

Chantier
national
prioritaire
2008-2012



pour les personnes
sans-abri ou mal logées

French Homeless and Poorly Housed People national Strategy

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Context

In 2007, the President of the Republic set the objective to reduce poverty by one third in five years. Structural measures aiming at deeply reforming our social system have been implemented. The refounding of the homeless people or poorly housed care services forms part of the global policy to fight exclusion and poverty. As other European countries, such as the UK, Finland or Denmark did, France, through its Prime Minister, declared the policy was a National priority for the 2008-2012 period and as from November 2009, it has included an overall strategy for the homeless or poorly housed people care services.

What does refounding mean?

A deep Reform of the System...

The aim of refounding is to concretely reduce the number of homeless people in France and to make it possible that no one is forced to live in an unfit housing or sleep rough. The goal is to radically transform the existing system, which was broken up, not enough regulated, unable to control the entrance flows or to ensure people found a housing solution, despite growing funding. The situation was that of emergency crisis management and poorly matched the reasserted principles of continuous and unreserved service provision.

The refounding required making use of the know-how and commitment of the stakeholders in the sector, i.e. the associations and local authorities, which are closer to the field and know the public, while reasserting the role of the State. It was also paramount to clarify the relationships of the State with these stakeholders and of the stakeholders between each other in order to mainstream and save the resources: connecting and coordinating the various stakeholders in the sector so as to think and work together, enables to limit a complex piling up of systems which, up to now, hindered efficiency and impeded an actual follow-up of the people. And yet, this follow-up is necessary to get out of a hand to mouth management. The aim is therefore also to put the service user at the heart of the operations to better meet their needs in an overall approach of access to the fundamental rights. This should also enable to provide the most adapted response in each case, promoting housing as much as possible.

... Relying on Two Main Principles

Two main principles result from these objectives: The organisation of a Public Service for Accommodation and Access to Housing as well as a priority given to housing (the “Housing First” approach).

Implementing a Public Service for Homeless people Accommodation and Access to Housing depends on general interest missions recognised as such once they have been stated. This also fully reasserts the joint State and local and regional authorities’ responsibilities. The measures taken will have to meet three main principles for public service: continuity of the care services, equal service provision and service provision adapted to the needs. In France, the State has the sole competence to provide services to homeless people or poorly housed people.

The “Housing First” approach means that accessing an ordinary housing under the general law should, as much as possible, be given the priority. Accommodation services should not be a compulsory stage, except if the person’s situation so requires. This principle applies both for almost autonomous and vulnerable people. The principle also states that standards in all accommodation forms should be similar to housing standards and ensure security, dignity and intimacy to the service users.

... And Requiring a New Type of Governance.

A restructured policy requires a new type of governance. Cross-disciplinarity, results and experimentation are the key words of the policy established in France to fight the increasing number of homeless or poorly housed people.

First, this is an overall policy that aims at meeting everyone's needs. In other words, as access to housing also enables people to adopt a reintegration approach, it affects all the sectors of social life: employment, as housing often facilitates working life reintegration or sustainability; justice, for instance to find solutions for people discharged from prison or to define rights and duties of landlords and tenants; health, when we look for solutions adapted to mentally ill people or when we define the characteristics of unfit housings; asylum, when we wonder what should be organised in terms of reception of refugees; youth, when looking for responses to stray young ... Only an interministerial work may lead to agreements and commitments on several fronts. In parallel, cooperation is also being implemented with the association sector and the local and regional authorities to reinforce the contact with the field and enable a better territory interconnection.

This twofold cooperation strategy – between the different ministries on the one hand and the local stakeholders on the other hand – leads to a renewal of the state-stakeholders relations relying on formal conventions setting the objectives to meet. The monitoring and assessment means and modalities are also determined. The implementation of the measures is assessed on a long-term footing thanks to precise indicators. All these contribute to a result-oriented approach that was somehow lacking in a sector where reforms were desperately needed, though.

This restructuring also requires experimental measures for which funds are made available. The approach adopted in France inspire from those taken in the USA, Canada, England, Finland or even Denmark and which have proved effective both in terms of integration for the people concerned and cost for the communities. At the local level, field missions are undertaken to study, assess and foster very active and innovative association initiatives in the field. The “Housing First” programme is an example of experimental programme implemented to provide the most disadvantaged homeless with a housing. 1,500,000 Euros were allocated to experiment this programme on 5 sites over 4 years. In the future, the programme will be general.

Background

In June 2008, at the request of François Fillon, Prime Minister, the MP Etienne Pinte unveiled the results of his parliamentary mission on emergency accommodation and access to housing of the homeless and poorly housed people. The report highlighted the housing shortage in France, including very social housing, i.e. housing whose price is adapted to the most vulnerable populations. The homeless system, as it was implemented in the 90's, needed a new impulse. It became obvious that a new housing policy was necessary: we had to rethink the system organisation to provide a better response and control costs.

After reading the report from Professor Damon on Homeless Policies in the European Union, the Housing Minister asked the General Delegated Prefect, Mr. Alain Régnier, to start and reflect on the modernisation of the housing system, building on the report as well as on the works carried out over the last years. The development of the national strategy results from a partnership and concerted two-stage process: first, conceptual and then, operational.

In a first stage, the General Delegated Prefect invited the associations, the Directorate-General for Social Action and the Housing, Town Planning and Landscape Directorate to take part in working out a common text to lay the foundations of a modernisation process. In June 2009, the drafting of a common framework note enabled to define the framework and principles of the refounding work.

Then, on September, 21st, 2009, during a meeting with the associations, Benoist Apparu, State Secretary for Housing and Town planning asked the General Delegated Prefect to carry on the interministerial work jointly with the association sector in order to suggest concrete measures to the government by the end of October 2009.

Three working groups were set up, made up of representatives from Civil Service, association representatives and service users. They met on several occasions between October 1st and 27th 2009. Each group worked on a specific topic.

One of the topics was "A unified service for the reception and counselling and one resource person". The second was "A simplified architecture in accommodation and localisation provision". The third one was on "social support to and into housing and access to affordable housing".

In total, more than 100 people participated in the working groups in which associations strongly committed themselves. Their work enabled to reach a series of shared proposals. From these proposals, the Minister presented the "National Homeless or Poorly Housed People Strategy 2009-2012 » on November 10th.

An interministerial group worked on complementary measures. The latter enabled to fight unfit housing, mobilise young civic service volunteers in "reception and emergency" missions, prevent evictions and access to housing for people discharged from prison, humanise accommodation centres, intermediate tenancies or even reinforce the mobilisation of housing provision.



Monsieur Benoist Apparu, French Housing ministry, presenting the French National Strategy, November 10th 2009

French Strategy

Analysing the Needs : Knowing Better and Observing Better

The French strategy aims at knowing better and observing better the homeless and poorly housed people needs from the places where they live in order to be able to adapt the measures to the reality on the ground.

This is achieved through a social watch platform, mobile teams, reinforced by 2000 young civic service volunteers and the implementation of an Integrated Reception and Counselling Service that enables in particular to develop local observatories and data collection on the needs and responses provided. An information system is being developed, supported by a computerised system aiming at making a census of local level demand and supply.

Thanks to the National Observatory on Poverty and Social Exclusion and its new Chairman Julien Damon, we know the situation of homeless and poorly housed people in France better.

Emergency Response : Welcoming Better to Accommodate Better

The French homeless and poorly housed people strategy aims at meeting everyone's needs in every place. This means accommodation centres are organised at the local level; this organisation is State steered through territorial Reception, Accommodation and reintegration Plans. The latter enable to mainstream the resources, simplify the contacts and avoid piled up complex structures with divergent status and functioning. A provision-cost referential is also developed to optimise service quality while controlling the expenses.

This goes hand in hand with the humanising plan for the accommodation centres that aims at ensuring intimacy and private life of the residents, promoting the development of individual rooms. A convention was signed with the ombudsman of the Republic to ensure access to fundamental rights to the most excluded people.

The service users are invited to participate in strategic reflexions to develop and assess the measures. It is contemplated to remunerate their participation. This service users' participation enables to put the public at the heart of the accommodation system.

In this sense too, a resource person should enable a "one to one" relation between the service user and this only contact person who will support them in their different contacts, creating a link over time and in an uninterrupted way. The resource person also aims at supporting the service user from the accommodation to the housing phases.





Support to and into housing : The Implementation of the Housing Priority

The French homeless and poorly housed persons strategy stresses access to housing. The aim is to prepare the accommodated persons into housing, either in an ordinary housing or through an adapted and supported solution.

Access to housing is promoted through innovative measures enabling to use existing housing. Tenancy intermediation, for instance, enables to make use of the private tenancy market while securing the landlord/tenant relation.

With this system, an association plays the part of a third party between the landlord and the tenant to make sure the rent is paid and thus securing the relation between both parties. The use of this solution is developing in France. It is implemented in numerous departments, including thanks to the 15 million Euros freed through the recovery plan. In the framework of interministerial works, an access to housing for highly vulnerable people is being implemented. For instance, people discharged from prison, international protection holders, the young or even people suffering from psychological disorders: adapted housing is proposed to them to avoid wandering. In terms of access to social housing, the « Loca-Pass » system is maintained and the steps to take are simpler.

Complementary measures are being developed to increase housing supply in the private housing market: the programming of social housing takes into account the goals set by the Solidarity and Urban renewal Act (SRU in French) in order for social housing to go hand in hand with social mix. Furthermore, the municipalities and inter-communalities are encouraged to adapt their town planning plans to more dense constructions. The opening of 8000 places in intermediate houses is another solution provided to people in the process of being re-housed.

the tenancy intermediation - « Solibail »

The tenancy intermediation is a rental management system created to tackle the issue of people having difficulties of access to or of maintenance of housing. Launched in France under the label “Solibail” to make use of the private housing market, 15 million Euros have been set aside in 2009 for the recovery plan so as to promote the development of this system and to obtain 5.000 private housing opportunities.

This system enables an association or a social organization to play the part of a mediator between the landlord and the tenant, managing the relation between both parties by assuring the payment of rent and the maintenance of premises in good conditions. The implementation comes in two forms: « leasing/subletting » or « management authority ». In the first case, the mediator signs the rental agreement with the landlord and subsequently sublets the premises to the tenant. In the second case, the landlord signs the lease directly with the tenant and the mediator only helps to walk the tenant through the process.

The Intermediate Houses Programme (boarding houses)

The intermediate houses – boarding houses are types of supported housing combining private personal spaces (“a real housing”) and collective spaces. A person or host couple who enliven and regulate daily life frames these establishments. The public they accommodate is defined by a 2002 circular: “[...] people with low level resources, in a severe isolation or exclusion situation, and whose social and psychological or even psychiatric situation make impossible in a foreseeable future to access an ordinary housing”.

The reception homes are specific intermediate houses intended for people with particularly important psychic disorders requiring a specific monitoring. Whatever their forms, the intermediate houses target particularly fragile publics. These intermediate houses are a possibility to go into housing for people accommodated in emergency or stabilisation hostels and for whom accessing an autonomous housing remains hypothetical.

Fighting unfit housing is a priority for the Agence nationale pour l'amélioration de l'habitat (ANAH) (NDT: National Agency for Housing Improvement) in the framework of a convention signed by the State and the Agency. A national programme to renovate old districts enables to address the issue of high unfit housing concentration. The fight against "slumlords" is lead in cooperation with the ministry of justice.

Preventing evictions is lead as upwards as possible. The different stakeholders are mobilised, an "unpaid rent SOS" freephone number has been implemented, the landlord/tenant relation has been secured as much as possible, for instance through an insurance, the Tenancy Risk Guarantee.

The "Landmark - Housing First" Project

A recommendation from the report on homeless people health handed over to the Minister for Health and Sport

The experimental programme "Housing First " aims at encouraging access and sustainability into an ordinary housing for homeless people suffering from serious psychic disorders. This is one of the recommendations suggested by Dr. Vincent Girard, street psychiatrist in Marseilles, in the report that he handed over on January 8th, 2010 to Ms. Roselyne Bachelot-Narquin, Minister for Health and Sport, on Homeless people health and access to care.

On the occasion of the handing over of the report, the Minister for Health and Sport and the State Secretary responsible for Housing and Town Planning, Mr. Benoist Apparu, decided to launch this programme as an experiment that is part of the 2009-2012 National Strategy for the Accommodation and Access to Housing for Homeless or Poorly Housed people.

The experiment will take place in four sites in France and will be linked to a similar ongoing Canadian programme.

Stakes

The number of people sleeping rough with severe mental illnesses is significant. A recent survey carried out by INSERM (Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale – French National Institute for Health and Medical Research), the Observatoire du Samusocial of Paris (The Observatory of the Paris Emergency Rescue Service) and the Institut de veille sanitaire (Institute for Health Watch) show that in Paris conurbation, almost one third of homeless people suffer from severe psychiatric disorders (psychotic disorders, anxiety disorder, severe depressive mood). This raises health, social and ethic problems that highlight the failure of the successive policies to take care of this public.

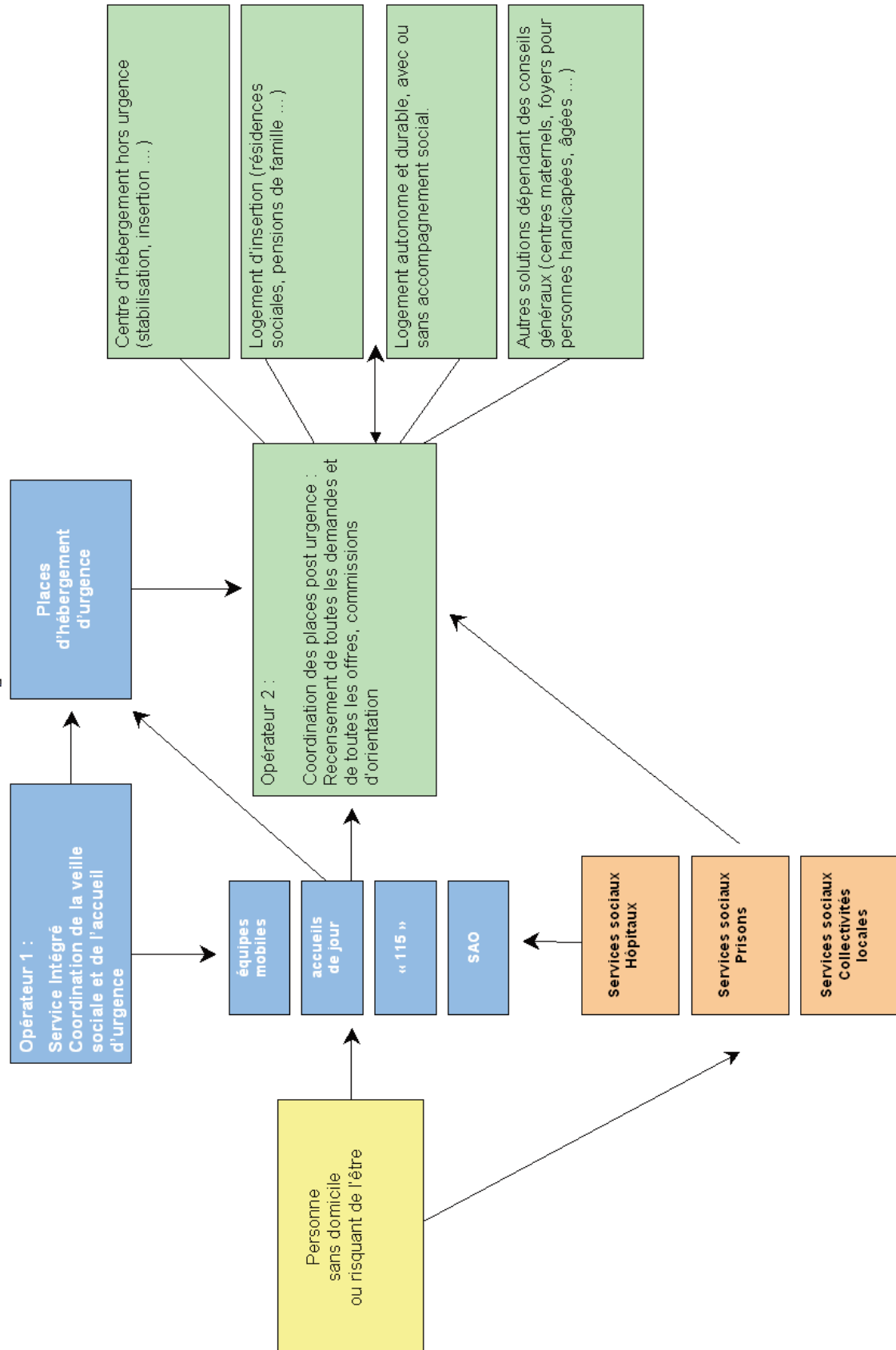
One of the reasons for the failure resides in the way these policies considered the homeless people and those suffering from severe psychiatric diseases, i.e. as a captive audience that had to be protected and assisted at all cost, without actually believing these people could and should be citizens as any others who have skills to claim in order to develop their autonomy.

Today, with the implementation of this experiment, the aim is to develop a new approach and to bring innovative responses to this issue.



Appendices

Schematic Graph of the reception and counselling services

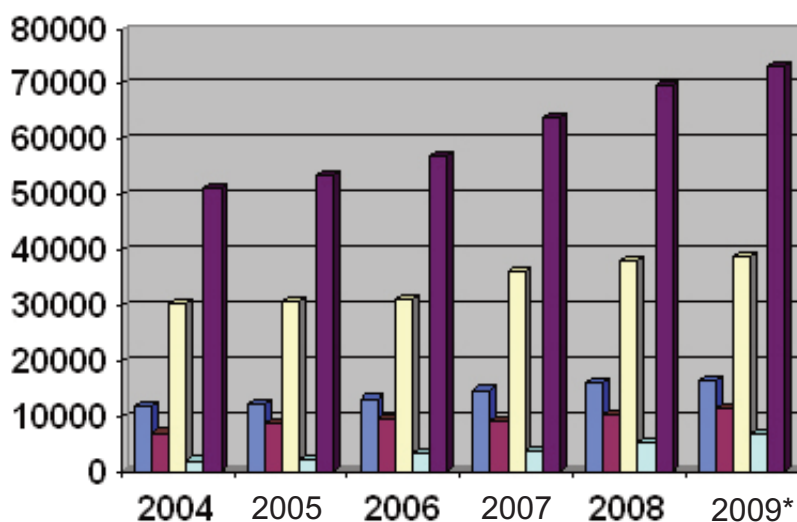


Refounding Figures

Key figures

- 100,000 homeless in France in 2007
- 3.2 million poorly housed people
- 10 % of people discharged from prison have nowhere to go
- 2,127 (reception/accommodation/supported housing) structures

Evolution of accommodation capacities and intermediate houses



*provisional Estimates



Humanising the accommodation centres

- An unprecedented plan with 170 millions over three years to renovate more than 500 centres
- To date, we plan to integrate 483 establishments in the humanising programme. 379 of them will be renovated and the remaining 104 will be built anew. The total of the works amount to 269 million Euros.

Fighting unfit housing

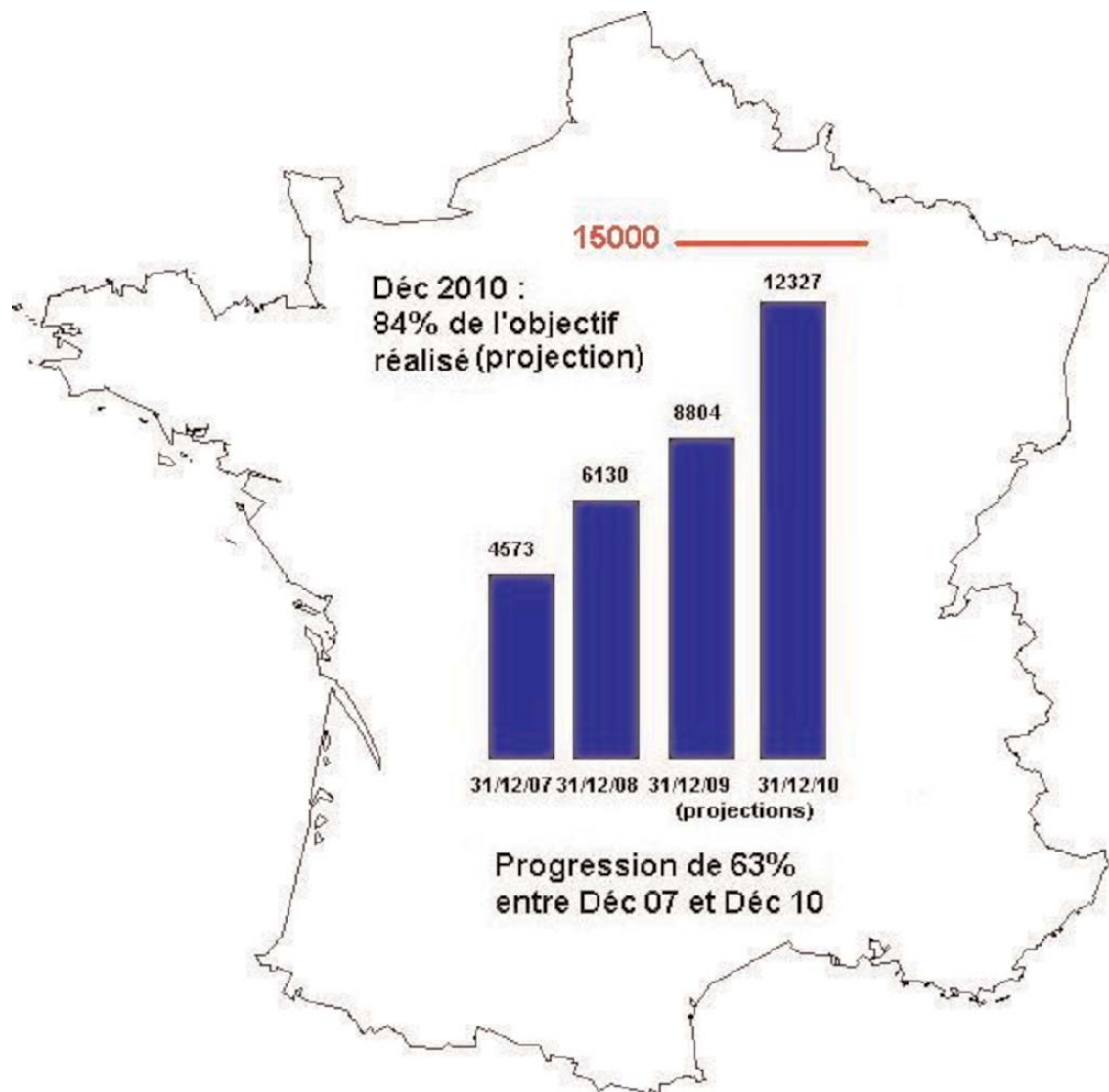
● 600 000 occupied housings distributed across the territory of metropolitan France and approximately 50,000 on the DOM are classified as “unfit housing” under the law, considered as hazardous to the health or the security of occupants . 50% of them are modest occupants living in rural areas, whereas the other 50% are private housings situated in cities.

● The number of orders made by the special police force of the State and towns concerning unfit housings have grown significantly over the recent 3 years (for instance, 2.200 orders against insalubrity were made in 2007)

- 200 million Euros to fight unfit housing

Intermediate houses

- By the end of 2009, 8,804 places had been open in intermediate houses.
- By the end of 2011, 15,000 places will be open.



Tenancy Intermediation

- The « Solibail » system implemented in the suburban area of Paris at the end of 2008 is about seizing private housing opportunities; a convention is then signed between the State and the operators(*) .
- This experiment, still under process, enabled to mobilise 261 housings and to re-house 188 families; 74% of whom were housed in hotels or collective structures.

(*) On the one hand, the State funds the exploration, tenancy management, vacancy and unpaid rents costs as well as the difference between the actual rent price and the price paid by the household; on the other hand, the operator commits itself to find housing in the private sector, to rent or sublet them for a limited period to disadvantaged households mentioned by the State.

Legal eviction proceedings

	2006	2007	2008	evolution
Number of effective interventions by the police force	102 967	105 917	102 130	- 1 %

Open credits 2007-2009 + Recovery Plan - Accommodation

	2007	2009	Evolution
Emergency accommodation	255 126 943	271 321 240	6 %
CHRS (Social Accommodation and Rehabilitation Centres)	506 650 497	601 567 789	16 %
ALT (temporary housing allowance)	41 000 000	41 656 000	2 %
Intermediate Houses	22 506 232	53 996 272	58 %
AGLS (Assistance to social tenancy management)	5 716 328	5 724 496	0 %
Housing / Accommodation Global Budget	877 000 000	1 100 000 000	20 %

Funding for Social Housing and Social Housing for the most vulnerable

- 130 000 social housing funded in 2009
- 140 000 social housing will be funded in 2010

- 13 737 Integration tenancy loan allowances (PLA-I) in 2007 and 17 000 in 2008
- 47 200 Social tenancy loan (PLUS) were funded in 2007 and 49 099 in 2008

