



HOMELESSNESS IN DENMARK

KEY STATISTICS

National homelessness counts have been carried out biennially over a given week (week 6 of the year) since 2007. A national client-registration system for homeless hostels, run by local authorities under §110 in the Social Service Act, has existed since 1999. The homelessness count gives a stock figure during the count week, whereas the client registration system on homeless hostels gives both stock and flow figures published in annual statistics.

Results of the 2015 National Homelessness Count

Please note that figures are for one week.

- People sleeping rough (ETHOS 1.1): 609
- People staying in emergency night shelters (ETHOS 2.1): 345
- People staying in homeless shelters/hostels (ETHOS 3.1): 2,102
- People staying in hotels due to homelessness: 113
- People staying with family and friends: 1,876
- People staying in short-term transitional housing: (ETHOS 8.1): 178
- People homeless following institutional release from prisons (ETHOS 6.1): 90
- People homeless following institutional release from hospitals/treatment facilities (ETHOS 6.2): 138
- Other: 687

Total: 6,138

The latest statistics from the client-registration system show that a total of 6,369 individuals stayed in homeless hostels in 2014.

INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

There was a 16 percent total increase in recorded homelessness between 2009 and 2013 (a rise from 4,998 to 5,820 during the period of the first Homelessness strategy programme). However, the trend varied by municipality. In the 8 municipalities with a full Strategy programme (see below), homelessness increased by 4 percent on average. In the 9 municipalities with a floating support programme homelessness

increased by 11 percent on average, whereas in the remaining 81 municipalities, which had not participated in the programme, homelessness increased by a staggering 43 percent on average.

CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

There has been an 85% increase in youth homelessness in Denmark between 2009 and 2015 (from 633 persons to 1,172 persons). This reflects the fact that young people with complex needs are particularly vulnerable in tight housing markets, partly because they can access lower levels of social benefits. There is greater awareness of youth homelessness since the strategy was put into place.

The national homelessness count shows that homelessness in Denmark is concentrated amongst individuals with complex support needs. About four out of five homeless people in Denmark has either mental illness, substance abuse or both. About half have a mental illness, about two thirds have a substance abuse problem and one out in three are substance abusers with mental health problems. Only about one out of five have neither of these problems.

POLICIES & STRATEGIES

A Strategy to Reduce Homelessness in Denmark, 2009–2012

Scope

Seventeen municipalities (out of a total of 98) were involved in the Strategy. The main focus was on eight municipalities which contained about half of the total homeless population in Denmark. This included the 3 largest cities – Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense. The majority of the strategy budget was allocated to these municipalities. In a second phase, additional municipalities were invited to apply for funding. Nine additional municipalities, mainly medium-sized towns, were thus selected.

Objectives

1. No citizens should live a life on the street;

2. Young people should not stay in care homes, rather they must be offered alternative solutions;
3. Periods of accommodation in care homes or shelters should last no longer than three to four months for citizens who are prepared to move into their own homes with the necessary support;
4. Release from prison or discharge from courses of treatment or hospitals must presuppose that an accommodation solution is in place.

DKK 500 million (€67m) state funding allocated to the strategy over four years. This is additional to municipal funding for statutory homeless services such as drop-in centres and homeless accommodation.

Housing First was the overriding principle of the Strategy. The strategy thus supported 3 methods of delivering floating support: Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), Individual Case Management (ICM), or Critical Time Intervention (CTI). Other parts of the programme included strengthening street outreach work and implementing a methodology for needs assessment in homeless shelters. Resources were also given to other local services and initiatives. Furthermore, part of the funding was allocated to provide more housing for homeless people including the construction of new housing units. The municipalities applied for specific projects and after a process of negotiating between central and local government, it was decided which projects should be carried out. It was possible for the municipalities to focus on all, or just some, of the four overall goals depending on the local situation.

Evaluation and Follow-Up

The strategy was evaluated in September 2013. Homelessness over the strategy period had overall increased. The increase was considerably lower in the municipalities that were part of the Strategy. Nonetheless, the targets that were set for the four overall goals of the Strategy (reducing rough sleeping, reducing the need for young people to stay in a shelter, reducing the general length of shelter stays and reducing homelessness due to institutional release) were generally not met.

However, at the same time the Housing First based interventions and methods implemented through the Strategy proved to be very effective in terms of housing retention rates. Part of the follow-up of the strategy will be to extend Housing First provision to 23 further municipalities and to focus on training and capacity building.

As part of the new programme will also be a specific programme aimed at developing targeted interventions for young homeless people, with a focus on case management based support, and improved models for cooperation amongst different support agents on municipal level.

Governance

The Ministry of Social Affairs leads the strategy, which was adopted by the Danish Parliament. Municipalities sign

implementation agreements with the Ministry and determine quantifiable local targets in line with the strategy objectives. These are based on detailed mapping. Municipalities must develop monitoring processes to measure progress. The Ministry of Social Affairs coordinates overall monitoring at national level.

Budget Evolution

The national strategy was financed by DKK 500 million over four years (ending August 2013). Shelters are financed under the relevant legislation with about DKK 1.4 billion a year.

Since 2009, some budget cuts have been observed on the municipal level (in relation to standard programmes for the homeless, including drop-in centres and types of accommodation).

Targeted Prevention

While the number of evictions generally increased during the 2000s until a peak of 4,405 evictions in 2011, the number of evictions started falling from 2011 to 3,507 evictions in 2013. A possible explanation is that a ceiling for cash benefit levels was abolished in 2011 along with other adjustments to the benefits system. However, a new benefit reform in 2013 introduces lower cash benefits for part of cash benefit receivers in the 25 to 29 age group, although people assessed not to be 'ready for education' are now exempt from the lower benefit levels. Another possible explanation for the falling trend in evictions may be a positive impact from the floating support programme in the National Homelessness Strategy, reducing the risk of evictions for groups that would otherwise have a very high risk of being evicted after being rehoused.

The strategy included a specific strategic goal on reducing homelessness following release from institutions. A model called 'Good Release' has been developed, which defines steps required all the way from admission to release or discharge. A roadmap must be created for the way in which cooperation between prisons, treatment centres, hospitals and municipalities can be strengthened in order to ensure coherence in the action taken during the transition from prison/treatment to settled housing. Critical Time Intervention is used to offer support during the transition into housing. Homelessness statistics in Denmark suggest that the programme has had a positive impact. The national homelessness survey collects data on those in hospital and prison who are due to be discharged in one month and do not have accommodation to go to. Over the period of the strategy, a considerable reduction was achieved in the number of individuals awaiting release from prisons or discharge from hospitals within one month and without a housing solution. In total, the 6 municipalities that focused on this target (Albertslund, Esbjerg, København, Odense, Randers, Aarhus) reduced the number of people in this situation from 106 in 2009 to 65 in 2013 (missing the overall target of reaching 39 by 2012 but nonetheless making important progress).

Housing-Led Approaches

As explained above, the Danish homelessness strategy adopted a Housing-First approach. It focused on ensuring that homeless people are offered their own home as soon as possible and that they have the right sort of support to maintain it. Housing is most often provided through the municipal “right of assignment” of social housing. Part of the strategy funding was allocated to provide more housing for homeless people including the construction of new housing units.

The evaluation of the Strategy demonstrated that affordable housing is a key priority. The increase in homelessness over the strategy period is concentrated in Denmark’s largest urban areas, and in particular in the suburban area of Copenhagen. Municipalities report an increasingly tight housing market in both Copenhagen and Aarhus, with a lack of affordable housing for socially vulnerable people.

A qualitative finding from the strategy evaluation was that independent, scattered housing works better for most individuals, and that with intensive floating support, those individuals with complex support needs are capable of living on their own in independent, scattered housing. Additionally, the findings indicate that congregate housing may have unintended negative consequences such as conflicts amongst the residents, and that residents often get ensnared in an environment dominated by substance abuse.

There are also some specific types of “adapted” housing such as *skaeve huse*, which offer an alternative form of permanent, independent housing for people who do not wish to live in the community in mainstream social housing.

There is a strong focus on developing floating support systems to deliver the homeless strategy. Municipalities are encouraged to focus on Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), Critical Time Intervention (CTI) and Intensive case management (ICM).

REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Positive

Ongoing shift towards offering permanent housing solutions as quickly as possible.

Negative

General impression that the use of urban space is increasingly controlled, especially through the replacement of comfortable benches with unattractive sitting options.

Rise in youth homelessness.