for those affected. Due to the pandemic, more places in emergency and temporary accommodation had to be created, while budgets had already been steadily rising for several years. In Dublin, Ireland, the budget for emergency accommodation services almost tripled between 2014 and 2018, i.e. rising to EUR 118 million in 2018.

**The profiles of homeless people continue to diversify**, transforming support services in the process so they are adapted to the specific needs of children, young people, women, seniors, etc. In Poland, a biannual survey carried out on a given night in February 2019 showed that 33% of homeless people were aged over 60, compared to 21.7% in 2013.

**Red flags regarding unpaid rent are everywhere** and the risk of a wave of evictions in the coming months is high. Some 7.7% of poor households were in rent or mortgage arrears in 2019 across the EU28. Over the past ten years, a rise in the proportion of poor households in arrears was observed in 13 countries.<sup>9</sup> According to a Eurofound study<sup>10</sup> regarding the effects of Covid-19 on living and working conditions, arrears and financial instability have increased sharply due to the pandemic. In England, between March and August 2020, some 5% of tenants on the private market were in arrears.

**This is compounded by the rise in poverty** as a result of the pandemic. Unemployment is on the rise all over Europe with food aid organisations experiencing increasing demand. In Italy during the first phase of the pandemic from March to May 2020, 445,585 people requested material assistance from Caritas Italiana, an increase of 129% on the previous year.

Where they are practised, **Housing First** policies are making a difference and drastically reducing the levels of suffering. In **the Danish city of Odense**, the implementation of these policies in cooperation with social housing landlords has been a huge success and the number of homeless people has plummeted by 40% in the space of ten years. In **Finland**, successive Housing First-based programmes to prevent and reduce homelessness resulted in a steady 45% decrease in the number of homeless people between 2009 and 2019.<sup>11</sup>

**Without high-level preventive policies, a new cohort of people facing difficulties will increase pressure on the homeless accommodation and reception systems, which have been overwhelmed for several years already.** The consequences of homelessness are devastating when it comes to people's lives and health, and irreparable for vulnerable individuals, such as children, young people and the elderly.

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<sup>9</sup> With particularly high rates in France (15.9% of poor households in arrears), Greece (15.8%), Ireland (13.5%), the UK (11.2%) and Finland (10.5%).

<sup>10</sup> Eurofound (2020), Living, working and COVID-19, COVID-19 series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, available at: [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef20059en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20059en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> ARA (2021), Homelessness in Finland 2020, [https://www.ara.fi/en-US/Materials/Homelessness\\_reports/Report\\_2021\\_Homelessness\\_in\\_Finland\\_2020\(60242\)](https://www.ara.fi/en-US/Materials/Homelessness_reports/Report_2021_Homelessness_in_Finland_2020(60242))

## Recommendations

- **The EU must set clear targets for the reduction and elimination of homelessness.**  
In order to ensure that principle 19 on housing and assistance for the homeless of the European Pillar of Social Rights is implemented, the European Commission announced the launch of a European Platform on Combating Homelessness in the second quarter of 2021. The Abbé Pierre Foundation and FEANTSA welcome this initiative and hope that clear objectives for the Member States are announced at the Porto Social Summit on 7 and 8 May 2021.
- **Zero post-Covid homelessness:** it is vital to plan for the end of the exceptional measures taken during the pandemic in order to protect the worst off so as not to create a new cohort of homeless people in the coming years. **This unique opportunity should be seized and EU tools mobilised in order to bring about a paradigm shift and systemic transformation. This can be done by leveraging the ‘Housing First’ policy to pave the way for a more humane, less costly and more effective fight against homelessness.**
- **Coordinate shared tools across the EU** by organising a **European Night of Solidarity** in conjunction with municipalities and city councils to gain an immediate overview of the profiles of those living rough and their numbers.
- Develop shared statistical indicators to gain an insight into homelessness on a European scale.
- Work towards **adequate standards of reception for all in emergency accommodation**, i.e. by not using dormitories or communal showers, ending the use of night shelters, promoting respect for privacy and setting short time limits for the use of emergency accommodation.
- Commit to upholding the Housing Rights Watch and Abbé Pierre Foundation’s **Homeless Bill of Rights**.
- Integrate the monitoring of emergency policies and their costs into the ‘European semesters’.
- Encourage **rent controls in major cities and areas with strained housing markets** in order to ensure housing costs are proportionate to household incomes.
- Promote the **creation of universal rent guarantee tools** to facilitate access to the private market for vulnerable groups like young people without perpetuating discrimination in areas where demand is high.
- In light of the pandemic, guarantee a **minimum income for young people in need** so they can not only survive, but also transition to independence more easily, while increasing their chances of accessing training or employment.
- Ensure that **housing subsidies** are sufficient so that the worst off can access housing.

- **Guarantee a supply of social or affordable housing** that meets tenants' needs not only in terms of rent but also in terms of support services.
- **Prevent rental evictions** and secure tenants' rights.
- Integrate some considerations into the EU's '*Bauhaus*' and Renovation Wave initiatives on how those facing housing exclusion can access dignified, affordable and adequate housing.

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