



Child Homelessness in Europe — an Overview of Emerging Trends

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Acronyms

AMA	Association des Maisons d’Accueil (Umbrella of homeless service providers in french-speaking Belgium)
BAWO	Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe (National umbrella of homeless service providers in Austria)
CNCA	Coordinamento Nazionale Comunità di Accoglienza
EOH	European Observatory on Homelessness
ESN	European Social Network
ETHOS	European Typology on Homelessness and housing exclusion
FEANTSA	Fédération Européenne d’Associations Nationales Travaillant avec les Sans-Abri
FNARS	Fédération nationale des associations d’accueil et de réinsertion sociale
INSEE	Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques
LOKK	Landsorganisation ad Kvinderkrisecentre (National organisation of shelters for battered women and their children in Denmark)
NAPIncl	National Action Plan on Social Inclusion
NBHW	National Board for Health and Welfare (Sweden)
NRS	National Report on Strategies for social protection and social inclusion
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
OMC	Office of the Minister for Children (Ireland)
S.A.D.	Sdružení azylových domů (National umbrella of homeless service providers in the Czech Republic)
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

Executive summary

In response to the calls of the Heads of state and government at the European Council of Lisbon in 2000, an EU strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion was launched. This strategy is not legally binding in any way for the EU27 countries, but provides a clear framework for countries to exchange information on successful policies and practices tackling different forms of poverty such as homelessness, child poverty, poverty of ethnic minorities, poverty of people with disabilities, and others.

In 2007, EU countries decided to use the full potential of this EU strategy by focusing these exchanges on specific societal problems and bringing together representatives of all 27 EU countries around these. The focus in 2007 is on child poverty. FEANTSA therefore wishes to bring a homelessness perspective to the child poverty debates. The general public tends to associate homelessness with men, rather than with women and children. But recent research and data shows that many women and children in Europe are increasingly finding themselves in situations of homelessness (Meert et al, 2005). These people are not necessarily chronically homeless but rather can end up on the streets for short periods at a time. The aim of this report is to improve our general understanding of child homelessness in Europe and to what extent this is a genuine challenge for EU governments.

The report starts with a stocktaking exercise of definitions and perceptions of the problem (Chapter 2) and general trends (Chapter 3) in different European countries to better understand **WHO** this problem concerns. Chapter 2 clarifies the notions of “homelessness” and “children”. In order to reconcile the different national approaches to child homelessness, the proposed ETHOS continuum of living situations is applied in this report to shed light on homelessness as experienced by children (individuals under 18 years of age). Chapter 3 highlights two emerging trends concerning children in homeless families and unaccompanied adolescents experiencing homelessness. Country examples are used to illustrate these trends confirming the diversity of profiles of children experiencing homelessness.

This is then followed by an analysis of **WHY** this phenomenon exists, namely the reasons for such forms of homelessness (Chapter 4) and the needs of children in these living situations (Chapter 5). Chapter 4 finds some commonality in the many different reasons for child homelessness across Europe, attempting to highlight some of the *general* pathways into homelessness experienced by children, although acknowledging that different factors (structural, institutional, relational, personal) are interlinked. Chapter 5 looks at the combination of different needs of children experiencing homelessness (housing, social, health, financial, education) which, if unmet, can make it extremely difficult to break the cycle of homelessness.

The report proceeds to examine **HOW** this phenomenon is tackled by identifying policies and services of general prevention through strong welfare policies, and more targeted policies and services aiming to support children experiencing homelessness or children and families at risk. A distinction can be made between primary (or systemic) prevention of child homelessness through general policies aiming to improve institutions/systems/communities which could potentially trigger child homelessness (examined in Chapter 6), and secondary (more targeted) prevention policies specifically targeting homeless children and children at risk with specific needs (considered in Chapter 7).

Chapter 8 then draws conclusions from this analysis and formulates some recommendations for the future. Child homelessness is only just slowly emerging as a problem in Europe, but will most likely increase if measures are not rapidly taken to counter this phenomenon. The longer EU governments wait, the harder it will be to prevent child homelessness becoming a European reality in Europe, in contradiction with declarations on European values and the importance of the European social model. Some general recommendations are formulated for both national and EU level action.

1 Introduction

Background to this report

This is the second European report of FEANTSA on young people experiencing homelessness. The European Observatory on Homelessness previously examined youth homelessness in 1998 (focusing on young people and young adults). This study examined the profile of homeless youth in EU15 and identified general trends, causes, policies and services relating to youth homelessness. The general conclusions pointed to the lack of any evidence that youth homelessness was on the increase in the second half of the 1990s.

This 2007 report will focus rather on children – individuals under the age of eighteen – in EU27 to bring a homelessness perspective to the current policy and research debates on child poverty in Europe. The aim of this report is not to examine the dynamics of child homelessness in great detail, nor to propose solutions to child homelessness. This analysis attempts rather to shed light on the nature of child homelessness in Europe and to understand whether this is genuinely an issue in the countries of the European Union.

No data sets are available for this exercise given that there is a general lack of comparable data on homelessness at EU level. Although much progress is being made towards the measurement of homelessness at EU level – including moves towards agreement on common definitions and methods of measurement¹ – obtaining such data is still challenging. This report therefore uses national data, where it exists.

Indeed, people experiencing homelessness often live outside the normal structures of society, and are therefore a moving target which makes it difficult to assess the phenomenon. Subsections of the homeless population are therefore harder to identify, and this is perhaps more the case for children who are either dependent on homeless adults or who are on their own and do not have the legal age to perform basic tasks such as signing a work contract or a lease.

1. *The 2007 European Commission study on measuring homelessness shows that measurement and monitoring of homelessness is developing rapidly.*

This analysis is therefore rather of a descriptive nature and not an attempt to provide a quantitative analysis of child homelessness in Europe. This qualitative analysis therefore depends largely on secondary sources – such as feedback from homeless service providers members of FEANTSA, reports of the European Observatory on Homelessness, and already available literature – to give a European snapshot of emerging trends in child homelessness during the first half of this decade which have policy significance.²

The Policy Context

In response to the calls of the Heads of state and government at the European Council of Lisbon in 2000, an EU strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion was launched. This strategy is not binding in any way for the EU27 countries, but provides a clear framework for countries to exchange information on successful policies and practices tackling different forms of poverty such as homelessness, child poverty, poverty of ethnic minorities, poverty of people with disabilities, and others.³

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2. *For more detailed country information, please consult the FEANTSA web pages on child homelessness.*

3. *The latest European Commission analysis of national anti-poverty strategies (Joint Report on social protection and social inclusion 2007) highlights 4 key challenges : child poverty, homelessness, poverty of ethnic minorities and poverty of people with disabilities.*

2 Definitions and perceptions of child homelessness

This chapter provides a framework for understanding homelessness and understanding the target group of this paper (i.e. children). The first section of this chapter clarifies the definition of homelessness used for this analysis, namely explaining the choice of ETHOS (European Typology on Homelessness and housing exclusion) as a basis for comparing homelessness in different EU countries. The second section then establishes the notion of “child” or “children” to be used in this report.

Homelessness

Homelessness and housing exclusion have often been referred to as possibly the most extreme form of poverty. Homelessness can be defined narrowly to include only people without a roof over their heads or it can be defined more broadly to include people in living situations such as staying with family and friends or in makeshift dwellings (UNECE, 2006; EOH Statistics Review, 2003; Brousse, 2004; Commission, 2007).

No definition of homelessness has yet been agreed at European level, however a few international or European definitions have emerged over the past few years (Commission, 2007). ETHOS – European Typology on Homelessness and housing exclusion – is one of these proposed definitions. ETHOS, a typology developed by the data collection working group of FEANTSA and the researchers of the European Observatory on Homelessness, takes into account different existing national definitions of homelessness and proposes a European compromise as a tool to compare homelessness using a common European conceptual definition (based on 4 categories: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing, inadequate housing), with operational sub-definitions which allow for national and regional differences.

ETHOS is a definition based on the notion of “home” as comprising three domains – physical, social and legal – the absence of which can be taken to delineate homelessness. A home can be understood in the following terms: having an adequate dwelling (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations in this dwelling (social domain) and having legal title to occupation of this dwelling (legal domain). These three domains were used as a basis to create a broad typology of living situations which constitute forms of homelessness and housing exclusion.

The dividing line between homelessness and housing exclusion naturally varies from country to country. Although there are different approaches to defining homelessness, there is general consensus that consideration needs to be given to a continuum of living situations – ranging from living on the streets with no roof, to living in shelters to living with friends – when seeking to understand the nature and scope of homelessness. This approach confirms that homelessness is a process (rather than a static phenomenon) that affects many vulnerable households at different points in their lives (EOH Statistics Review, 2005).

The living situations outlined in ETHOS are not the only aspect of the problem of homelessness – people experiencing homelessness may also require different forms of support (health, employment, etc). However, ETHOS is a good starting point for international comparison of homelessness and will be a useful tool for understanding different forms of child homelessness in Europe in Chapter 3. Pathways, consequences and support needs of children experiencing homelessness are examined in Chapters 4 and 5.

ETHOS categories and definition (2007)							
	Operational Category		Living Situation		Generic Definition		
Conceptual Category	ROOFLESS	1	People Living Rough	1.1	Public space or external space	Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters	
		2	People in emergency accommodation	2.1	Night shelter	People with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter	
	HOUSELESS	3	People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless hostel	Where the period of stay is intended to be short term	
				3.2	Temporary Accommodation		
				3.3	Transitional supported accommodation		
		4	People in Women's Shelter	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation	Women accommodated due to experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be short term	
		5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1	Temporary accommodation / reception centres	Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation due to their immigrant status	
	5.2			Migrant workers accommodation			
	6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1	Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release		
			6.2	Medical institutions ⁵			
	Conceptual Category	INSECURE	8	People living in insecure accommodation	6.3	Children's institutions / homes	No housing identified (e.g by 18th birthday)
					7.1	Residential care for older homeless people	Long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)
		7.2			Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people		
9		People living under threat of eviction	8.1	Temporarily with family/friends	Living in conventional housing but not the usual or place of residence due to lack of housing		
			8.2	No legal (sub)tenancy		Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy	
			8.3	Illegal occupation of land		Illegal occupation of a dwelling	
10		People living under threat of violence	9.1	Legal orders enforced (rented)	Where orders for eviction are operative		
			9.2	Re-possession orders (owned)	Where mortgagor has legal order to re-possess		
INADEQUATE		11	People living in temporary / non-conventional structures	10.1	Police recorded incidents	Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence	
				11.1	Mobile homes	Not intended as place of usual residence	
				11.2	Non-conventional building	Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty	
		11.3	Temporary structure	Semi-permanent structure hut or cabin			
		12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation	Defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation or building regulations	
13	People living in extreme overcrowding	13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding	Defined as exceeding national density standard for floor-space or useable rooms			

Note: Short stay is defined as normally less than one year; Long stay is defined as more than one year.

This definition is compatible with Census definitions as recommended by the UNECE/EUROSTAT report (2006)

5. Includes drug rehabilitation institutions, psychiatric hospitals etc.

3 Two general trends in child homelessness

There is some data on children experiencing homelessness in various countries, however this is fragmented and sometimes difficult to interpret. Official data is collected in different ways and responsibilities are sometimes divided between various ministries, service providers or national statistics institutes. Moreover, as the previous chapter demonstrates, international comparison of data in this respect is challenging due to different definitions and perceptions of the target group of children experiencing homelessness. The following sections aim to interpret and map the different approaches and phenomena onto the ETHOS living situations to identify different country trends in child homelessness.

The two main emerging trends concern **children in homeless families** and **unaccompanied adolescents experiencing homelessness**. Country examples are used to illustrate these trends. Figures are not always comparable across countries, but they can at least document changes in numbers and profiles over time in a particular country.

Children in homeless families

Children in homeless families are not often found living on the streets, but rather in forms of temporary shelter, and therefore tend to be in situations of homelessness, insecure housing or inadequate housing. This includes:

- > children in families living in temporary shelters,
- > children with their mothers living in refuges for survivors of domestic violence,
- > children in families threatened with eviction,
- > children in families living in very poor housing conditions.

- An alarming number of children in families are found to be **spending long periods in temporary shelters and accommodation** in different EU countries, therefore mainly experiencing homelessness. It is important to note that some of these homeless families can find themselves in a cycle of homelessness which also leads to short periods of rooflessness.

In **Sweden**, a governmental report published in 2004, *Economically Deprived Children* demonstrated that poverty and homelessness exist among children, especially those who live with single mothers and immigrant parents (Sahlin, 2006).

In **Belgium**, data on Flemish homeless services from 2003 reveal that 85% of homeless women with children stayed in homelessness services together with their children, and 75% of them were even accompanied by three or more children. However, this phenomenon is not limited to women. Of all homeless males who have children, 53% are also accompanied by their children (EOH Profiles Review, 2003). Moreover, an in-depth study on homelessness in Wallonia published end 2005 revealed that across the region of Wallonia, the profile of those housed in emergency accommodation was as follows: 8.4% of childless couples, 23% of couples with families, 63% of single parent families (usually young women alone accompanied by young children).

In **France**, the umbrella organisation FNARS carried out a survey in 2005 amongst its members (homeless service providers) to determine the number and profile of children using homeless services. The results published in September 2006 showed that 14.000 children (“mineurs” i.e. under 18) were housed in services targeting homeless families in 2005, in other words children represented 40% of the total number of users of these services. Moreover, 50% of the children were under 6 years of age. Children were mainly concentrated in the “centres maternels” (53,3% of service users were children generally accompanied by their mother) and reception centres for asylum-seekers (46,8% are children generally accompanied by both parents). Fewer were using services like the “maisons-relais” (28% of service users were children accompanied by their mother).

In **Spain**, the National Institute of Statistics published the results of a national homeless survey carried out in 2005 which revealed that almost half of the homeless population have children (46%), but only 10% live with the children. This is a small percentage of children living in homeless households, but nonetheless this also implies that the children not accompanying their homeless parent(s) are potentially having



to adapt to new or temporary family situations as a consequence of their parents' homelessness, making them more vulnerable to difficult living situations (NIS, 2005).

In **Hungary**, according to the Statistical Report on Family-, Child- and Youth Protection (2005) of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, 6041 clients (children with parents) were living in family temporary homes.

In the **United Kingdom**, data shows that over recent years more people than ever have experienced homelessness in Wales reaching record levels in 2005 of over 20,000 people, 7,000 of whom were dependent children. In recent years, more families than ever have had to stay in temporary accommodation (Shelter Wales, 2007).

In **Poland**, according to the 2005 Annual Report of MONAR (organisation of homeless service providers), the MARKOT Movement for Exiting Homelessness had 4,576 places in 56 institutions across the country. Among these were seventeen homes for single mothers and their children, two night-shelters and thirty seven residential homes for homeless people. As of 31 October 2005, there were 1,422 children accommodated in these various shelters.

In **Slovenia**, "maternity homes" are similar to shelters but are intended for women with children who are socially and economically vulnerable, and unable to solve their housing situation. The stay is limited to one year and can be extended to two years. There are seven maternity homes in Slovenia with a capacity of 129 beds (Karitas slovenska, 2007).

■ **Children surviving domestic violence are increasingly found in shelters** accompanying their mother and are often referred to in feedback from FEANTSA members as children experiencing forms of homelessness. The 2005 European Observatory on Homelessness report on homeless services in Europe refers to the fact that relationship problems or breakdown are often associated with housing exclusion or can create a vulnerability to homelessness: "In particular the increase in domestic violence is associated with episodes of homelessness or temporary housing for many women and their children. "(EOH Services Review, 2005)

In the **United Kingdom**, a large number of people threatened by homelessness in Northern Ireland are people (mainly children and women) forced out of their homes because of domestic violence. In Northern Ireland, the percentage is on the rise and more survivors, after years of physical and mental abuse, are fleeing to the Housing Executive and private charities. The number of survivors of domestic violence claiming homelessness rose from 684 in April 2003 to 798 in June 2005. Women's Aid has around 2,000 women and children staying in its shelters every year after experiencing domestic abuse (FEANTSA Flash, 2007).

In **Poland**, according to the "Blue line" database administered by the National Helpline for Survivors of Domestic Violence, there are 251 institutions which provide overnight shelter for women and children who are survivors of domestic violence. According to the Police "Blue Cards" statistics, the number of domestic violence survivors in 2004 was 150,266 (88,380 women, 35,137 children under 13 years of age) (Wygnanska, 2006).

In **Finland**, women's shelters are not usually counted as services for homeless people, because the women generally stay there only for a short period. It is, however, recognised that the social welfare authorities sometimes have difficulties finding a suitable dwelling for the family and for these reasons the mother and the child have to stay in the shelter for a longer period, in which case, they should be included in the figures of homeless families of the official housing market survey (Y-saatio, 2007).

In **Belgium**, only three organisations in French-speaking Belgium provide specific services for survivors of domestic violence who flee their home: the "Centre de prévention, des violences conjugales et familiales" in Brussels (with 24 beds); the "Solidarité-Femmes et Refuge pour femmes battues" in La Louvière (with 24 beds); and the "Collectif contre les Violences Familiales et l'Exclusion" in Liège (with 48 beds). Despite an increase in applications for shelter at these institutions over the last 30 years, no additional structures have been set up to meet these needs. The Refuge in Liège provides shelter for women and their children of all ages (0-18) which represent half of the service users, in other words

approximately 100 individuals in one year. The Refuge in Liège had to turn down 279 applications in 2006, 64,5% of which were due to lack of beds (AMA, 2007).

In **the Netherlands**, the umbrella of homeless service providers recently reacted to the Government's declared intentions on youth policies drawing attention to the approximately 8,000 children (mainly under 12 years of age) who have fled with their mother from domestic violence and are forced to live in women shelters for a considerable period of time. Many of these children have special needs that are currently neglected by youth services (Federatie Opvang, 2007).

In **Austria**, children of parents who become homeless themselves have trouble finding adequate shelter, and this is especially for children in families which have split due to domestic violence and who end up in refuges for women where many difficulties arise when seeking decent accommodation. In 2004, 2,767 persons (1,430 women and 1,337 children) stayed for some time in a shelter for abused women, for an average of 56 days (EOH Statistics Review, 2005).

In **Denmark**, a report of the National organisation of shelters for battered women and their children (LOKK) confirmed that the majority of children staying in refuges from domestic violence are of a very young age (which is explained in previous studies by the fact that domestic violence is often most pronounced early in the marriage/ partnership while the children are still young). According to the report in 2005, 60% of the children in the shelters were in the age group of 0-6 years, 29% were between 7 and 12 years old, and 11% were in the age group 13-17 years. Most stays of children in these refuges are relatively short. Eighteen per cent of the children stayed in the shelter between 0 and 2 days, and half (51%) stayed there for two weeks or less. This is a drop in the number of short stays compared with 2004 when 54% had this type of stay. Twenty per cent stayed for 1-3 months while about 10% stayed for more than 3 months in the refuges (LOKK, 2005).

■ There are also a number of **families threatened with eviction** and therefore at risk of ending up on the street, or literally end up in situations of rooflessness or houselessness which, without early intervention and adequate support, can potentially lead to a cycle of homelessness. This can involve eviction from an adequate dwelling (and therefore mainly imply legally insecure living situations) or can involve eviction from inadequate forms of habitation such as makeshift dwellings or squats (and therefore implies both inadequate and insecure living situations).

In **Sweden**, according to a state investigation on evictions and homelessness among families with dependent children, about 1,000 children are affected by evictions each year. Several of the local homeless projects funded by the National Board for Health and Welfare (NBHW) aim to counteract evictions of families with dependent children (EOH Policy Review, 2005)

In **Hungary**, a survey of 22 cities carried out by the Civil Rights Foundation in 2004 revealed that there were 5412 households threatened with eviction (calculating 4 persons/ household, this concerns 21.648 persons). There is no data on the number of children affected, but it is estimated that at least half of the people concerned (more than 10.000 persons) are children, although the proportion of children probably exceeds 50% since the majority of the families have three or more children (HAPN, 2007).

In **Finland**, most children vulnerable to homelessness are those living in families with multiple problems. The poverty of families with children has increased during the past years and economic problems can lead to evictions. Local authorities have arranged housing and also rehabilitation for families in these kind of crisis situations (Y-saatio, 2007).

In **France**, police evacuated the biggest squat in France in 2006, evicting hundreds of west African families from an old and disused hall of residence of a university in the south Paris suburb Cachan. Up to 1,000 squatters, including 200 children, many from the Ivory Coast, Mali and Senegal, lived in 300 small student rooms with improvised wiring, poor sanitation and damp. Half were asylum seekers or illegal immigrants. The rest had legal status to remain in France. Although most of the squatters had jobs, they could not find housing due to racism and discrimination (FEANTSA Flash, 2006).

In **Portugal**, one of the issues that triggered public debate in 2006 was the situation of immigrant families who had been living in shanty towns for several years. Several shanties in different shanty towns in the Lisbon area were pulled down and the families evicted from them, which provoked several public demonstrations for the support of those families and their Constitutional right to be re-housed. It seems that some municipalities prioritised the re-housing of families with children over single male individuals (Baptista, 2006).

■ Child homelessness is also perceived in many countries to affect **children in families living in poor housing conditions**, often living situations which are described in the insecure and inadequate housing categories of the ETHOS typology. In some central and eastern European countries, this problem mainly concerns the Roma population.

In **Lithuania**, statistics from 2003 show that 8,818 families were on waiting lists for social housing of whom 3,219 were young families and 481 were children without parental care, which gives an indication of the number of people having to find temporary solutions (living with family or friends, or in overcrowded conditions, in other forms of insecure housing) while waiting for access to the social housing (EOH Statistics Review, 2005).

In **France**, the organisation *Secours Catholique* documented about 650 000 situations of poverty in 2004, which represents about 1,5 million persons, including 690 000 children (Secours Catholique, 2005). This report analyses the housing situation of these households, highlighting the 3% increase in the number of inadequate forms of housing since 2004. There are also regional figures on homeless children in families in the county of Seine-Saint-Denis: the organisation ADSEA 93 believe 5000 children are “en errance” i.e. are “drifting” from one situation to another with their families (mainly travellers or Roma) living in poor housing conditions moving from living in squats to furnished hotel rooms to inadequate housing.

In **Hungary**, a survey collected data on the number of “Roma slums” from the National Public Health and Medical Officer’s Service. According to these data, there are 291 such slums and 1033 slum-like habitations in which approximately 140.000 people live, 49.152 of whom are children under 14 (Bényi Mária, 2003; Család, Gyermek, Ifjúság 2006)

In **the United Kingdom**, research published by a homelessness charity called Shelter UK in 2006 shows that 1.6 million youngsters are either homeless or living in bad housing, with all the negative impact of such living situations on a child’s development, education, and general well-being (Shelter UK, 2006). In Wales, 35.000 children are living in poor housing and over 43.000 children are living in overcrowded conditions judged by the Bedroom Standard (Shelter Wales, 2007).

In **Spain**, a report on social exclusion published by Caritas Zaragoza (2004/2005) refers to single parents with children and Roma as groups predominantly affected by substandard housing in the area, and to the negative impact of living in sub-standard housing emphasising housing exclusion as one of the main factors triggering social marginalization (Caritas Zaragoza, 2004).

Unaccompanied homeless adolescents

Unaccompanied adolescents experiencing homelessness (mainly rooflessness and houselessness) appears to be a trend in many EU countries, and namely concerns individuals under 18 described as follows:

- > Homeless adolescents
- > Runaway or throwaway youths
- > Unaccompanied minors
- > Children leaving institutions

However, it is clear that all four categories are interlinked and unaccompanied homeless adolescents during their cycle of homelessness may experience one or more of these living situations.

■ **Homeless adolescents**, chronically homeless since a very young age, tend to be referred to as street youths often moving from one living situation to another. Such individuals are sometimes hidden, staying with a succession of friends or acquaintances. Or they may alternate frequently between the street, living with friends, squatting, and staying in emergency or temporary accommodation. However, this trend of child homelessness is only just emerging in few EU countries since children in most countries are considered a priority group and should receive immediate support when found on the street.

In **Ireland**, youth homelessness (concerning single young homeless persons, and not children in homeless households) is perceived primarily as an urban phenomenon. The total number of young people who appeared to the Health Service Executive (responsible for individuals under the age of 18) to be homeless in 2004 was 495, and Dublin city has consistently recorded the highest number of homeless youth countrywide (OMC, 2006). Forty young people experiencing homelessness from the Dublin region between the age of 14 and 22 were interviewed recently on their living situation. On becoming homeless, some of them made use of emergency accommodation, while those who did not have access to such accommodation stayed instead with extended family or friends for days or weeks, while a smaller number slept rough in their neighbourhoods (Mayock, 2007).

In **the United Kingdom**, Centrepoint and the University of York worked to together to estimate the number of homeless youths in the UK – it is estimated that there are between 36.000 and 52.000 homeless youths (aged between 16 and 24). In Wales, there are some isolated young adolescents who are estranged from their families and living a transient lifestyle in hostels and with friends (Shelter Wales). In Scotland, the highest number of young homeless applications are made by 21-24 year olds. However, with 16-17 year olds making up a smaller section of the youth population in Scotland, this age group makes more homeless applications proportionally with 3.3% of the 16-17 age group presenting as homeless in 2005 (SCSH, 2007).

In **Romania**, former street children using the services of the Samur social are a problematic group to rehabilitate. They have grown up in the streets, have sometimes become parents or even grand-parents. They have only ever had a social life embedded in violence and find it hard to adapt to any other environment. They are not accompanied by parents as such, but still tend to live in groups (Samur social, 2006).

In **the Netherlands**, thousands of youths find themselves in situations of rooflessness every year. These individuals are among the estimated 3,500 to 5,000 young people experiencing homelessness in the Netherlands. Although this figure covers adolescents and young adults, figures show that the individuals affected by homelessness are getting younger and younger. The national umbrella of homelessness service providers, Federatie Opvang, called on the government in February 2007 to pay particular attention to young people who are homeless. There needs to be more support for young people who, for various reasons, can no longer live at home.

In **Germany**, there is a distinction between runaway youths, children living in shelters, and “Treber”. According to Jordan & Trauernicht (1981), the term “Treber” is used to refer to children and youth who escape from serious conflicts and break out of the channels of socialization that have determined their lives so far. They usually end up without a permanent place of residence or any steady income and often lead an illegal existence in a subcultural living environment (Trabert, 2007).



■ **Runaway or throwaway youth** often end up in child support/protection services and are at high risk of ending up on the streets. These individuals tend to experience temporary or episodic homelessness, returning home to their family intermittently, as opposed to the category of adolescents referred to above who have remained homeless for much longer periods and have often entered a chronic cycle of homelessness.

In **Luxembourg**, interviews and meetings with service providers in 2005 point to the fact that there is an increasing share of youngsters among the homeless population (younger than 19, and between 20 and 24) in particular people who were no longer tolerated in the parental home or who left their parents voluntarily (EOH Profiles Review, 2003). There is a clear distinction in Luxembourg between chronically homeless children and runaway children, the latter being far more common (Children Ombudsman Luxembourg, 2007).

In the **United Kingdom**, an estimated 100.000 young children (many aged under 11) run away from home each year. The NSPCC recently criticised the shortage of emergency accommodation available for these children, and called for more refuges like the London Refuge where young runaways can safely stay up to fourteen nights (NSPCC, 2007). Moreover, the first and second *Still Running* surveys carried out nationally in 1999 and 2005 in the UK found almost identical rates of ‘runaways’ before the age of 16 years in the school population: 10% and 10.1% respectively. There were more female runaways than male (12% vs. 8%) and the most common age for running for the first time was 14 years of age (30%).

In **Malta**, family breakdown often results in children being sent to children’s homes. There is evidence of a large number of young women (age 17-24) who become pregnant outside marriage and are kicked out of the family home as a consequence. If unable to find a place to live, they end up in homeless shelters (Vakili-Zad, 2006).

In **France**, according to the juvenile liaison police in Paris, 40.000 runaway youths (under 18) are documented every year in the country. Although, these children often go back to their families (the majority of them after 3 or 4 days). As for those who do not go home, they tend to drift from squat to squat through acquaintances.

In **Poland**, the Polish organisation “Foundation for Poland” has drawn attention to the problem of street children in Warsaw. Careful interpretation of this statement is needed since this phenomenon described in Warsaw does not refer to chronically homeless adolescents (previous category) but mainly to children who spend most of their time in the streets “as a place of socialization” while still being fully connected to their families (EAPN, 2006). Such children have different levels of vulnerability, and in some cases these are children who run away from home frequently and are therefore potentially at risk of experiencing homelessness for longer periods.

In **Germany**, recent studies distinguish between street children of inner cities (category referred to above as unaccompanied homeless adolescents), and the so-called suburban street children who can be found in socially troubled areas as well as in traditional working-class suburbs. This latter group still live at home part of the time, but show a considerable distance to their respective family, school, place of work or of job training in contrast to the classical kind of street children (Trabert, 2007).

■ The precarious living situations of **unaccompanied minors** (aylum-seekers) in Europe often amount to forms of homelessness and housing exclusion. These children have often migrated from non-EU countries and tend to receive accommodation in hostels, bed and breakfast accommodation, foster families or care institutions. Some may end up staying in temporary accommodation much longer than planned. Some may slip through the system and rapidly find themselves without a roof over their heads.

In **Austria**, the latest available statistics on unaccompanied minors show that there were 1.212 such individuals in 2004, 881 in 2005 and 439 until November 2006 registered with support organisations in Austria (Austria, 2006). Youth welfare institutions are to take responsibility to ensure guardianship and/or custody for these children, but this is not always easy to achieve. The admission procedure for a guardian (only for children under 14 years of age – “unmündige Minderjährige”) should take only a few weeks, but there are also exceptional cases where the unaccompanied minors have to live in temporary accommodation for more than one year without obtaining a guardian. Throughout this whole procedure the children are not roofless but their status is rather insecure (BAWO, 2007).

In **Spain**, over the last years, there has been an increase in the number of unaccompanied minors entering the country. In 2004, 9917 unaccompanied minors were provided with support. These individuals tend to arrive from Algeria, Morocco, Romania and sub-saharan Africa. Most of these individuals stay in temporary accommodation while their application for asylum is being processed and therefore experience short periods of homelessness. Some of these children even leave the support system out of fear of being repatriated to their country of origin and are therefore forced to live on the streets (Provivienda, 2007).

In **Italy**, a report was recently published on the impact of immigration on children in Italy which includes references to young immigrants who lose their parents, and unaccompanied minors who migrated to Italy on their own and who have to deal with the legal issues of being a migrant, but also psychological issues such as their perception of themselves as adults, while society perceives them as children (CNCA, 2006).

In **Belgium**, debates were triggered in December 2005 concerning the living situation of 66 unaccompanied minors who were detained in the closed refugee centre 127 of Steenokkerzeel, especially as other such centres were also starting to detain children in the same way (CODE, 2005). Discussions especially focused on the need for different treatment between adults and children. Although children in such situations have a roof over their head, they are clearly experiencing forms of homelessness since these situations place unaccompanied minors in a vulnerable situation preventing access to schooling, placing them in close proximity of adult refugees, and exposing them to potential health threats (physical and mental).

In **France**, the Marseilles organisation “Jeunes Errants” refers to an estimated 3000 to 4000 unaccompanied minors sent to France every year (from Romania, Morocco, China, Afghanistan, Rwanda) to earn money for their family. These children arrive in cities like Marseille, Paris, Lyon or Calais after travelling very long distances, and are exhausted and disorientated, without any social networks, not necessarily speaking French, and consequently sleeping in public spaces or squats.

■ **Children in or leaving institutions** (medical care institutions, foster care, etc) are perceived to be at risk of homelessness if they have no relatives, no safe home to go to or no secure housing of their own. This situation can concern young offenders, children in medical institutions, or orphans in child care institutions. The recent report of the Council of Europe on rights of children at risk and in care (2006) confirms the high homelessness rates of children leaving care in Europe (CoE, 2006:64).

In **Slovenia**, there are very few children in situations of rooflessness. Rather, some children live in Children/Youth Homes or they are included in fostering programmes provided by Centres for Social Work. The emerging trend which could lead to increasing child homelessness in Slovenia concerns children with special needs who may end up alone while there are not enough specialised institutions to take care of them (Karitas slovenska, 2007).



In **Ireland**, the first findings of a recent study on youth homelessness shows that many adolescents who are homeless have had a history of state care, characterised by successive care placement breakdowns (Mayock, 2007). As concerns young offenders, data from 2004 shows that since there are no unplanned releases of young offenders, they are less at risk of becoming homeless upon their release – certain requirements have to be fulfilled before the youth is released from the centre which goes some way in ensuring that homelessness is prevented amongst young offenders (FEANTSA, 2004).

In **Belgium**, there are few unaccompanied children staying in emergency shelters since homeless children in Flanders mainly stay in specific youth institutions (both managed by the State and by NGOs). Homeless children and youth are also found in psychiatric institutions and (much less) in prisons or in specific penal institutions for young people, although this is a new emerging trend (SAW, 2007).

In **Greece**, young offenders constitute a specific target group. While in the institution, they face problems such as minimal understanding, self-harm tendencies, high levels of violence. Evidence shows that the majority of these people are homeless when leaving the institution, while as many as two out of three eventually end up returning to prison (EOH Services Review, 2005).

In **Hungary**, according to the 2005 Statistical Report on Family-, Child- and Youth Protection of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, there are 8064 clients using services of „temporary care for children”. Some of them are children (228 children live with foster parents, 1795 children living in temporary homes for children, as well as 6041 clients (children with parents) living in family temporary homes. In addition, there are 7939 children living in children homes belonging to the child protection specialist care, and 481 children living in institutions providing nursing and care. Moreover, 9036 children are supported by the foster care network.

In **the Czech Republic**, as in many EU-10 countries, a specific phenomenon is the high number of children in childcare institutions. A large proportion of homeless people (30-40%) have had experience in children’s institutions. The *Czech NAP*Inclusion (2004-2006) identifies a number of socially excluded groups including the 20,000 children under 18 years of age who are permanently living in children’s homes (Radezky, 2005). Whereas not all these children are at risk of ending on the streets, shutting down these care homes could lead to an increase of homelessness among these children.

In **Malta**, available data shows that the majority of people experiencing homelessness are children and women. The children are especially individuals suffering from abuse and neglect who are to be found in Children Homes (childcare institutions). In October to November 2004, there were 75 children under 16 years of age with no family or relatives in Malta, and who were at risk of becoming homeless if evicted or if the home was closed down. Similarly, there were 225 children under 16 years of age with family or relatives in Malta, but whose potential care-giver was unable or unwilling to take care of them. In cases where such institutions are closed down or where children have to leave state care (by the age of 16), with no relatives or home to go to, they will end up on the streets (Vakili-Zad, 2006).

4 Reasons for child homelessness

The previous chapter highlights the diversity of profiles of children experiencing homelessness, and demonstrates the tendency for homeless children to shift from one living situation of homelessness to another. Establishing causal relationships between factors of child homelessness and situations of homelessness lies outside the scope of this paper, and would require more careful examination of existing research on homelessness pathways. However, it is still possible at this stage to identify *general* factors which lead children into a cycle of homelessness.

Factors of vulnerability were identified in the 2005 Review of homelessness statistics published by the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH Statistics Review, 2005). The Review put forward a generic approach to understanding the vulnerability factors that affect the risk of homelessness, which can also be used as a framework for understanding pathways to child homelessness.

There are many different reasons for child homelessness in different EU countries, but some commonality has emerged from the different existing situations. The next section highlights some of the *general* pathways into homelessness experienced by children, although clearly these different factors are interlinked and only more in-depth research can accurately distinguish the clusters of factors and precipitant factors which lead to such crisis situations and the first onset of homelessness.

■ **Structural factors:** Some children may become homeless – alone or accompanied – when their families suffer hardship and financial crises resulting from lack of affordable and good quality housing, limited employment opportunities, or inadequate welfare benefits.

In Ireland, a study of youth homelessness showed that most youths interviewed came from poor neighbourhoods and endured hardship during childhood linked to poverty and household instability (Mayock, 2007).

In France, housing costs were reported to represent an increasing proportion of the household budget of households who apply for social support with the Secours Catholique. Many families are forced into insecure and unaffordable living situations due to lack of adequate housing solutions, which in turn can lead to homelessness if not dealt with appropriately (Secours Catholique, 2005).

In Sweden, there is a link between homelessness and the housing market in the sense that municipalities without homelessness rarely have a shortage of accommodation, according to a report from the Swedish National Board of Housing, Building and Planning (NBHW, 2005). This implies that families with children are likely to be more threatened with homelessness in areas which do not meet their housing needs.

In the United Kingdom, young people can be discriminated against under the benefit system in Wales, since they receive lower levels of social security benefits, and a restriction on the amount of housing benefit they receive. Under the single room rent restriction, a single person under 25 years old is restricted to the level of rent paid for a room in a shared house. This restricts their choice of accommodation, and restricts them to some of the worst forms of accommodation such as houses in multiple occupation (Shelter Wales, 2007).



In **Malta**, the report of Vakili-Zad (2006) refers to signs that homelessness is growing in the country, including a reference to family breakdown mainly due to *financial* issues which often results in children being sent to children's homes run by religious establishments.

In **Germany**, according to experts there are specific reasons why children run away from their families in what was formerly East Germany. Many parents have not come to grips with the consequences of German reunification and, consequently, with their increased responsibility for the upbringing and future prospects of their children. Moreover, the areas mostly affected by child homelessness are suburbs with a high unemployment rate, and in former West Germany especially suburbs with a high rate of immigrants (Trabert, 2007).

In the **Czech Republic**, there are many factors which lead to child homelessness. One of these is linked to the family environment: many homeless children in fact come from homeless or very poor households (S.A.D, 2007). For example, the children of mothers already in institutions are increasingly looking for shelter.

■ **Institutional factors** can also influence vulnerability of children to homelessness such as a lack of services, services which do not meet certain needs, the nature of allocation mechanisms, and lack of coordination between services, or a breakdown in the continuity of care

In **Belgium**, the Liège domestic violence refuge reports an increase in the duration of stay of their clients: in 2006 the average stay lasted 91 days, as opposed to 55 days during the previous years. This clearly indicates a need for changes in institutional structures, more social housing, and the setting up of new services to meet increasing demand in the area (AMA, 2007).

In **Slovenia**, the number of children with special needs who may end up alone is increasing, yet there are not enough specialised institutions to take care of individuals with such needs. In addition, there is a lack of homeless shelters for young people with special health needs (drugs or alcohol, mental diseases, etc) (Karitas slovenska, 2007).

In **Austria**, young unaccompanied minors are initially supported by a legal advisor from their first reception centre. Usually, the admission procedure takes a few weeks. However, there are also cases where unaccompanied minors and separated children remain in the admission procedure for more than one year without getting a guardian – a situation which can only lead to greater insecurity for the child (BAWO, 2007).

In **Malta**, many agencies providing services to children and youth are having difficulties – some are closing their doors and others are curtailing their services. This is seen as an indication that homelessness is growing in the country (Vakili-Zad, 2006).

In **Ireland**, a recent study which investigated the experience of homelessness of 40 young individuals shows that a care history is a key risk factor of homelessness among youngsters. 40% of the homeless youngsters interviewed reported a history of state care (Mayock, 2007).

■ **Relational factors** such as relationship problems or family breakdown are often associated with housing exclusion or can create a vulnerability to homelessness, and is often the precipitant factor leading to the first onset of homelessness for a child (mothers with children leaving a violent home, runaway youths, children placed in homes due to family breakdown, etc).

In **the United Kingdom**, many children suffer from homelessness as a result of family disruption (such as parents being homeless, in temporary accommodation or moving frequently). In Northern Ireland, sharing breakdown and family dispute were reported to have been the most common reason cited for homelessness during the first quarter of 2006 (NIHB, 2006). The recent NSPCC report on supporting runaways in the United Kingdom indicates that the primary reason for young people running away from home or being forced to leave home is problems with their families (NSPCC, 2006).

In the **Czech Republic**, the *Czech National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (2004)* identified various socially excluded groups, including children from broken and non-functioning homes (EOH Policy Review, 2005)

In **Malta**, family breakdown, marital problems and broken family ties are a major cause of child homelessness, namely children and youth survivors of domestic abuse. Moreover, the number of boys between 13 and 17 who are homeless as a consequence of family problems has increased in recent years (Vakili-Zad, 2006).

In **the Netherlands**, domestic abuse is considered an important factor of homelessness, with approximately 8,000 children (mainly under 12 years of age) who fled with their mother from domestic violence (in 2006) and were forced to live in women shelters for a considerable period of time (Federatie Opvang, 2007).

■ **Personal factors** can include personal problems linked to health, substance abuse, immigration, but can also be linked to lack of knowledge of certain support services (which is likely to be the case for homeless children with no guardians to guide or protect them).

In **Spain**, some unaccompanied minors who originally had a street lifestyle back in their country of origin sometimes reproduce this lifestyle in the country of arrival. Some abandon state support through fear of being sent back home and therefore stay on the streets where they may feel safer, but are effectively living in situations of rooflessness (Provivienda, 2007).

In **Malta**, the number of children born to young women (17-24) outside wedlock has been on the increase for the past years (from 1.1% to 24% in the past 25 years). Although the average is not high compared to other EU countries, this is not yet fully tolerated in the predominantly Catholic culture of Malta. Hence a large percentage of young pregnant women are told to leave the family home without necessarily having another place to go to (Vakili-Zad, 2006).

In **Ireland**, a considerable number of the young people interviewed for the Mayock 2007 study were already drug-experienced by the time they accessed shelters or ended up on the streets. However, most expanded their drug repertoire once on the streets and several initiated heroin use (Mayock, 2007).

In **Luxembourg**, runaway youths are often early school leavers who fail at school or are expelled from school due to absenteeism, drug addiction, lack of respect for teachers (Children Ombudsman Luxembourg, 2007).

5 Needs of children experiencing homelessness

As well as a roof, children experiencing homelessness often require additional support to help them to improve their situation, in order to fully recover from the trauma of homelessness and to prevent any further problems arising as a consequence of their living situation. This section looks at different needs: housing needs, health needs, financial needs, education needs, and social needs. However, the categorisation used for the purpose of this analysis is somewhat artificial – most children who are homeless often have a combination of these different needs which, if unmet, can make it extremely difficult to break the cycle of homelessness.

■ **Housing needs** are the most obvious needs of children who are homeless (i.e. who lack a home) who urgently need a stable home to allow them to benefit from any additional social or health support which can prevent their situation from deteriorating. Temporary accommodation can be useful to meet immediate housing needs as long as it does not become a long-term solution. The ultimate aim is permanent accommodation of an adequate standard, with space for social relations, and which is legally secure.

In **the United Kingdom**, the London organisation Centrepont refers to the importance of providing young homeless people with a “home” (not just with temporary shelter) where they can build friendships, feel a sense of belonging and lay the foundations for their future (Centrepont, 2007).

In **Finland**, prevention of eviction of families with children is carried out through local authority programmes offering housing as a first step, and followed by rehabilitation where necessary for families in these kind of crisis situations (Ysaatio, 2007).

In **Belgium**, the Maison Maternelle in Kain refers to temporary shelter or accommodation as a potential source of anxiety for children, or sometimes rather as a source safety and relief if this is a new living situation away from a previously tense family situation (as long as this remains a short-term solution). As regards children and women surviving domestic violence in the Liège region, their housing needs are difficult to meet due to the difficult housing situation: decrease of housing supply, housing unfit for habitation, increasing rents, social housing available only in isolated peripheral areas (AMA, 2007).

In **the Netherlands**, most of the young people interviewed for a study of homelessness in the region of Zeeland referred to the need, first and foremost, for a safe home to stay in, followed by a source of income, and finally education and training (Jansen et al, 2007).

■ **Health needs** are common among children experiencing homelessness and vary according to the living situation. Living situations which can have damaging effects on a child’s mental and physical health and development include homelessness as a result of domestic violence, as a result of living in dwellings unfit for habitation, and especially as a result of rooflessness situations concerning unaccompanied adolescents who are exposed to a street environment which can place them in conditions of high health risk linked to violence (sexual and physical), malnutrition, drug abuse and depression.

In **France**, the study carried out by FNARS in 2005 on the profile of children using its shelters and accommodation showed that 1 out of 6 children have health problems which require professional support, with behavioural problems and chronic diseases being the main problems. In addition, according to a report of the National Housing Council (2002) housing affected by lead poisoning (*Saturnism*) is deemed to be injurious to life, and affected around 85,000 children aged 1 to 6 years old in 2002 (FNARS, 2007).

In **Belgium**, children escaping a violent home with their mothers and consequently having to adapt to a changing living environment (new family environment, new housing or shelter, sometimes new school) are often reported to suffer from sleeping, behavioural, and eating problems which require additional support (AMA, 2007).

In **Ireland**, a recent study shows that drug abuse often starts after homelessness, rather than being a trigger of homelessness. Moreover, health problems are less frequent for the younger age group of children experiencing homelessness, but the situation changed dramatically for the over 17s who due to more rough sleeping were more prone to infection, accidents, serious cuts, and broken bones (Mayock, 2007).

In **the United Kingdom**, the negative impact of poor housing conditions on children has been demonstrated in various pieces of research. In Wales, research has highlighted that spending time in bed and breakfast accommodation can have major consequences for children's development and education including: behavioural problems (mood swings, over-activity, depression, disturbed sleep and bed-wetting), impaired development of motor and speech skills in young children, and living in cramped conditions can mean that young children lack the space they need to play and can also make it difficult for school age children to work at home (Shelter Wales, 2007).

In **Germany**, in addition to other health risks of homeless children, psychosomatic conditions and illnesses play an important role. In relation to this, the results of various studies attest a correlation between poverty and health among children and youth. In this context, the following illnesses can be diagnosed in large numbers: psychosomatic illnesses and disorders (headaches and backaches, problems getting to sleep or in sleeping through toothaches), as well as dental problems, infectious diseases, diseases of the respiratory tracts (Trabert, 2007).

In **the Czech Republic**, two thirds of children living in the streets of Prague abuse alcohol, drugs or are gamblers. According to the "Projekt Sance", up to 70% of the street children have escaped from an institution. Although these children are exposed to the risk of serious diseases such as venereal diseases, HIV/AIDS, jaundice, they have no access to healthcare, or health insurance (Eurochild, 2006)

■ **Education needs** are generally important among children experiencing homelessness given that their unstable living situation often leads to them changing schools or even stopping school altogether for short periods, which inevitably then has an impact on the child's development.

In **Belgium**, according to the organisation "Trois Pommiers" in Brussels, children in families staying in temporary shelter are often obliged to change schools which can lead to disruptions (AMA, 2007).

In **the United Kingdom**, the organisation Centrepointhighlights the importance of learning opportunities for children experiencing homelessness in the UK as a means of giving these individuals the skills they need to build a better life for themselves (Centrepointh, 2007). In Wales, education opportunities for children are reduced – children who live in homeless families on average miss out on 25% of their schooling. Living in poor overcrowded conditions reduces opportunities to develop and learn (Shelter Wales, 2007).

In **Denmark**, for many of the children staying in the refuges of LOKK, the stay in a shelter means they stop going to their day care or school. In 2005, 60% of the 0-6 year-olds no longer had day care, and 54% of the 7-12 year-olds dropped out of their schools. For the teenagers, the figure was 41%. Compared with 2004, there is a small decline in the number of children who are forced to quit school.



■ **Financial or material needs:** Children in homeless households living in temporary accommodation services should have access to basic financial or material support. Unaccompanied children or adolescents who are in situations of rooflessness or in insecure accommodation staying with friends tend to be worse off financially because, due to their young age, they have few legal means by which they can earn money to meet their basic needs, and may therefore resolve to begging or crime to have any income at all.

In **Ireland**, a study published in 2006 showed that a number of homeless children who had run away from difficult home circumstances were among children begging in Ireland, a phenomenon which was most prevalent in Dublin and other large urban areas (ISPCC, 2005-2006). The Mayock 2007 study revealed that young people with longer histories of homelessness reported greater involvement in theft, drug selling and begging as part of a wider repertoire of survival strategies.

In **Belgium**, attention is drawn to the fact that children who arrive in shelters with their parents (especially mothers surviving domestic violence) often arrive without any material possessions as a result of having to leave their home after a crisis or emergency. Hence the material needs of children in homeless families are often the most urgent such as the need for clothes, toiletries, and food (AMA, 2007).

In **Denmark**, street work with homeless youths aged under 20 in the city of Copenhagen tends to focus first on meeting the basic material needs of the individuals, such as providing them with opportunities to eat hot meals, watch television, make telephone calls, wash their clothes, get their hair cut and so on. This is considered a first step before encouraging them to change their situation (Udenfor, 2007).

■ **Social needs:** Children experiencing homelessness often need security, protection and stability as a pre-condition to breaking the cycle of homelessness – this is especially the case for unaccompanied homeless adolescents without a caregiver or any social networks.

In **the Netherlands**, research into child homelessness in Zeeland showed that homeless adolescents believe that support should not lead to isolation from their social networks. These young people have spent on average a year experiencing homelessness and therefore often value their network of friends over their own families (Jansen et al, 2007).

In **Ireland**, there is evidence that children in homeless families which constantly move around from one living situation to the next (temporary accommodation, friends, hostels), find it harder to make lasting friendships and maintain social networks. Other studies concerning unaccompanied homeless adolescents show that insecurity and lack of protection from a guardian can lead to living situations (mainly rooflessness) where they face serious risks through creating new relationships and conforming to expectations of peers who are more established in the hostel “scene”, through access to hard drugs, and through criminal offending (Mayock, 2007).

In **Denmark**, the National organisation of shelters for battered women and children (LOKK) stated that, for nearly half (49%) of the non-Danish children using LOKK services, “danger” is stated as a reason for not attending school, while the corresponding percentage for Danish children is 45%. Danger means, for instance, threats from a violent person or the risk of kidnapping. Hence the needs of such individuals for security and protection, as well as social support (LOKK, 2005).

In **Belgium**, it is acknowledged that children entering homeless services with a parent need specific attention as the experience of homelessness can be traumatic for them. In Flanders, there are some methods for supporting children in such situations through the use of specialised staff. In accordance with existing International treaties, children have special rights which also need to be respected by homeless services (SAW, 2007).

6 General policies to prevent child homelessness

There is a general prevention ethos in the development of policies to tackle homelessness suffered by children in Europe. The difficulty for a child to leave the streets once entrenched in a cycle of homelessness suggests that the greatest impact on reducing child homelessness is to be found in measures preventing children from ever ending up on the streets in the first place.

A distinction can be made between primary (or systemic) prevention of child homelessness through general policies aiming to improve institutions/systems/communities which could potentially trigger child homelessness, and secondary (more targeted) prevention policies specifically targeting homeless children and children at risk with specific needs (which will be considered in the next chapter on specialised programmes).

This section will highlight measures of **primary prevention** which aim to prevent specific harm to children before it ever occurs, and which are generally implemented through services to support and improve the quality of life of families through solid welfare policies covering child protection, social security (or social protection), housing, education, and health.

■ **Social security (protection) policies** deliver universal welfare services available to all citizens (as opposed to being means-tested), which are considered a fundamental building block of social policy in a number of countries (note: often countries with few children experiencing homelessness). Child welfare services are an important part of such policies.

In **Denmark**, there are very few homeless children living in the streets and the reason for this is the way Danish legislation is developed (Consolidation Act on Social Services – January 2007 – see more on the website of the social affairs Ministry www.social.dk). Denmark's strategy for social protection and social inclusion is to build on principles of universality, accessibility, gender equality, adequacy and sustainability. Systems are primarily tax-financed and depend only to a limited extent on labour market attachment. For example, this means that all citizens have access to health services, that all citizens obtain the right to old-age pension and that all citizens are, to the extent that they fulfill legislative conditions, entitled to a comprehensive selection of social services.

In **Finland**, child homelessness is considered a minor issue. The principle of universal welfare services means that all children until the age of 18 years are entitled to child protection. Preventive and non-residential support are the primary measures, but when they are not adequate, it is possible to take the child into care. In such cases, the municipal welfare board has a duty to support the child after the end of foster care until the person reaches 21 years of age. In practice, this includes providing housing support.

In **Austria**, there is an overall responsibility of the youth-welfare offices of the Länder (regions) to take care of children and young people up to the age of 18. A variety of financial and personal assistances is supplied to families to allow them to keep their children in care and from becoming homeless. The federal state can help with family allowances and tax reductions, the Länder have different subsidies for living costs and the cost of everyday life. In addition, the youth-welfare offices are responsible for supplying children and young people with sufficient dwelling space and care to ensure they do not become homeless.



In **Estonia**, the Child Protection Act (Lastekaitse Seadus) states that every person under the age of 18 is a child and must be treated as a child in accordance with the law. In accordance with this law, all children regardless of their background and the status of their parents can receive support, benefits and institutional help if necessary. So the focus is not on homeless children, but access to welfare for all children. Moreover, the state services for children without parental care are mainly based on family structures. Homeless children or children at risk are not targeted by specialised services, but rather are supported by the general child care system.

■ **Housing policies** in some countries are an important framework for preventing homelessness. Policies to develop housing services (such as shelters, temporary accommodation, residential care, social housing) are sometimes combined with social or care services for children at risk who are in need of both residential and social support (on their own or with their families). On a supply level, urban development policies are often important for improving the quality of life of families through measures to increase housing availability (building homes, including social homes) and measures to improve the general housing environment through a focus on housing quality and regeneration.

In **the United Kingdom**, general housing policy aims to improve quality, availability and affordability of housing. The focus in recent years has been on investment in social housing as a means of creating a safety net, particularly for homeless families with children. According to Yvette Cooper (Housing Minister), the intention over the coming years is not only to build more social homes (the organisation Shelter UK has called for 20.000 extra social homes to be built every year to give children the chance of a better future), but also to adapt the housing planning system to take into account the needs of children.

In **Slovenia**, general housing policy aims to provide adequate housing and housing services through its national housing scheme, through social housing, through temporary shelters (municipalities) and other such measures (Karitas slovenska, 2007).

In **Finland**, reducing homelessness is one of the official aims of housing policy. When necessary, housing services are combined with care services for children in need of such support (Y-saatio, 2007).

In **Latvia**, housing legislation passed since independence aims to protect vulnerable households and prevent homelessness. The 1997 Law on Social Apartments and Social Dwelling Houses made the municipalities responsible for providing housing for all vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups, including families with children, the disabled, and pensioners without employed family members (EOH Policy Review, 2005).

In **Denmark**, public urban development is perceived as an important way of creating well-functioning housing and housing areas. Therefore, initiatives aimed at rundown and outdated housing were launched over the past years (building renewal), as well as measures to meet the physical, social and cultural challenges posed by housing areas (area renewal) (NRS Denmark, 2006).

■ **Education policies** contributing to general prevention of homelessness include measures as varied as universal education policies (including financial measures to help children with special needs), day-care facilities which have an educational function, training programmes to increase young people’s chances of employment, and general awareness raising about leaving home.

In **Belgium**, working from the principle that education should be re-designed to serve the labour market, the emphasis in recent years has been on the training and re-education of unemployed people with a special emphasis on the most vulnerable, particularly younger people (EOH State Review, 2003).

In **the United Kingdom**, in relation to young people aged under 16 years, the *Sustainable Communities* agenda specifically locates responsibilities with the Department for Education and Skills, and joint working agreements and protocols arranged between housing and social services. These arrangements are to be led by the Director of Children’s Services in each local authority through Children’s Trusts, that must be established in each local authority by 2008. One of the four principle strategies outlined in the Sustainable Communities agenda is the need to increase the take up of Education Maintenance Allowances by young homeless people, or those at risk of homeless, to help them stay in education (Smith and Ravenhill, 2007).

In **Sweden**, the 2005 government report to the UN Committee on children’s rights highlighted that the State was strongly committed to children’s rights and welfare. It amply funded systems of public education and medical care. The government provided compulsory, free, and universal education for children aged 9 to 16, but public schooling was provided until age 18. Nearly 100 percent of school-aged children attended school, and the highest level achieved by most children was completion of high school. The government also provided free medical care for all children up to the age of 16, and boys and girls had equal access (Sweden, 2005).

In **Denmark**, ensuring high-quality day-care facilities is a key issue for the Government, as is guaranteeing day-care availability from a child’s six-month birthday. High-quality day-care facilities for even very young children are important for several reasons. These facilities give parents a sense of day-to-day security and are also a must for creating gender equality in the labour market. Moreover, these services fulfill an educational function for the children themselves, offering even toddlers relevant social competences that are particularly important to children from socially disadvantaged families and housing estates. Thus, day-care facilities also help break the vicious circle of deprivation (NRS Denmark, 2007).

In **Ireland**, there are initiatives to raise awareness about living independently and about homelessness which are directed both at youth who are found to be particularly at risk of leaving home as well as young people in general. The organisation Focus Ireland believes that education plays a key role in the prevention of homelessness. Their education programme is used, amongst other things, to inform young people in schools of the issues around leaving home (Focus Ireland, 2007).



In **Finland**, effecting structural changes in schools is considered important. Paradoxically, school structures in their present form act as a brake on young people’s integration into society. Structural changes bringing an increased sense of responsibility within the school itself can prevent young people from losing their confidence and abandoning their studies altogether. Helsinki offers an example of this with “The voice of young people”. On the basis that exclusion prevents young people from deciding on their own future, this project sought to encourage young people to become involved in the process of decision-making within their own school. In 2005, the project was widened to include 140 schools involving more than 40 000 young people aged between 7 and 18 (URBACT, 2006)

■ **Health policies** include programmes for children in schools (including vaccination programmes), or drug treatment programmes which are mainstream health services open to all, including young people in situations of homelessness.

In **Estonia**, the National Audit Office (SAO) examined the organisation of health of preschool children, focusing in its audit on the topic of health promotion and prevention of diseases. Proposals were made in 2006 to revise measures for healthcare in preschool child care institutions and improve monitoring of children’s health in cooperation with the Minister of Education and Research.

In **France**, the department of Seine-Saint-Denis takes different general measures to prevent family homelessness including sending midwives to households where pregnancies are not being monitored (midwives carry out up to 5000 house visits every year) which often helps to identify mothers at risk of homelessness due to over-indebtedness or living in the country illegally (Jeunes Errants, 2007).

In **Denmark**, the expansion of a treatment guarantee for substance users to cover inmates and young people under 18 years of age, as well as increased efforts to prevent hepatitis, are expected to have a positive impact in the prevention of homelessness (Benjaminsen, 2006).

In **Slovenia**, there are many policy measures to provide basic health protection, compulsory insurance paid by municipalities as well as preventive health programmes such as vaccination in schools.

7 Targeted prevention through services for “at risk” groups

Avenues of systemic prevention are represented in the previous section, including child welfare laws which should ensure protection of vulnerable children. However, such laws and policies are not always correctly and fully implemented. There are a number of children who cannot benefit from mainstream welfare services or who are not in the target group of institutions. As a consequence, more specialised policies and services are developing across Europe aiming for early detection of vulnerable children and families, or prevention of reoccurring harm and further deterioration of their situation – hence the importance of perceiving homelessness as a process (EOH Statistics Review, 2005; Chamberlain and Johnson, 2003).

Some countries have a mix of both systemic prevention through effective welfare policies and more targeted prevention with specialised services to fill gaps in service provision (where the mainstream system fails), to ensure there is a continuum of care to meet different and complex needs, or to reach out to people who do not use mainstream services. In other countries, these specialised policies and services are part of early intervention measures identifying groups considered at risk of homelessness such as young offenders and families threatened with eviction. Finally, some countries focus more on developing specialist policies and services as a way of targeting homeless children who are at risk of entering a chronic cycle of homelessness, thereby aiming to break the cycle before it is too late.

Various organisations are involved in developing service continuums for children experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. These may include the local authority (and sometimes the regional authorities), the mental health care sector, addiction services, community health services, law enforcement authorities, housing associations, homeless services, youth welfare services, child protection agencies, probation and aftercare services, and generic social work agencies. This section examines some of these more closely in relation to children: homeless services, youth services for vulnerable children (children in state care, children in poor families), services or refuges for children surviving domestic violence, and finally services linked to justice and home affairs.

■ **Homeless policies** often target different sub-groups, including children and families. Across Europe the provision of homeless services is delivered by three spheres – the state, the church and the voluntary (NGO) sector. Although the balance of provision varies, there is evidence in almost all countries of a shift towards an increasing role for more recently established NGO agencies (EOH Services Review, 2004). Homeless services mainly include residential services, such as temporary accommodation, shelters, supported housing, as well as non-residential services such as mediation services, housing services, health-related services, and employment-related services.

In **Hungary**, the Social Law of 1993 defines the services to be provided to homeless persons, but defines eligibility very narrowly as those living on the street, in a hostel, or in a dwelling not fit for habitation. Those in temporary accommodation, or overcrowded, or at risk of eviction, are not eligible. According to this law homeless persons are entitled to basic shelter and daily provisions (daily shelter, communal kitchen, information office, public bath). Children are given extra protection with specialist temporary accommodation for homeless families, although demand exceeds supply (EOH Policy Review, 2005).

■ **Youth/family services** have been set up in most EU countries to specifically target children at risk through child well-being or child poverty policies which lead then to specialised services focusing on homeless children, children imminently at risk of homelessness (namely leaving institutional care), or families in crisis situations.

In **the Netherlands**, one focus of the current Dutch government will be on youth policies. Federatie Opvang, the national umbrella of homeless service providers, called on the government earlier this year to pay particular attention to young people who are homeless as a distinct group to allow for adequate support. There are already a number of examples of services which are specifically geared towards supporting young homeless people. The Bertolt Brecht house in Amsterdam is a centre for homeless young people. It is a 24-hour shelter which was opened in 1995. People using this shelter are young people between 16 and 25 years of age, with serious behavioural problems (among which are addiction), and psychiatric problems. These young people live on the street or drift from one address to another. They do not go to school, have no work and therefore no income (Federatie Opvang, 2007).

In **Malta**, the Housing Authority also has a specific programme targeting youth leaving institutionalised care. The HEADSTART programme provides a holistic support package to young persons leaving institutional care. A number of institutes in Malta offer residential care to young persons below the age of 18, who are either orphans or have had to leave a troubled or abusive family environment. These young persons have to leave these institutes at the age of 18 as places are very limited. Despite the institutes' sterling work, these young persons enter the world on a very vulnerable footing as they are often without a home or a job to go to. There is widespread consensus among service providers in the various social services that these young persons are a high-risk category, and face compounded disadvantages when trying to join mainstream adulthood. Youths leaving care tend to have little or no educational qualifications; have great difficulty in finding a stable job with prospects of advancement; and even greater difficulty in securing affordable accommodation (Malta Housing Authority, 2007).

In **Poland**, there are clear measures targeting people leaving various residential institutions like foster families, orphanages, youth correctional facilities, penal institutions, homes for mentally disabled children and other such institutions can apply for welfare benefit. Financial support is provided for certain purposes: self-independence, studying, gaining proper housing conditions. In-kind support is usually furniture. In 2005 benefits for the improvement of housing conditions were allocated to 809 people (Wyganska, 2006a).

In **Ireland**, a strategic commitment has been given by the Irish Government to improving the lives of children and young people who are homeless, and this framework is set out in the Youth Homelessness Strategy (Department of Health and Children, 2001). Commitments on tackling child homelessness are monitored through the National Children's Strategy (coordinated by the Office of the Minister for Children) which looks at all aspects of child well-being.

In **Finland**, as well as a focus on youth, there is a focus on *family* support – the Laurinkoti project in the city of Vantaa is a good example of supported rental housing for families with small children. This is a residential unit run by the Vantaa parish of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, but it works in close cooperation with the child welfare services of the city. There was a need to develop a more comprehensive approach to help the young families to solve their problems and find ways of living together after crisis situations. The child welfare services refer the following groups to this project: evicted families, teenage mothers, immigrant families, people coming from crisis care centres or shelters for survivors of domestic violence (CATCH, 2006).



In the **United Kingdom**, there are many youth agencies that specialise in working with homeless people who are less than 25 years old (Centrepoint, The Connection at St Martins, Depaul) and they tend to engage with children who have fallen out of the system which is provided by Social Services. Recently, a member of parliament launched a motion in Parliament calling for greater funding and an improved national strategy to help the estimated 100.000 young children who run away from home each year, based on standardisation of how to deal with the problem through increased knowledge and coordination of cases of runaway children.

In **Bulgaria**, the government prepared a report for the European Commission on the country's anti-poverty measures over 2006-2008. Reference is made to measures for the improvement of the housing conditions for vulnerable groups such as persons leaving specialised institutions. The Bulgarian report draws attention to a good practice on training for young people leaving care institutions. Housing spaces are established as "Sheltered Spaces" where young people are placed for a period of 2-3 years before leaving the institution in order to teach them to cope with everyday life and to take care of themselves (NRS Bulgaria, 2006).

■ **Domestic violence** policies and refuges target children (often accompanied by their mothers) who are already in a situation of homelessness due to leaving a violent home environment, and therefore require specialist rehabilitation services to help them recover from the traumatic experience.

In **Latvia**, the Dardedze Centre Against Child Abuse is a multidisciplinary centre which provides services to children who are survivors of abuse and their families. The centre operates a temporary shelter where the child as well as a supportive family member can stay until crisis situations are normalised. The police, social services, the courts, health services and schools make referrals to this Centre, although children and their families can also request support directly (CoE, 2006).

In **Belgium**, the law of 9 January 2003 for Wallonia allows the survivor of domestic violence to stay in the dwelling and forces the offender to leave the dwelling. However in practice, this is rather hard to implement for various reasons such as the lack of awareness of this right on the part of the survivor, the lack of safety in the dwelling (especially after the release of the offender), and the psychological difficulties linked to staying in a home with hurtful memories. There is also the decree of 12 February 2004 on homeless services which has only partially been implemented since no extra funding has been allocated for child support staff (AMA, 2007).

In the **Netherlands**, there are some interesting projects like *Let op de Kleintjes* ("Pay attention to the children") in Amsterdam which is a psycho-education course for children who have witnessed domestic violence. In practice, a mother group frequently runs beside the child group. The course is offered in women's shelters. The children attend 9 meetings, which have a fixed structure and thematic approach. Creative arts are used as a work tool. The course aims in the first place to make the children aware of the feelings which they have hidden because of the circumstances (Federatie Opgang, 2007).

In **Estonia**, the Tartu Child Support Centre is an NGO dealing with abused and/or neglected children and their parents, with services such as psychological counselling and psychotherapeutic help, medical care and counselling for abused children and their family members. The interesting feature of this project is its multi-agency nature with participation of professionals who all have special training in child abuse: paediatricians, psychologists, social workers, prosecutors, juvenile police officers and volunteers (CoE, 2006).

■ **Justice and home affairs** policies cover various areas related to child homelessness such as preventing evictions of families, the situation of young offenders, and the placement of unaccompanied young asylum-seekers. Homeless strategies across Europe are often being developed in cooperation with the relevant justice and home affairs ministries for the reasons illustrated in the following country examples.

In **Ireland**, since the release dates are planned for young offenders, there is less risk of them becoming homeless. There are three centres for young offenders in Ireland, and each ensures that the individual is followed-up by a social worker or a probation worker, that arrangements are made with schools or other youth outreach centres, that a pre-release programme is drawn up with the offender's family, and that a placement in a hostel is available if necessary. These requirements must be fulfilled before the youth is released, and does contribute to preventing homelessness amongst young offenders (FEANTSA, 2004)

In **Spain**, unaccompanied minors are supported through systems of protection (for instance, the implementation of the Law on Childhood Protection) using resources like flats, shelters, centres, residences. The authorities can use these resources for a maximum period of eight months, during which the minors are identified by the public administration.

In **Sweden**, in 2005 13 new local homelessness projects were selected for funding by the NBHW. Four of them aimed at preventing evictions through what seemed to be quite traditional methods, including cooperation with the local Municipal Housing Companies who report on people at risk of eviction to the local social authorities which, in turn, try to solve the situation. Four projects are categorised as mainly oriented towards housing; three of these projects target women and one 'unintentionally homeless men and women'. One of these – and the only one based in Göteborg – aims to offer homeless women with dependent children 'alternative housing with elements of support' with the ultimate goal to provide them with their own dwellings (Sahlin, 2006)

In **Hungary**, probation offices work to prevent people leaving prison from becoming homeless. This service seeks to link the ex-offender with the community prior to release and provide support once the person leaves prison. The service focuses primarily on young offenders and can take steps including: getting in contact with the family of the young offender in order to assess whether a return to the family is possible, and providing help in finding work and education opportunities. There were also indications that the Probation Offices planned to provide some supported accommodation in the future, as well as more concrete action in terms of securing employment (FEANTSA, 2004)

In **Italy**, the situation of unaccompanied minors is dealt with by two jurisdictions which can lead to tensions and contradictions: childcare law is generally based on the rights of children to shelter and support, whereas Immigration law is far more restrictive, based on notions of public order and security (ESN, 2005).

In **the United Kingdom**, Wales has a Youth Offending Strategy which contains a commitment to evaluate the extent to which the needs of young offenders are addressed within local homelessness strategies and plans, and to ensure that all youth offending teams are working to identify the housing needs of young offenders in their local areas (Shelter Wales, 2007).

In **Greece**, a fairly wide variety of smaller statutory institutions offer housing support and a friendly environment for youngsters below the age of 18. These agencies are supervised and run either by the Ministry of Health and Welfare or, in cases of young ex-offenders, the Ministry of Justice (EOH Services Review, 2004).

8 Conclusions

Trends

The ETHOS homelessness and housing exclusion continuum has been a useful tool to understand and compare different existing forms of child homelessness in Europe. ETHOS helps in this respect to understand child homelessness as a process where most of the children concerned are moving frequently between the streets, situations of homelessness, forms of insecure housing (living with family and friends) or inadequate housing (in squats or makeshift dwellings).

The two main trends of this phenomenon in Europe concern children in homeless families (children in temporary accommodation, children in domestic violence refuges, children in families threatened with eviction, children living in very poor housing conditions) and unaccompanied homeless adolescents (chronically homeless children, runaway youths, unaccompanied asylum-seekers, children leaving care institutions). The profile of these children differs according to the factors which caused their homelessness in the first place, and these categories of child homelessness are, in many cases, all interlinked.

Policies and services

The phenomenon of children chronically experiencing homelessness is still only an emerging problem which can, and should, be stemmed as soon as possible by improving prevention policies (both systemic and targeted) to reach out to the many children at risk to avoid them entering a cycle of homelessness in adulthood.

The causes of child homelessness seem to be a complex combination of structural, institutional, relational and personal factors. It is clear from the analysis in this paper, that child homelessness cannot be tackled in isolation from poverty and homelessness experienced by adults, especially as many children experience homelessness as a result of their parents going through crisis situations.

There are different approaches to tackling this problem which are outlined in this paper mainly founded on a prevention ethos and the need to catch the problems as early as possible. There are structural policies linked to housing, social welfare, education and health which serve to prevent crisis situations and to detect imminent crisis situations. Other policies are developed for children who cannot benefit from these mainstream measures. These therefore tend to be specialised policies which target children (and their families) who are already living in difficult situations. However, structural barriers can hamper even the best conceived interventions, making rehabilitation a real challenge.

Recommendations

Homelessness is now an acknowledged problem in all EU countries. Child homelessness is only just slowly emerging as a problem in Europe, but will most likely increase if measures are not rapidly taken to counter this phenomenon. The longer EU governments wait, the harder it will be to prevent child homelessness becoming a European reality in Europe, in contradiction with declarations on European values and the importance of the European social model.

On the basis of the results of this stocktaking exercise, FEANTSA would like to make the following recommendations.

AT NATIONAL LEVEL:

- > To develop national research on homelessness (building on existing research at national and European level), starting by a focus on the causes and pathways of adult, family and child homelessness;
- > To develop national evidence-based homelessness prevention strategies to tackle homelessness experienced by adults and children which focus not only on “at risk” groups (and hence individual deficits), but also on the broader, community-wide contexts in which they occur;
- > To include the needs of children in all housing needs assessments;
- > To encourage all national administrations to take up the recommendations of the 2007 EU study on measuring homelessness to improve monitoring of homelessness at national level;
- > To mainstream homelessness in all national policies and to assess the complementarity of legislation adopted in these different sectors to avoid developing contradictory measures.

AT EU LEVEL:

- > To bring together all organisations and authorities working on homelessness-related issues to come together at EU level to learn from each other on the best ways to tackle homelessness in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination;
- > To bring together organisations from *different sectors* (child poverty, homelessness, immigration, housing, health, employment, justice) to work to improve prevention and intervention efforts to better address child homelessness in Europe;
- > To support the European Commission as facilitator of exchanges between different national administrations in the area of homelessness **by declaring 2009 a light year on homelessness.**

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