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Achieving Goals: Strategies to End Homelessness



FEANTSA

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Achieving Goals: Strategies to End Homelessness

By Ruth Owen, *Policy Coordinator, FEANTSA*

Strategy involves setting goals, determining actions to achieve these goals, and mobilizing resources to implement the actions. If, as FEANTSA believes it should be, the goal of public policy is to reduce and ultimately end homelessness, then a strategy is required.

Strategies to address homelessness exist at different levels. As competence for providing homeless services is often at local level, local strategies play a key role in structuring how homelessness is dealt with in a given city or local area. National and/or regional governments can also play an important role by providing an overarching framework, which ideally will enable and support local authorities to tackle homelessness. National and regional homelessness strategies can determine shared policy goals, create a legal framework, provide access to resources, and support and guide local policy implementation.

With the Social Investment Package,¹ the European Commission has called on European Union Member States to develop integrated national strategies on homelessness as part of efforts to address poverty. About half of Member States (MS) have done so.² Many MS report on their progress on/towards a homelessness strategy in the framework of EU social policy coordination, e.g. through the European Semester National Reform Programmes and/or through the Social OMC. In several MS where there are not yet official strategies, stakeholders are working to lay the foundations. Overall, the dynamic around national and regional strategies in the EU appears to be growing. Several MS, including the Czech Republic, Italy, Luxembourg and Spain have announced new or forthcoming strategies over the past few years. Some Member States with a well-established tradition of strategies, like Finland, are in a process of review and renewal to define new strategic goals and actions in order to make further progress on reducing homelessness.

Not all strategic public policies to address homelessness are called 'strategies'. They may be presented as, for example, programmes, laws, action plans and so forth. Whatever the name, a strategy is a plan with goals, actions and resources attached to it.

Some common elements of homelessness strategies include targets; defined actions to reach these targets; governance mechanisms; monitoring and data collection; the role of central/regional government in providing an enabling framework for the local level. There is an emerging body of knowledge about what makes strategies work. FEANTSA's Toolkit³ for developing an integrated strategy to tackle homelessness identifies 10 key approaches for effective integrated strategies: evidence-based; comprehensive; multi-dimensional; rights-based; participatory; statutory; sustainable; needs-based; bottom-up. In Canada and the US, Federal level guidance has been published to support communities in developing 10 year plans to end homelessness. The use of a systems approach in this context is interesting. During its campaign 'Ending Homelessness is Possible!' FEANTSA developed a handbook on ending homelessness, providing guidance on what goals homelessness strategies should address in order to reduce, and ultimately end, homelessness rather than "manage" it.⁴

Developing effective strategies is not easy. Indeed, homelessness continues to increase in most Member States. Whilst some strategies have proved genuine motors for change, others have remained in practice more of a "paper strategy", insufficiently backed by proper governance, a legal framework, resources or accountability. Some strategies are regularly renewed to maintain progress over time. Others take a restrictive approach to what homelessness is, failing to get to grips with complex realities over time and thus to support action across prevention, emergency intervention and reintegration. Some strategies have lapsed, slipped off the agenda, or been downgraded in terms of resources or scope. The current context of austerity and the impact of the financial and economic crisis has only compounded these difficulties. At the same time, this context has thrown into sharp relief the need to address homelessness effectively rather than allow it (and its societal costs) to spiral.

Given the challenges outlined above, now is a vital time for exchange and shared reflection on what makes strategies deliver. Hopefully, the excellent articles in this magazine can support mutual learning and joint reflection at EU-level.

¹ See <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&langId=en&newsId=1807&moreDocuments=yes&tableName=news>

² Including Belgium (Flanders), Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany (certain regions including North Rhine Westphalia), Ireland, Italy (forthcoming national Guidelines on homelessness), Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain (forthcoming), Sweden and the UK. See FEANTSA website for a non-comprehensive list of published strategies: <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique143&lang=en>

³ FEANTSA Toolkit for Developing an Integrated Homelessness Strategy <http://feantsa.org/spip.php?article630&lang=en>

⁴ FEANTSA Campaign <http://feantsa.org/spip.php?article171&lang=en>



This edition of *Homeless in Europe* starts with a reflection on Finland's transition from "PAAVO", the current programme to end long term homelessness to "AUNE", its successor planned for 2016-2020. Juha Kaakinen at Y Foundation explores what made PAAVO deliver its impressive outcomes, and the process of review leading to plans for AUNE. He remarks that there is still "a lot of work to do on the road to tackling homelessness". The article shows the balance that sustainable policies must strike between targeting specific needs and taking a comprehensive approach. Mutual trust between stakeholders, commitment, accountability and the allocation of significant resources emerge as central to implementation.

In a second Scandinavian contribution, Tom Rønning, Odense Municipality, presents two elements of Odense's recent experience in tackling homelessness. Firstly, he explores how the local strategy has achieved impressive progress in tackling homelessness through Housing First, in the context of the Danish national strategy. Key elements of success include working together, use of technology and a broader 'inclusive city' approach. Secondly, he highlights how European exchange in the context of the HABITACT forum on local homeless strategies has impacted positively on policy development in Odense and partner cities.

Caroline Beyers from the Flemish Government describes how progress has been made towards a regional strategy on homelessness as part of the broader anti-poverty strategy. Key milestones have included data benchmarking, establishing inter-ministerial working and formalising cooperation between different levels of government.

Another Belgian perspective is provided by Martin Wagener, La Strada (Support Centre for the Brussels Homeless Sector). He highlights the challenges for an integrated approach to homelessness in Brussels. He notes the diversification of profiles and services in recent years, and the increasingly important role of participation. A working group bringing together stakeholders from the homelessness and closely-related sectors (public and general welfare services, physical health, mental health, poverty, addiction, prisoner integration services, etc.) was established to feed into political negotiation between the relevant ministers. The article concludes by presenting the remaining challenges for implementing an integrated approach.

Samara Jones, FEANTSA and Tom Archer, BSHF, UK then take a critical look at the track record of national strategies in the EU as a whole. They explore how grassroots campaigns might support better progress towards strategic goals. In particular, they suggest that European cities learn from the experience of the 100,000 Homes campaign in the US that encouraged working together to mobilise action and achieve impact.

Ana Martins and Ricardo Ferreira, AMI, review progress on "The National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People 2009-2015 – Prevention, Intervention and Attendance" launched by the Portuguese Government in March 2009. This was the first National Strategy pertaining to homeless people in southern Europe. The article shows that the strategy has been an important force for galvanising local action, and that local coalitions are highly active in implementation. However, at national level the strategy lacks legal value, resources and political commitment, meaning that many vital aspects of implementation have not progressed. AMI and others continue to push for this to be addressed.

Ioanna Pertsinidou and Dimitra Soulele provide a snapshot of the current challenges for developing a strategic response to homelessness in Greece, particularly focusing on the extreme economic, political and financial context of the crisis.

Marc Uhry, Fondation Abbé Pierre, poses the tricky question of whether there is an "unbreakable glass ceiling" that makes it impossible to solve homelessness and housing exclusion in France. He takes a broad view of welfare and societal changes that have led to the current situation, before concluding that political solutions are possible but that they require the mobilisation of actors on the ground and citizens.

The final contribution, by Nicholas Pleace at the European Observatory on Homelessness, takes a fresh perspective by presenting his thoughts on the policy mistakes that actually cause homelessness, rather than tackling it. Strategic approaches can reduce, and perhaps ultimately end homelessness. Stakeholders around Europe and the world have a lot to learn from one another about developing and implementing strategies that actually work.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We would like to give you the chance to comment on any of the articles which have appeared in this issue. If you would like to share your ideas, thoughts and feedback, please send an email to the editor, suzannah.young@feantsa.org.



From PAAVO to AUNE – A Coordinated Strategy Based on Housing First Brings Results

By **Juha Kaakinen**,¹ *Director, Y-Foundation, Finland*

The Finnish National Programme to reduce long-term homelessness, known as the PAAVO Programme, started in 2008 and the second programme period will end in 2015. At the time of writing, the negotiations to form the next Finnish Government are ongoing, and we have great hopes that the next national programme will start in 2016.

PAAVO is a government programme coordinated by the Ministry of Environment in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Criminal Sanctions Agency, the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland, RAY (Finland's Slot Machine Association), 11 cities with the highest numbers of homeless people, NGOs and private companies.

With the programme, over 2,800 new apartments have been built or purchased for homeless people, 350 new professional support workers have been hired to do social work in housing and housing advice services have prevented 200 evictions per year. Some important structural reforms have been implemented: the Housing First principle has been established and shelters and hostels have been replaced with congregate supported housing units. All in all, from 2008-2014 the number of long-term homeless people decreased by 1,150 people and the total number of homeless people also decreased.

The PAAVO -programme has been successful in many respects and some of the results and the changes to the service system introduced by this programme are exceptional. However, there is still a lot of work to do on the road to tackling homelessness. In order to get new ideas and perspectives for the future work to fight against homelessness, the Ministry of Environment commissioned an evaluation of the whole PAAVO programme in 2014. The evaluation was carried out by four recognised researchers: Nicholas Pleace from the University of York in the United Kingdom, Dennis Culhane from the University of Pennsylvania, USA, Marcus Knutagård from Lund University, Sweden and the Finnish member of the group, Riitta Granfelt from the University of Tampere.

The evaluation focused on the programme as a whole, as well as its different aspects from the perspective of implementing the Housing First model in Finnish society. The review report described work on homelessness done in the United Kingdom, Sweden and the USA, focusing particularly on operating practices that could be used when working on homelessness in Finland. The evaluation report, and a lot of relevant background material on the programme and development work on homelessness services in Finland can be found at: www.housingfirst.fi.

As an overall assessment, it can be stated that the main goal of the programme, the permanent reduction of long-term homelessness nationally, has been reached with the help of a carefully planned, comprehensive cooperation strategy. The fact that the programme works in accordance with the Housing First principle is proof of the fact that with sufficient and correctly allocated support, permanent housing can be guaranteed even for long-term homeless people in the most difficult positions. According to the evaluation, Finland's is perhaps the best example of a truly coordinated national homelessness strategy, bringing together homelessness NGOs, Y-Foundation, cities and the central government.

Although the focus has been on long-term homelessness, the programme has also responded comprehensively to other needs by developing successful preventative services and specialist services for particular groups, e.g. young people and former offenders. The use of communal/congregate models of Housing First has been a subject of debate, but the effectiveness of the strategy is also evident. An important element for further work has also been the development network and training coordinated by the Networking for Development –project and Y-Foundation.

The researchers give several recommendations for future work. Increasing affordable housing supply is key to reducing and preventing homelessness, high pressure housing markets e.g. Helsinki City are

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of particular concern. The researchers also point out that prevention needs to identify people at risk of long-term and recurrent homelessness. Services like Critical Time Intervention and Housing First can be used to prevent long-term homelessness among high-need and vulnerable groups of people. Indebtedness can also be a route into homelessness and can be counteracted. There is also scope for using lower intensity models of support to both prevent and reduce homelessness. Finally, the researchers remind us that housing is not enough to solve homelessness and special attention should be directed to social integration, work, education, training or something positive to give structure to life and to give the feel of being a part of a community.

It is not only the actual evaluation report that has been useful but the dialogic evaluation process has been as well and has given new insights for planning the next programme period. A proposal for an action plan and for a national homelessness policy called the AUNE programme has recently been distributed for comment. Many of the recommendations of the evaluation have been included in the proposal.

The new proposed reduction programme for 2016-2020 focuses more strongly on prevention and integrating homelessness reduction measures to other measures and policies for fighting social exclusion. The Housing First principle is now almost a self-evident cornerstone in the new programme.

The main target of the programme is to reduce homelessness by 500 persons per year. This goal is reached by strengthening prevention and by tackling recurrent

homelessness. Measures to strengthen prevention include 3,500 new flats for homelessness work, facilitating access to housing for people with debts or rent arrears, increasing housing advice, including housing as part of the Finnish youth guarantee and establishing low-threshold service points for young people at risk of homelessness.

Tackling recurrent homelessness includes supporting former homeless persons into work, piloting FACT (flexible assertive community treatment) in four cities and strengthening the role of experts by experience (former homeless persons) in work on homelessness.

A third important element of the future programme is development work and national coordination of the programme. This also includes more systematic data collection, evaluation and research. The estimated budget of the new programme is €79M, of which €55M is reserved for building and buying flats and €24M for personnel costs and development work. The costs are divided between several state authorities and municipalities.

A good written strategy or programme is always only the beginning of a process. Our experience in Finland is that a successful implementation of a programme demands three components: mutual trust between all stakeholders involved, commitment and accountability. To reach trust and accountability, concrete quantitative objectives and written agreements may be necessary. The most important factor is commitment: success is impossible without individuals who have a strong ethical commitment to working to end homelessness.

It is not only the actual evaluation report that has been useful but the dialogic evaluation process has been as well and has given new insights for planning the next programme period.



How Can We Learn from Each Other? Lessons Learned from the HABITACT Peer Review in Odense 2015

By **Tom Rønning**,¹ *Housing Strategic Consultant, Social Center, Odense Municipality, Denmark*

Odense experienced a considerable (47%) reduction in homelessness levels between 2009 and 2013. This is extraordinary in comparison with the development of homelessness in other major Danish cities.

The municipality of Odense is one of the founding members of HABITACT.² One of the key activities in HABITACT is to arrange an annual peer review for about 30 participants in one of the member cities. The meetings have been held for the last six years, and this year, 2015, Odense City hosted the HABITACT meeting. The aim of the meeting was to review homelessness and urban inclusion policies in Odense in the context of wider developments and draw potential comparisons with other European cities.

At the meeting this year, representatives from eight countries, 12 cities and several European organizations were present. From Odense, NGOs, staff from the municipality and other local stakeholders participated.

Dr. Volker Busch-Geertsema³ did a great job of writing the discussion paper and the case study for the peer review.⁴

THE ODENSE CONTEXT

- With a population of 198,000 people, the city of Odense is Denmark's third largest city.
- Odense participated in Denmark's national homeless strategy 2009-2013.
- Odense experienced a considerable (47%) reduction in homelessness levels between 2009 and 2013. This is extraordinary in comparison with the development of homelessness in other major Danish cities.
- Overall, Odense has experienced the best results in the whole country during the period of the homelessness strategy.

In the Danish national homeless strategy, there was a request to shift from a "housing ready"/"treatment first" approach to using the Housing First approach instead.

Since 2009, 211 citizens in Odense have received their own apartment through the Housing First approach and, six years later, 93 % of those citizens still live in their own apartment.

Access to ordinary and permanent housing is key to combating and ending homelessness. In Odense, the municipality has been able to obtain cheap apartments which have been offered to citizens who consequently have benefited from Housing First.

WORKING TOGETHER

A strong component of the success is stakeholder collaboration. There has thus been very good and close cooperation with the housing associations for many years. Every month there is a meeting between the housing association representatives and the municipality. The municipal representative says what kind of need there is for apartments, and the housing associations provide an overview of vacant apartments. The result is that, within a month, apartments can be found for homeless persons.

Another example of the close cooperation between housing associations and the municipality is a specific offer from the municipality to intervene, for example in cases of neighborhood conflicts. A 'neighbours' fire brigade' is a professional municipal service with trained staff. The brigade will, for example after complaints in a housing area about challenging behavior of tenants with mental health problems, contact the neighbours affected and inform them about how to deal with people with mental health problems in the housing complex. The objective of this kind of 'housing fire brigade' is partly to create security for all neighbours and partly to maintain a high level of tolerance for individuals displaying what is considered non-mainstream behaviour. It also has the function of building bridges between neighbours and housing areas, and between the professionals working with problem-solving and helping individuals stay in their flats.

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2 HABITACT is a European exchange forum on local homeless strategies. It was launched with the support of FEANTSA in June 2009 by a core group of cities to develop European cooperation between local social policy administrations on tackling homelessness. HABITACT was established in response to growing interest and demand for information on homelessness from local authorities across Europe. Support from the European Commission and patronage from the European Committee of the Regions will serve to further build cooperation to make progress on tackling homelessness. <http://www.habitact.eu/>

3 Dr Volker Busch-Geertsema, Researcher at GISS (Association for Innovative Social Research and Social Planning), Bremen, Germany and Coordinator of the European Observatory on Homelessness, www.feantsaresearch.org

4 http://www.habitact.eu/files/activity/peerreview/discussionpaper_odense2015.pdf



Ad-hoc support is also provided by Odense's municipal staff, just as the staff participate in four area-based networks in Odense. They cooperate closely with housing associations in the same area and have regular meetings every three months with the following groups: caretakers from the housing associations; relevant people from the youth welfare department and from psychiatric services as well as with the police. This network is also important for the exchange of information and for keeping an early warning system in relation to any social and neighborhood problems in the housing area. This setup is to ensure quicker responses to problems, and the networking builds competencies important in relation to forecasting and preventing problems from spinning out of control.

The municipality and the housing associations also work closely to reduce the numbers of bailiff evictions. Since 2009 there has been a decline of over 30% in the number of bailiff evictions. This means a better economy for both the municipality and housing associations and that fewer citizens will be excluded from society. Ultimately, this means fewer homeless citizens.

INCLUSIVE CITY

In Odense, there is a focus on being an inclusive city for all inhabitants. This also means that there is the strong belief that every citizen has the right to be treated with decency and feel secure, and that this right must also be accomplished for the most socially excluded citizens/groups in the society. In a partnership of shop-owners, NGOs, socially excluded people, the Municipality, the police and other stakeholders, we have rules for cooperation. This focus has created a common realization that there is a need for special sanctuaries for socially excluded groups in urban spaces.

Since 2010, three sanctuaries have been created on public places in the city. These sanctuary sites are part of the many things that the city provides for residents in the urban space. Sanctuaries were meant to be placed where socially excluded people use the city, but the municipality had too little knowledge of how socially excluded people used the city. In order to make sure that the sanctuaries and other offers to the group were placed the right places in the city, the Council needed more information.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

After asking homeless people and other socially excluded persons where they would prefer to meet and consume, it was decided to improve the evidence base for decisions on where to locate the new provisions for these groups by using modern technology. In September and December 2014, and May 2015 Odense Council started 3 consecutive GPS-experiments. This was done in cooperation with an NGO with experience in working with socially excluded persons. On both occasions, 20 socially excluded persons received a GPS device to carry around in their pockets for a week. Participation in the project was voluntary, and the individual participants and their device were kept anonymous to the municipality.

At the time of writing this article, the geo data were still being processed and analyzed further in cooperation with experts from Copenhagen University. But a new sanctuary has already been placed in accordance with the GPS knowledge - and with great success.

PEER REVIEW

The peer review paper from Dr. Volker Busch-Geertsema on homelessness and urban inclusion policies in Odense created a lot of discussion, both about what happened in Odense but also in a wider European context.

A few of the reviewed topics were:

- It is possible to bring about a reduction in homelessness numbers, but it is a long-haul process, with many more areas of focus than just housing.
- One of the reasons why there are so many things happening in Odense is that there is already a culture of pragmatic solutions.
- For the local players who participated, the understanding of local work in a larger European context is of great importance.
- Because of the discussions in the peer audit, there are several areas Odense municipality will put extra focus on.
- Participants from the other cities received some inputs that are relevant to their local work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank FEANTSA, HABITACT and especially Dr. Volker Busch-Geertsema for their support for the meeting in Odense.



Towards a Flemish Homelessness Strategy

By **Caroline Beyers**,¹ *Policy Officer, Department of Welfare, Public Health and Family, Flemish Government, Belgium*

At the moment there is a lot of extremely topical interest in developing a strategy to tackle homelessness in Flanders. This article describes the process towards and the origins of this growing interest.

The first section describes how homelessness services are organized in Flanders. The second, third and fourth sections describe some anticipatory movements that enabled the current situation. The last section provides information about what is left to do and the current achievements.

HOMELESS SERVICES IN FLANDERS

In Flanders, homeless services are spread across different sectors and different levels of government. The way shelters are organized is the choice of local authorities though it is welfare organizations that are running them. Homeless hostels, temporary accommodation or women's shelters are organized by NGOs (*Centra voor Algemeen Welzijnswerk*, General Welfare Centers), that are financed by the Flemish government department of Welfare. Access to social housing is regulated by the Flemish government department of Housing. Transitional supported housing is both financed by local authorities and the Flemish government. In the field of drug rehabilitation institutions, psychiatric hospitals or mental health, both the Flemish government and the Belgian government are involved.

Overall, tackling homelessness in Flanders takes a lot of coordination, dialogue and cooperation on different levels.

COOPERATION TREATY

In 2014, the former Belgian secretary of state (*Staatssecretaris*) for anti-poverty took a first step towards drawing up a strategy to tackle homelessness. A treaty of cooperation maps out all legislation involved across the different levels in Belgium. The Belgian state, as well as the different Communities (Flemish, French, German) and Regions (Flemish, Walloon and Brussels), became party to this treaty. First of all, the treaty secured universal recognition of the urgent need to tackle homelessness. All the

parties committed to using the ETHOS typology to define the target group(s). The treaty clarifies in a very clear way that all levels of government must cooperate in order to tackle homelessness. Furthermore, every Minister involved, whatever his/her political jurisdiction, commits to tackling homelessness by coordinating his/her own policies in cooperation with other policymakers. Finally, every Minister involved supports social innovation to tackle homelessness and improves data collection.²

To put it briefly, the first obstacle, the lack of coalition between different levels of government, was negotiated in this treaty.

WELFARE DEPARTMENT COALITION WITH HOUSING DEPARTMENT: A SUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT

Particularly in the Flemish Region, the Welfare Minister and the Housing Minister improved their cooperation. Together they strengthened support for people under threat of eviction. NGOs all over the region provide support to avoid an eviction. As far as social housing is concerned, an in-depth evaluation was set up.³ NGOs (*Centra voor Algemeen Welzijnswerk*, General Welfare Centers) and local authorities both provide support for people under threat of eviction. The social workers achieved high results and cooperated with social housing organizations. The Minister for Welfare invested about 2 million Euro in enlarging the support capacity. After that, some pilot projects were set up for implementing supported housing in private housing (under the Anti-Poverty Ministry). Currently, the first partial results show a success-ratio of more than 75%.

In addition to this, both Ministers enabled several projects for supported living. Those projects, scattered over the Flemish Region, emphasize the urgency of supported living as a way to tackle homelessness. Some projects focus on people due to be released from institutions (penal institutions, youth care, etc. Other projects focus on the support NGOs can provide to give people a boost and let them live independently. All of the projects are situated in an experimental framework. Both the Ministers are evaluating

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2 <http://reflex.raadvst-consetat.be/reflex/pdf/Mbbs/2014/11/10/129494.pdf>
<http://codex.vlaanderen.be/Zoeken/Document.aspx?DID=1024743¶m=inhoud>

3 LESCRAUWAET, D., Evaluatie van de preventieve woonbegeleiding van de CAW's gericht op voorkoming van uithuiszetting, 2011. (CAW (NGO sector) Evaluation of the supported living method focusing on avoiding eviction) <http://www.kennisplein.be/Documents/Rapport%20preventieve%20woonbegeleiding%20%20geactualiseerde%20versie%20%20mei%202011.pdf>



the results at this moment and aim to integrate the results in their current policies. However, it is already clear that the cooperation of local authorities is very important, as well as a strong cooperation between the Departments of Welfare and Housing.

The new term (2014-2019) in Flanders gives opportunities to each Minister to determine new policy measures on this topic. Traditionally, each Flemish Minister writes down his/her ambitions for the next term in a policy report. It is interesting to note that the intention to tackle homelessness is mentioned in both policy reports.

BENCHMARKING

The lack of proper data is a serious obstacle to developing effective policies. In Flanders, registration of service users differs strongly between services. Different legislation regarding the sector encourages different registration systems. To address this issue, the Minister of Welfare commissioned a three-phase research project into this subject. Firstly, researchers from the University of Leuven⁴ counted the users of night shelters all over the Flemish Region during a short period of time. Secondly they also studied the users of homeless services (temporary accommodation). Finally, the number of evictions was mapped. This research is innovative in several ways. Besides there being interesting results about the characteristics of every subgroup within the research, some overall observations can be made. Three of them read as follows:

First of all, the Flemish government got a first insight into the number of homeless people in Flanders and their characteristics. For example, the high presence of children in night shelters and temporary accommodation is disconcerting. This raises a number of questions about the current policy.

Secondly, and very importantly, the results of this research showed a real problem regarding moving up the housing ladder. Several service users stay longer than needed in homelessness services. Besides the

costs of this, the humanitarian aspect is extremely urgent. As far as the costs are concerned, some interesting research has been done: other research had shown that the costs per user for temporary accommodation run up a daily bill that is twice that of housing-led methods like supported living or Housing First.⁵ It makes sense to think about innovative measures to address this issue.

Finally, the need for proper data collection emerged out of this research. Obviously, this is a long-term aim. The research methodology used can be fine-tuned, should be expanded to other ETHOS categories and should be repeated over time to strengthen the evidence base for policy. Acting upon this advice, the Minister of Welfare very recently (2015) started a project to collect proper data on two categories of the ETHOS typology, i.e. people due to be released from institutions (penal institutions, psychiatric hospitals and youth care) and people under threat of eviction. To achieve this, again, strong cooperation between several Departments of the Flemish and Belgian government is recommended.

TOWARDS A FLEMISH STRATEGY?

Regulated by law, the Flemish government develops an anti-poverty strategy at the beginning of each new term. This anti-poverty strategy presents the goals of the Flemish government for the next 5 years. Today, the measures outlined above offer great possibilities for moving onto a coordinated strategy to tackle homelessness. In addition, the Flemish anti-poverty strategy is currently the subject of many debates among all Ministers. In July 2015 there will be a decision on the content of this strategy for 2015-2020. The proposal to implement a global strategy to tackle homelessness is a rational consequence of the measures undertaken until now. This global strategy will focus on avoiding homelessness (prevention), will emphasize a housing-led approach and will pay serious attention to the participation of NGOs, local authorities and target groups when implementing the strategy. The process might not be finalised yet, but it will be continued!

The lack of proper data is a serious obstacle to developing effective policies.

4 MEYS, H., HERMANS, K., Nulmeting dak- en thuisloosheid, Leuven, 2014. (*Benchmark homelessness*)

http://www.kuleuven.be/lucas/pub/publi_upload/2014_EM_KH_Nulmeting%20dak-%20en%20thuisloosheid_SWVG.pdf

5 DEMAERSCHALK, E, LESCRAUWAET, D, De kost van trajecten in de thuislozenzorg, Leuven, 2014. (*The costs of homeless services*)



Towards an Integrated Approach – the Brussels Homeless Assistance Sector Adapting to Recent Challenges

By **Martin Wagener**,¹ *Director of La Strada - Support Centre for the Brussels Homeless Sector, Belgium*

Since the publication of the general report on poverty in 1994, homelessness has slowly emerged as a priority for public policy in Belgium.² Evidence for the diversification of the homeless population can be found in all research sources consulted from the 1970s in Belgium to present day.

Contributing to an integrated approach should not only be thought of as providing effective supportive action in situations of homelessness, but must integrate a better understanding of the mechanisms that lead to poverty and social exclusion in order to adapt structural policy. Many reports point to the lack of a transversal and consistent policy that takes into account the structural basis for preventing entry into homelessness and the diversity of support needed to get out of precarious situations.

The federal cooperation agreement regarding homelessness and inadequate housing in Belgium³ incorporates a definition: homelessness is a “*situation in which a person lacks their own home, is not able to get one by their own means and therefore has no place of residence, or temporarily resides in a shelter until housing is placed at their disposal*”. The merit of this definition is that it situated homelessness and inadequate housing in a context of a lack of housing, and that it makes explicit reference to the General rights of citizens. By adopting the ETHOS typology, the agreement retains a clear differentiation between roofless, houseless, insecure and inadequate housing arrangements which are all (at least shared) competences of the homeless sector.

The latest studies on homelessness have pointed to two major difficulties in particular: firstly, the housing-related problems are increasing the diversity of those who seek assistance in this sector.⁴ Secondly, even if the specific services for homeless people engage in some form of cooperation with the public sector and already existing associations, apart from giving rise to some very interesting approaches, the partnership with the public welfare services and other public services remains problematic.

In this article, we will discuss different themes related to an integrated approach in the Brussels-Capital Region. In fact, since the publication of a study led by Prof. Andrea Rea et al. in 2001-2,⁵ different public policy and service orientation recommendations have continually been put into place. In short, the principles of consistent prevention, adequate emergency and long-term care, shelter and assistance as well as the willingness to orientate supportive action through housing-led approaches which may offer more stable solutions are followed.

After discussing these implications, we will give an overview of some recent challenges noted by an ongoing working group in the region related to an integrated approach to homelessness.

THE BRUSSELS-CAPITAL REGION – A TERRITORY WITH A COMPLEX POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The complexity of the political structure of Brussels is very difficult to summarize. In short, there are different political levels which partly overlap: Brussels is composed of 1 region with three language-related (“community”) commissions, 2 communities and 19 municipalities which form together a part of the federal state of Belgium in the heart of the European Union. The regional government is organised through three different chambers “community commissions” (Flemish, French and bi-community). Besides the regional political organisation, there is another political division based on the language communities: the French- and Dutch-speaking community. Nearly all levels of this political structure share competences regarding directly or indirectly to homelessness. Note at this stage that the structural change regarding public welfare policies enables the communal, regional or federal policies to find a more consistent approach. The centre for equal opportunities has devoted one of its longest reports to emphasizing the need for a coordination of action on homelessness at local level.⁶

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3 Service public fédéral – chancellerie du premier ministre, *Accord de coopération concernant le sans-abrisme et l'absence de chez-soi*, 12 mai 2014 (MB 2014/206010)

4 Casman, M-T, Dierckx, D., Vranken, J. (2009), *Onderzoek naar OCMW hulpverlening aan dak- en thuislozen*, POD Maatschappelijke Integratie.; Observatoire de la santé et du social de Bruxelles-capitale, (2010) *Rapport bruxellois sur l'état de la pauvreté*, Rapport Thématique : Vivre sans chez soi, 2010 ; Lelubre M., (2009), *Freins et facilitateurs à l'accueil, l'hébergement et le logement des personnes sans-abri*. Association Chapitre XII du Relais Social du pays de Charleroi.

5 Rea A., et al., (2001), *La problématique des personnes sans-abri en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, Rapport Final*, ULB, 2001.

6 Service de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale, (2010), *Rapport bisannuel de lutte contre la pauvreté 2008-2009, partie 2 : «Pour une approche cohérente de la lutte contre le «sans-abrisme» et la pauvreté.*



In Brussels, where the institutional reality is rather complex, La Strada was created in 2007 by the united meeting of the Brussels-capital Region common community commission. It was created as a political tool to support informed decision-making by policy makers as well as to reinforce the networking of social stakeholders and to support innovative ideas and projects. The administrative council of La Strada is composed of delegates from the four (currently three) relevant ministers from the community commissions. The sector is represented by two federations (AMA, BICO) and the "regio-overleg" (Flemish social dialogue institution in Brussels) who represent respectively the services financed by the three community commissions (COCOF, COCOM and VGC.)⁷ These different instances try, through a collaborative effort with Brussels, Flemish and Walloon partners, with federations and associations, as well as with Ministers, to provide assistance to homeless people in its political, legal and organizational aspects.

The support centre La Strada promotes essential links with other sectors to carry out sustainable prevention and integration policies (health, housing, employment, etc.) and supports innovation in professional practice. All this involves a finer knowledge of homeless populations and their trajectories. The support centre performs essentially 3 functions: (1) Observatory function: measurement and analysis of data, as well as the creation of recommendations, (2) Networking function: facilitating dialogue in the sector and helping implement homelessness policies, (3) Information point/helpdesk function: information for homeless people, giving voice to the homeless population through group gatherings and raising public awareness.

One of the difficulties of this networking approach remains cooperation with stakeholders 'outside the sector' in a context where political responsibilities are partially shared. This may look like the 'ping-pong game' referred to by Julien Damon⁸ to characterize the problems of stakeholder partnerships, without a clear definition of their scope or a central arbiter referring to the responsibilities and the problems each one has to face. Homeless support services in the sector are nowadays largely confronted with more general societal challenges that exceed their competences and resources (work, housing, food, hygiene, health, education, etc.). This tension may reveal a shift from preventive to curative action, that might lead to a situation where the lack of services of general interest are put on the shoulders on specific stakeholders, which do not have the resources to deal with the diversity of situations. The main challenge remains first and foremost improving cross-sector cooperation, especially with the public welfare services (CPAS/OCMW) and

other key stakeholders, as well as the introduction of stakeholders not yet part of the sector that share sector policies in order to promote a more comprehensive approach to situations of poverty and social exclusion.

THE EVOLUTION OF HOMELESSNESS GOES TOGETHER WITH THE EVOLUTION OF SERVICES

Even if the Brussels homeless sector has a long history of short- or mid-term shelters and warming-rooms, the 1990s were marked by several historical developments which occurred in different sectors. They all had a significant effect on the kind of people who required assistance from support services. The closure of the detention centres for beggars and vagrants, the 'Buisson' law regarding the closure of psychiatric hospitals in favour of outpatient services and a change in the treatment of asylum seekers created new categories of people searching for a refuge in homeless support services. The sector has seen a significant increase in emergency shelters, and on the other hand, the 1990s were marked by a change in other services offered. In Brussels, we can trace this back to the creation of a night shelter in 1988 (Pierre d'Angle) and of the Samusocial in 1999, which meant that supported housing grew and street work was developed (Diogenes in 1995). Day shelters with showers, hygiene services and/or social restaurants were created. More widely, there were some profound changes in the way global social services work, on how prisoner reintegration services function and how people with addictions were treated. More generally, a global change based on the multiplication, development, specialisation and generalisation of different support services in contact with homeless people took place. This phase of building services evolved simultaneously with an increasing professionalisation of employees in the sector.⁹

A number of studies point to the diversification of "homeless profiles". Figures from the 2014 census in Brussels¹⁰ specify that 'entrenched rough sleepers'¹¹ only make up more or less than one seventh of all the people who are hosted in homeless services. They have more difficulties in accessing aid, being "blocked" by the arrival of new categories of people seeking help. One of the major stakes resides in the difficulty of finding adequate and affordable housing. In the context of this change, we also have to remember a major change in the analysis of the predicting factors. Social difficulties gained more and more attention compared with other explanations based on psychological (or moral) disabilities.¹² Considerable efforts have been undertaken to better understand the situation of homelessness on a statistical and qualitative basis.

The main challenge remains first and foremost improving cross-sector cooperation

7 Wagoner, M., (2009), *La réorganisation du secteur d'aide aux sans-abri en région de Bruxelles-Capitale. Les articulations entre le monde politique, le travail social et les habitants de la rue*. Mémoire présenté dans le cadre du Master 120 en sociologie, UCL.

8 Damon, J., (2002), *La question SDF - Critique d'une action publique*. Paris : Presses universitaires de France, pp.243-246.

9 De Backer B., (2008), *Les cent portes de l'accueil - Héberger des adultes et des familles sans-abri*, Charleroi : éditions [Couleur Livres] ASBL, p.35.

10 La Strada, (2015), *Troisième dénombrement des personnes sans abri, sans logement, et en logement inadéquat en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. Le 6 novembre 2014*.

11 Thelen L., (2006), *L'exil de soi - Sans-abri d'ici et d'ailleurs*. Bruxelles : Travaux et Recherches 52, Publications des Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis.

12 Brousse, C., Firdion, J.-M. & Marpsat, M., (2008), *Les sans-domicile*, La Découverte, « Repères », Paris, p.24.



PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Historically, approaching homelessness was marked by repression, paternalism and exclusion. The general report on poverty¹³ showed an evolution concerning the 'voices of the poor' and their capabilities: they now have their own word to say about their social position. The terms of participation, empowerment and emancipation slowly move into the language of the professionals. The memo from the Combat Poverty, Insecurity and Social Exclusion Service retains the priorities for the last Belgian Presidency of the European Union and points to: *"the importance of the participation of people living in poverty in discussions on public policies that directly relate to the fight against poverty, but even more, their voice should be heard about all policies."*¹⁴ Note that it is important to situate the different levels of participation in the context by addressing questions about the political functions of their voice.¹⁵

SOME MAJOR ISSUES STILL REMAIN

The recommendation from the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness points to the question: *"Are 'housing-led' policy approaches the most effective methods of preventing and tackling homelessness? The jury calls for a shift from using shelters and transitional accommodation as the predominant solution to homelessness towards 'housing led' approaches. This means increasing access to permanent housing and increasing the capacity for both prevention and the provision of adequate floating support to people in their homes according to their needs."*¹⁶ The Belgian federal cooperation agreement points to the same necessity. If the European recommendations appear to be sufficiently defined, their application to the national or regional level is more complex.

An ongoing working group put in place by the regional homeless dialogue body which is led by La Strada brings together stakeholders from the homelessness and closely related sectors (public and general welfare services, physical health, mental health, poverty, addiction, prisoner integration services, etc.). The working group accompanies an ongoing political negotiation between the relevant ministers.

Even if the final report of the working group is not finished, we would like to point to five major issues which need particular attention in the future.

1. First of all, the members point to the need to deepen a comprehensive, cross-sector and integrated approach to homelessness that is guided by a rights approach, in order to integrate citizens into society (housing, work, culture, dignified life, etc.). In this context, housing becomes not just the ultimate goal, but it may also be the starting point for suitable support.
2. It is crucial to improve prevention more broadly and related to specific issues (debts, tenant evictions, domestic violence, leaving institutions, etc.) in order to encourage people to keep their housing by providing appropriate care and/or support.
3. To better address complex situations, it is important to strengthen existing initiatives that underpin the support network around the person (cf. Housing First) as well as intersector cooperation (mental health, health, addictions, assistance to ex-detainees, youth assistance, general social services, migration, disability, etc.).
4. Undocumented migrants who do not currently have access to public welfare need at least access to health care and other options for (temporary) shelter.
5. The sector currently provides solutions, but there is a great need to strengthen the levers which allow access to housing:
 - ▶ Render housing financially accessible and enhance access to social housing
 - ▶ Broaden support for social real estate agencies
 - ▶ Increase solutions in the framework of supported housing and Housing First
 - ▶ A regional platform in the form of 'home catch' projects require structural negotiation between homeless and housing sectors in order to open practical opportunities in terms of housing
 - ▶ Invite the municipalities/public welfare service to invest in transitional or crisis accommodation in order to facilitate local approaches
 - ▶ Supporting initiatives that strengthen social ties at the local level (cf. social isolation)

This shows that cooperation should continue to ensure a follow-up to the existing achievements of the various sectors.

¹³ ATD Quart Monde, et al., *op.cit.*

¹⁴ Service de lutte contre [...], *op.cit.*

¹⁵ Vitali R., (2010), « Les fonctions politiques de la parole des pauvres », in : *Images et usages de la pauvreté*, Berthier A. (éd.), Bruxelles, PAC éditions, pp. 93-106.

¹⁶ Feantsa, (2010), *European Consensus Conference on Homelessness: Policy Recommendations of the Jury*, Bruxelles, p.2.



Driving Action to End Homelessness; the Role of National and Regional Strategies and Grassroots Campaigns

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INTRODUCTION

Over half the countries in the EU have developed and started to implement national homelessness strategies over the past 15 years. This is an admirable achievement and clearly a step in the right direction to tackle the causes of homelessness and find appropriate, housing-led solutions for people who are homeless. However, in many countries, national strategies have not had the impact that NGOs, politicians, local authorities and those experiencing homelessness have hoped for.

FEANTSA and its members regularly monitor the national strategies in place across Europe, and are regularly called upon by national authorities as they develop, implement and evaluate the strategies. In addition, FEANTSA keeps a list of countries with national strategies on its website,³ and gathers information about the implementation of these in Country Fiches.⁴

This article does not seek to provide a comprehensive review of the existing national and regional strategies, but rather to ask if there are ways to make them more effective. We explore ways to mobilise new resources and make better use of existing ones, and examine a concrete example of how this has been done in the United States, highlighting how Europe can learn from this example.

GOALS OF HOMELESSNESS STRATEGIES

FEANTSA has promoted and facilitated transnational exchanges between homeless services across Europe for the past 20 years. Analysis and reviews of homeless policies in this framework have revealed that a variety of approaches to combating homelessness exist.⁵ National and regional homelessness strategies share a common and important ambition: to reduce and end homelessness. Many strategies are based on the principles that arose from FEANTSA's Consensus Conference in 2010.⁶ Strategies to end homelessness should be founded on 5 goals, which were promoted by the FEANTSA 'Ending Homelessness is Possible' campaign:⁷

1. No one sleeping rough
2. No one living in emergency accommodation for longer than is an 'emergency'
3. No one living in transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on
4. No one leaving an institution without housing options
5. No young people becoming homeless as a result of the transition to independent living

WHAT CAN NATIONAL STRATEGIES ACHIEVE?

What can a homelessness strategy actually contribute? By setting out objectives and areas of focus, and in the best cases underpinning those with legislation, rights and funding, regional and national governments can establish a framework in which they can test, measure and change their policies to reduce and end homelessness.

Homelessness strategies have the potential to transform the context in which people work; to give social workers, housing workers, civil servants, all actors, the security of a framework in which to plan and implement effective policies, as well as target resources.

The Finnish homelessness strategy⁸ exemplifies how a government can virtually eliminate homelessness by using a homelessness strategy to plan, invest and adapt. Finland succeeded because the strategy effectively addressed the housing needs of people who were homeless. The government department responsible for the strategy worked with partners to invest in the construction and renovation of thousands of apartments, specifically for people who were homeless. This housing-led approach is closely linked to Housing First; the core principle of these approaches is the provision of permanent housing with support services.

Successful strategies put data collection at the core. In Denmark and Scotland, the homelessness strategies include a firm commitment to collecting measurable and reliable data about who is homeless and which housing options are available. In both cases, governments adapted their strategies to reflect the findings of research and data collection, and were more successful as a result.

By setting out objectives and areas of focus, [...] underpinning those with legislation, rights and funding, [...] governments can establish a framework [to] test, measure and change their policies to reduce and end homelessness.

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3 <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?rubrique143&lang=en>

4 <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article853&lang=en>

5 Toolkit for Developing an Integrated Homelessness Strategy - <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article630&lang=en>

6 <http://feantsa.org/spip.php?article327&lang=en>

7 <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article171&lang=en>

8 A comprehensive review of the Finnish homelessness strategy was published in 2015: <https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/153258>



BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING STRATEGY GOALS

Not all strategies succeed. This can happen when a government, in partnership (or not) with NGOs and other actors, take the time to create a strategy, but then fail to make adequate resources available. It can also be that strategies encourage actions which fail to tackle the underlying causes of homelessness, and the reasons why people become entrenched in certain situations. For many countries hit hard by the economic crisis and austerity measures, cuts to social welfare and in particular to the most vulnerable, have been accumulating over the past several years. These 'failed' or 'on paper' strategies are disappointing. Advocates and NGOs are disappointed that they cannot count on stable, predictable funding for their services. Local authorities are pushed from both sides: more individuals and families need support and housing, but the flow of resources from central or regional government has been shut off.

We have seen some exceptional successes in Europe, like Finland, where homelessness has been dramatically reduced, and where the focus can now be turned to issues like prevention of young people becoming homeless, ensuring quality accommodation, etc. However, for many countries, the economic crisis of the past five years has constrained government resources, particularly when it comes to ensuring access to adequate housing and moving people on from emergency and transitional accommodation.

While the numbers of people who are homeless has increased significantly since 2008, local level service providers – be they homeless services, housing services, or other organisations supporting people who are homeless – have seen a sharp drop off in their funding. This leaves us asking how, in such a context, service providers and other actors at a local level can play a real part in achieving the laudable goals of the national strategies.

People working in the homeless sector know that there is more that can be done, even with scant resources. There are ways to use existing homelessness strategies to leverage change, to be creative in developing new and nimble ways to find and allocate housing. Most social and housing workers do this daily, but are likely doing so on an ad hoc basis, possibly in isolation from others who are striving for the same goals. With a better understanding of the people who are experiencing homelessness and their housing needs, coupled with better knowledge of the housing that is available (or might become available) we can make a real impact. We can move rapidly towards the goals expressed in those homelessness strategies identified above.

LESSONS IN MOBILISING ACTION

By working together in different cities and towns in Europe, we can mobilise and motivate each other to take action, even if a national strategy is underfunded or dormant. In such circumstances, different tactics and forms of action are required. We must find ways of co-ordinating existing resources more effectively, and methods for inspiring people to act in new and

unfamiliar ways. We believe these difficult demands can be met through broad-based campaigns, and there is much we can learn from initiatives in the United States (US) and Canada.

The 100,000 Homes campaign,⁹ which ran from 2010 to 2014, helped mobilise 238 communities across the US to house 105,580 people in chronic housing need. The campaign asked homeless organisations and partners to join the campaign, encouraging them to apply certain principles and methods in tackling chronic street homelessness.¹⁰ There are many lessons to be learned from this initiative, but for the purposes of this discussion, certain pieces of learning stand out.

Firstly, the campaign set a big and audacious goal, with a relatively short timescale. In the evaluation of the initiative, those who had participated emphasised the critical importance of this:

'According to respondents, the Campaign had the greatest impact on increasing the sense of urgency around ending chronic homelessness and helping communities feel connected to the federal goals of ending chronic and veterans' homelessness'

An urgent and audacious goal meant that participant communities had to look again at their processes and resources with added vigour. Without significantly more resources, local communities had to find ways of better using what they did have, making more efficient use of the housing stock and targeting their help toward the most vulnerable people. What is counter intuitive about the campaign is that, rather than viewing an urgent and audacious goal as an extra burden, communities found it motivating. The credit for the success of the campaign goes to those communities that stepped up to meet the challenge.

A firm focus on collecting and using data to improve outcomes was another important element of this campaign, and this links to our points above about the role of national strategies in creating the right framework. The campaign used local housing placement goals to urge communities to be creative, encouraging them to place 2.5% of their most chronically homeless individuals per month. This target served to connect the actions of local practitioners and volunteers to the overarching goal of housing 100,000 people. Hence, campaigns can make clear that vital link between local acts and bigger social change; between national strategies and local implementation.

This learning raises some crucial questions. Can similar initiatives be applied in a European context, and how can we integrate national strategies with broad-based campaigns like the one described above? FEANTSA and BSHF, in partnership with organisations in a number of European cities, are exploring how lessons from initiatives like the 100,000 Homes campaign, and learning from other European successes like those in Finland, can be transferred. As this work develops, we will share our learning with you, and encourage you to participate.

⁹ <http://100khomes.org/>

¹⁰ <http://100khomes.org/read-the-manifesto>



National Strategy for Homeless People: An Overview and Experience on the Ground

By **Ana Ferreira Martins**,¹ *National Social Action Director* and **Ricardo Ferreira**,² *Social Action Department, AMI Social Action Department, Portugal*

OVERVIEW

The right to housing is consigned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 25, n° 1) concerning the right to an adequate standard of living for health and well-being.

The Portuguese Constitution (1976) also proclaims the right to housing (art. 65^a, n°1) “Everyone has the right, for himself and his family, to housing of an appropriate size, with hygiene conditions and comfort that preserve personal intimacy and family privacy” (2010, GIMAE).³

Following these structural documents and other European tendencies, such as the 2008 Written Declaration approved by the European Parliament – where Member States committed to ending street homelessness by 2015 – and recognising that the current response to the homeless phenomenon was poor, the Portuguese Government launched, in March 2009, “The National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People 2009 - 2015 – Prevention, Intervention and Attendance”. This was the first National Strategy pertaining to homeless people in southern Europe.

The Strategy was built upon the work of an inter-agency group that brought together public and third sector organisations. Considering the complexity of homelessness, this group covers several sectors: from social action to health, from employment to housing. A group is responsible for the whole process of implementation, monitoring and evaluating the Strategy: the GIMAE (Strategy Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Group)

The document includes two main aims: Aim 1 is to improve current knowledge about homelessness, information, awareness and education; Aim 2 is about training the workers on the ground.

AIM 1

Improving knowledge on homelessness, information, awareness and education

Working on a specific target group requires knowledge of the phenomenon, knowing who the people we are targeting are and how many people are in that situation. When we talk about homelessness, exactly which people are we talking about? The

organisations that work with homeless people did not or do not share the same ideas, which generates confusion when trying to delineate projects for this population. The Strategy came to “solve” this problem by defining the concept of homelessness: “We consider to be homeless those who, regardless of nationality, age, sex, socio-economic condition and mental and physical health, are **roofless**, living in public spaces, in emergency accommodation or in precarious places; are **houseless**, staying in temporary accommodation for this purpose”. Some objections to this concept might be voiced. It is very restrictive since it only contemplates the two first categories in the ETHOS typology, and one of those categories (houselessness) it is restricted since it only includes those social services corresponding to the Social Security definition of “Temporary Accommodation Center” leaving out people, for instance, who are victims of domestic violence and, because they have no other option, are staying in shelters. On the other hand, by omitting the last two categories from ETHOS typology, many people who live, for example, in insecure situations such as those who are at risk of evictions due to lack of payment of their rent or mortgage might find themselves at risk of becoming homeless – the number of people in default regarding their mortgage payments has increased from 125,377 people in 2009 to 147,998 people in 2014.⁴ This might be a consequence of the large increase in the rate of unemployment since 2008 (7.6%) which reached its peak in 2013 (16.2%)⁵ and is now, for the first trimester of 2015 at 13.7%.⁶ Also, the number of people at risk of eviction from rented housing might increase with the promulgation of a new law for the rental market which predicts faster evictions and an increase in rent value. Thus, this narrow definition of homelessness might contribute to a failure in the area of Prevention.

Still as part of Aim 1, the Strategy had planned for the creation of a “Monitoring and Information System” (SIM) which was predicted to be available for reference institutions in January 2010 but still does not exist. Thus, global knowledge about the homeless population is still very limited. This also conditions the dissemination of information on the concept of homelessness and the construction of planned educational programmes to fight prejudice and discrimination against homeless people.

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3 2010, GIMAE. Estratégia nacional para a integração de pessoas sem-abrigo. Propriedade: Instituto da Segurança Social

4 Accessed in May 2015 <http://www.conheceraçrise.com/indicador/63/no-de-pessoas-com-emprestimo-em-incumprimento#tab-0-1>

5 Accessed in May 2015 <http://www.conheceraçrise.com/indicador/23/taxa-de-desemprego#tab-0-1>

6 2015, INE, Estatísticas do emprego – 1º trimestre 2015



The Strategy is a good example of how things could be done, but because of a lack of political will, are not done.

AIM 2

Training the workers on the ground

This includes training directors and technical workers who have direct contact with the homeless population and the creation and recognition of a qualified group of institutions, called "reference entities". These training programmes will have to be built from scratch, something that was predicted to happen by the end of 2010, but institutions are still waiting for it to happen.

Although training of teams hasn't started yet, the Strategy itself provides the model for intervention and management for working with the homeless population and aims to use the available human and financial resources with no additional funding. The model is based on a multidimensional approach comprising diagnosis and case management, including a 'life project' – built together by the case manager and the service user – directed towards social inclusion and autonomy. The model is to be implemented at local level through the local Social Networks.

Experience on the Ground

The implementation of the Strategy model has been carried out locally through the NPISAs (Core Homelessness Planning and Intervention Groups). These NPISAs are to be constituted where appropriate, considering the persistence and existence of the phenomenon, out of the local Social Networks. NPISAs are inter-institutional partnerships composed of public and private entities with direct or indirect intervention with homeless people. Thus, the creation of these NPISAs has occurred according to the will of local authorities. According to Baptista (2013),⁷ 14 NPISAs have been created since 2009. The Lisbon NPISA was only created in January 2015.

With 12 social services (including two night shelters and two street teams in Lisbon and Oporto) spread throughout Portugal, AMI is part of NPISAs where those social services are found. Thus, AMI is part of NPISAs in Almada, Oporto, Coimbra and recently Lisbon. In Almada, AMI has been the group Coordinator and in Coimbra it has coordinated the service delivery group.

As part of the NPISA's work, we meet regularly with the other local institutions who work with homeless people. According to the experience of our technicians on the ground, these regular meetings have allowed a better gelling between the several entities and a clearer definition of each organisation's intervention, especially with the creation of the case manager figure. Thus, an accelerated and better

response to individual situations has been possible, for instance in accessing psychiatry, general health and additional services since these entities are also part of the NPISAs. Also, this closeness has allowed for better knowledge about the local homeless phenomenon and avoids duplicating services, as information is frequently shared and organisations are more committed to supporting each other's work.

On the other hand, there have been no improvements in terms of financial support, neither for institutions nor for homeless people. AMI and the Almada NPISA presented a project to get five homeless women off the streets but, due to a lack of social housing and a lack of financial support, this project is still waiting to be approved. When the Strategy was presented, a budget of 75M euros was announced for its implementation, but there is no information available about these funds or whether it will be allocated (Baptista, 2013). No specific training has been provided to any of the NPISA's we're part of either.

To sum up, the National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People is operating in a positive way at local level. On the other hand, the centralising role of the group responsible for its implementation, monitoring and evaluation (GIMAE) has cut off its action with almost everything left to be done. There is no centralised database, there has been no specific training for technical teams on the ground, the concept and the strategy itself have not been adequately disseminated, there is no monitoring and no evaluation (as interactions between GIMAE and NPISAs ceased at the beginning of 2013). The Strategy is a good example of how things could be done, but because of a lack of political will, are not done. And this is probably the main problem: this Strategy was never turned into a legal document despite the efforts of the Inter-Institutional Group to get it through the Council of Ministers.

Thus, there is concern on the part of the civil society organisations, which led the Portuguese FEANTSA members to meet the cabinet of Solidarity, Employment and Social Security Ministry in early 2013 to express their concern regarding this Strategy and to ask what the Ministry's future plans for the Strategy were. Recently, in January 2015, AMI and other civil society organisations sent a letter to the same Minister and were present at a meeting with representatives from the Minister's office, expressing the same concerns. As a result, nothing but being sent from office to office has happened (we are now turning to the Social Security Institute). The Strategy ended in March 2015 and we are still trying to find out whether there is a future plan for homeless people in Portugal.

⁷ Baptista, I. (2013) *The First Portuguese homelessness strategy: progress and obstacles*. European Journal of Homelessness. Vol 7, Nº 2



Challenges for Developing a Strategic Response to Homelessness in Greece in the Current Economic and Political Context

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Greece is currently suffering the deepest recession in its contemporary history. According to recent data (reference year 2014), Greece is among the countries with the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate (23.1%), unemployment rate (26.1%) and it has the highest proportion of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion before social transfers (35.7%) of the 28 EU countries.³ When it comes to homelessness, there is no clear indicator allowing for systematic measurement of this form of extreme poverty. The definition used here is based on the ETHOS typology that includes four different categories to work out who is considered homeless. What is known empirically until existing data is collected and provides more reliable evidence, is that what dramatically increased over the past years in Greece is invisible homelessness. Extreme poverty conditions are experienced behind closed doors: living in insecure and inadequate housing conditions without electricity, water, proper heating or under threat of eviction. Households having their electricity cut off and figures on the reduction of heating oil consumption justify these data. At the end of 2013, the only electricity company counted 330,000 households having their electricity cut off, of which only 140,000 made an attempt to regulate their debt and start paying back. Figures on evictions are not published. Defining ways to measure homelessness is key to allowing policy makers to acknowledge the volume of the problem, but this is just one part of the equation, the others being having the political will and the necessary resources.

There are various studies on the welfare system in Greece that criticize it for being inflexible, fragmented, mostly based on family and offering only informal social services to those excluded from the social protection system.⁴

GETTING HOMELESSNESS ON THE AGENDA

Voices began calling for the development of a strategic response to homelessness in Greece long before the crisis, in the 1990s. Although the figures were and always will be subject to question about their validity and credibility, it could be commonly agreed with a certain degree of confidence that they all somehow indicate clear increasing trends over the past years and that these trends have been geometrically amplified due to the radical recession the country has experienced. The crisis has not only affected those that were living at the edge of the social web by pushing them out of it: it has also pushed to the margins all those who used to form the lower middle-income class, those who never thought that their lives could be altered in such a radical way, those who never thought that they might need assistance from the non-existent welfare system.

Despite all the efforts in the years prior to the crisis to push the homelessness issue higher up the political agenda, it was only in 2012 that the State put any effort into formulating a policy on homelessness. In January 2012, a call was announced by the Ministry of Health and Welfare asking civil society and the church, through an open coordination method, to define homelessness and put forward a strategic action plan. What was achieved then was the formulation of the first ever homelessness bill that has now been voted by the parliament with amendments and has placed homeless people among those who need attention and created an Action Plan to Fight Homelessness.

Why has the Action Plan never actually been put in action? How has the Troika affected policy on homelessness? What is the role of EU as regards homelessness? What is the role of the State in Greece?

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³ These data derive from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU – SILC), Source: Hellenic Statistical Authority, Living Conditions in Greece, April 2015. See also: Marinakou, M., EAPN Greece: Key facts and figures on poverty!, EAPN Greece, 2012, accessible at <http://www.eapn.eu/images/stories/docs/EAPN-MEMBERS-publications/2012-poverty-facts-and-figures-GREECE-Maria-Marinakou.pdf>

⁴ Therefore, to a large extent, the protection of those in need has been considered for many years as a family duty towards its members, rather than a recognized human right that the State should safeguard through a coherent welfare system. See: Ferrera, M., 1999 op cit, pp.44-45; Castles F., Ferrera M., 'Home Ownership and the Welfare State: Is Southern Europe Different?', South European Society and Politics, Volume 1, Issue 2, 1996, pp.163-185. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14716120010001631631>; Martin, C., 'Social Welfare and the Family in Southern Europe: Are There Any Specificities?' in Mire Florence Conference, Comparing Social Welfare Systems in Southern Europe, vol. 3/1997. Paris, Mire, pp.315-335.; Flaquer, L., 'Family policy and welfare state in Southern Europe', WP num. 185, Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, Barcelona, 2000; Sapounakis, A. (2002) 'National Report on Homelessness in Greece – Service providers for temporary accommodation', FEANTSA, Brussels



The political instability and the frequent changes meant that the comprehensive Action Plan to Fight Homelessness was left in the drawer of the Minister's cabinet.

Evidence could suggest clear answers to these questions but policy making has never been a purely rational exercise anywhere in the world. That rings true for all levels of policy making, starting at local level.

AN UNPREPARED WELFARE SYSTEM

The enactment of the Financial Support Mechanism in 2010,⁵ followed by the launch of a Task Force for Greece, with the aim of providing technical assistance (2011),⁶ and the second Financial Agreement (2012)⁷ set the frame for major reforms that immediately had an impact on the social welfare sector. Among them, the following should be highlighted: a) the transfer and reorganisation of welfare agencies, bringing them under the authority of different ministerial authorities, i.e. the transfer of the General Secretariat of Welfare from the Ministry of Health and Welfare to the Ministry of Labour (which was renamed as the "Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity"),⁸ along with the creation of a "National Register of Beneficiaries of Social and Welfare Benefits"; b) the abolition and/or merging of key welfare and social agencies, with as a major example the dismantling of the Social Housing Sector;⁹ c) continuous expansions of the responsibilities of the local government in welfare sectors (especially at municipality level), which were not followed by the necessary budget commitments on behalf of the State.

In an environment that has been, and still is, changing rapidly, the Greek State appears to be failing to take the time to consider and plan or even learn and use its existing experience accordingly. It reacts spasmodically to a constant emergency rather than acting proactively or using the opportunity that the crisis

provided to address existing structural weaknesses in the system. Tellingly, the only measures that were put into place for homeless people were emergency ones due to weather conditions. Social Structures that were funded through EU resources were left up to the political will of the local governments and have only been taken up by a limited number of them, and then in an inadequate way.

THE NEED FOR POLITICAL WILL

Public administration constraints in terms of adequate, transparent, easy-to-use mechanisms, along with capable and adequate human resources at all levels, also form a key challenge. The political instability and the frequent changes meant that the comprehensive Action Plan to Fight Homelessness was left in the drawer of the Minister's cabinet. It was always going to take time to revive the idea of the need for a strategy in a Minister's office that had taken over "in times of crisis". Recently, it was picked up again with a view to being revised, despite the fact that the existing one was never tested for its impact!

Political will has been the driver of changes. It is certain that the Greek State has a clear responsibility to at least formulate the basis and the framework for a comprehensive strategic response to homelessness, using the recommendations available so far, the experience and resources from the EU and Greek society. It also has a clear responsibility to call for action and use all the available social and financial resources from both the private and public sectors. There still remains the question of who will be brave enough to break the vicious cycles of clientelist policy-making and lead the necessary structural changes, bearing the political cost.

5 M. Marinakou, D. Soulele, I. Pertsinidou, Anti-Poverty Network Greece, EMIN Country Report Greece, Piloting Minimum Guaranteed Income Scheme in Greece: Expectations and Challenges, , November 2014

6 Information available on the EU Commission – Task Force Greece, official webpage:

http://ec.europa.eu/greece/news/economic-news/economic3_el.htm

http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/taskforce-greece/index_en.htm

7 L4046/2012 (GG A 28/2012), L.4093/2012 (GG A 222/2012)

8 a.9 L.4052/12 (GG 41 A/1-3-2012)

9 Abolition of the public organisation in charge of providing affordable housing (Greek acronym OEK) by a.6 L4046/12, resulting in the absence of social housing structures in Greece.

Specifically, it is also noted that: "In Greece, the most dramatic situation, the package of austerity measures passed by the Parliament on 12 February 2012, includes the dissolution of the public organisation delivering low-cost housing to employees and workers which represented the only form of social housing in the country", in CECODHAS Housing Europe's Observatory Research Briefing, Impact Of The Crisis And Austerity Measures On The Social Housing Sector, Year 5 / Number 2, February 2012.



France, An Unbreakable Glass Ceiling Over Housing Exclusion?

By **Marc Uhry**, *Europe Representative, Fondation Abbé Pierre, France*

France is one of the EU member states with the strongest legal framework to address homelessness, together with strong public policies without rupture over decades. Thanks to this framework and policies set up after WWII, living conditions have improved massively, in such proportions that are probably unprecedented in the history of the world. However, 30 years ago, the engine of progress started to slow down, the core of housing exclusion started to harden, there was no more improvement and there started to be more and more households living in the most precarious conditions and in more severe deprivation, slums appeared again, ghettos rose up and social housing became inaccessible. And all this without major budget cuts. So, what went wrong?

A few figures: 17% of permanent residences are social housing tenancies and France is building more than 100,000 new social housing units each year, in a country of 65 million inhabitants. The NGO sector has 300,000 beds available for various specific social needs. The country spends an average of €45bn on housing policies (2% of GDP) per year. That's quite a lot. The private sector is subsidised, 0% mortgages are available for low-income households who want to become homeowners; thermal renovation is subsidised up to 80%, etc. Individuals receive benefits and there are social services for people with multiple needs.

The legal framework is ambitious: high quality standards, an enforceable right to housing, complex and long eviction processes including social considerations, a protected status for tenants compared with other European countries. Households with mortgages are quite protected, so banks tend to avoid risky loans and there are very few repossessions compared with in our neighbouring countries. There is a legal obligation for every city with more than 5,000 inhabitants to offer a specific place for travellers living in caravans. There are laws regulating real estate activity.

So, why did this glass ceiling over households appear? There are many reasons, but four in particular need to be underlined.

1. THE 'NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT': COSTLY AND LOSING PUBLIC CONTROL

In 1977, a reform began to move funds previously allocated to social housing as a whole, to give individual benefits. The idea in itself was understandable: why would the State put money into building, while households could become richer and not need solidarity? It is fairer to put money into *the use* of housing, adapting public support to income, family size and rent levels.

This was a mistake. Firstly, the State lost its control over what is produced and where. Secondly, when prices started to rise, there was nothing else to do but follow them through giving out higher rates of benefits. For the following twenty years, construction rates were very low and slow, were not adapted to social needs, geographical realities, morphology and service needs. In a context where urban planning policies were considered old-fashioned and Leviathan,

shrinking cities were abandoned and everyone rode on the wave of speculative bubbles in attractive territories. This led to speculative hotspots and huge lack of housing (close to one million dwellings missing in 2000, according to economist Michel Mouillard).

The worldwide housing bubble, when housing prices doubled in ten years in France, forced government to put more money into benefits while restricting access to them. Despite the fact that 25% of the population that used to be eligible for benefits is not anymore, government spending on benefits increases by €800 million a year.

As the planning and monitoring report already concluded in 1980: "with this reform, the State pays more and loses control of the situation."¹

2. THE UNHEALED WOUND OF COLONIAL WARS

The war in Algeria, a very violent tragedy, ended in 1962 after 150 years of the harshest form of colonialism. Over the following less than five years, two million people had to "come back" to France, and perhaps two million more came as more or less temporary workers. At that time, in the seventies, workers had the right to bring their family with them. This was the time when vast areas of social housing blocks were built too fast and allocated too quickly, as it was imagined that growth and progress would heal the still fresh wounds. These areas, full of trauma and hostility between peers, were the first ones hit by massive unemployment from 1977 onwards, exposing them to despair. In 1981, the first riots appeared in social housing areas and was a growing movement towards general uprising from 2006 onwards. There were a few attempts to renovate some areas and to promote some economic development and cultural projects in these areas, but nothing serious enough to compensate for the high level of islamophobia in France, the only country where the hijab is forbidden by the law for example for mothers who want to go visit their children's school. Governments were always coherent: the right wing more or less supported deregulation and limitation of social housing, but the left wing developed, under the ideology of 'social mix',² a class hatred towards working-class people (against football, against tv, against supermarkets, gay friendly - all understandable mottos but that end up creating a new 'bourgeois order'), paralyzing intervention in poor suburbs.

¹ Commissariat Général du Plan, Rapport 1980, Paris, p257.

² France was criticised in 2007 by the Council of Europe for discriminatory use of the concept of social mix (collective complaint Feantsa vs. France, 2007)



With thirty years of the rise of the National Front, it is impossible to have a meaningful debate on what policies to design so that migrants and their children are better included, which leads to a terrible image of social housing stock, and more and more specific ghettos (fuelled by price increases, which pushed poor people into poor areas, and played a role in the 'socio-specialization' of urban areas).

3. MORE RIGHTS... FOR FEWER PEOPLE

Housing rights and related rights have developed considerably over the past decades: in terms of tenant status, quality standards, discrimination, an enforceable right to housing, etc.

At the same time, vulnerable groups saw their rights reduced. The hardcore of homelessness comes from there, from the three main categories of victims of having their rights restricted:

- Migrants: in the late 1980s, people fleeing persecution were not considered refugees until the State said so, but became asylum seekers, with restricted rights. In 1991, the right to work and to social support for asylum seekers was scrapped. They were supposed to be given places in new specific shelters, but in these shelters there was one bed for five asylum seekers. Then categories of migrants were divided into administrative sub-categories, with varying rights. A lot of them fell through the gaps between two categories, a trap meaning that those with few social rights were forced to ask for help from emergency assistance.
- People suffering from psychiatric disorders. 130,000 out of 180,000 beds in psychiatric hospitals were got rid of over the last 25 years. The initial objective was a good one: preventing people from being imprisoned under the pretext of 'healthcare'. So they were released, but without any policy imagining where they could go, how they could face a "free market" context, with a lot of other prospective tenants considered less risky. Up to now, under budget orthodoxy (even in France...) no alternative has been found, adding to the scale of the problem.
- Young people: the minimum wage is available (first by law, then in practice) to over 25-year-olds, to encourage people to work instead of using the benefits system. However, up to 25% of unemployed young people could have chosen to be as they can live happily with half the minimum wage.

These three categories were more and more obliged to ask for help from social services, the NGO sector and emergency assistance. These services became overwhelmed and at the same time, social housing became fossilized by the lack of households moving out (too big a step given the market price), too-segregated areas, and more people applying for social housing.

4. RIGIDITY OF STAKEHOLDERS

The NGO sector exists and is paid to work towards "social inclusion", based on a rather medical metaphor: they help people who had an 'accident in life', to heal and to go back to an 'autonomous life', through individual psychological and social support. This doesn't work if people are experiencing housing exclusion because of external causes: massive unemployment, administrative barriers or a permanent disability for example. But NGO staff are trained to work in that way, finance is organized that way, the paradigms remain and so almost nothing has changed over the past twenty years, except more money being allocated to provide more social services to individuals who actually need something else.

Social housing is still being organized to house the working class, despite the fact that tenants are getting poorer every year. The whole finance system is based on that premise. As a result, rents are too expensive for more applicants for recent social housing and old social housing areas are more and more segregated. At the end of the day, who really complains about the poor being segregated in poor areas? Would you like them as your own neighbours? As your own tenants? As a mayor, would you increase social expenditures to welcome their children into your community?

Overall there is a lack of thinking about systemic policies. Attempts to cut individual benefits budgets are ridiculous when there is no alternative in terms of housing policies. What is the strategy to provide the right size home in the right location, with a price compatible with the household's income, when the market is unable to provide such a supply? What is the strategy on the ground, in speculative cities, in shrinking cities? What is the taxation strategy to boost social justice and dynamic construction development at the same time? How can we go back to a more thought-out form of development through town planning without bringing too much rigidity? How can we help NGO services adapt to the changing needs and influence the structural causes of homelessness and housing exclusion?

Nothing is stopping us from doing this. After WWII, France and other European countries managed to address difficulties far deeper than what Europe has to face now, with far fewer means. The only glass ceiling is our own laziness to imagine, cooperate and solve issues instead of managing them. The glass ceiling is our lack of ambition, our collective bitterness. Only 5% of French people and Europeans are at the core of housing exclusion, not a high figure, compared with the means we have to deal with the problem together. It just needs political will, and we are the people, so we are the will. Enough now - let's go, let's break the ceiling!



How to Cause Homelessness

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The European Observatory on Homelessness, which operates under the auspices of FEANTSA, is designed to share innovation in responses to homelessness. Through the freely available *European Journal of Homelessness*² and an annual European Research Conference,³ the Observatory promotes and discusses the best evidence there is around stopping, reducing and preventing homelessness. Disseminating all this evidence is not always a straightforward task, as services or ideas that work in one part of Europe might need to be adapted to work properly in another part of Europe.

In trying to understand new and effective ideas about preventing and reducing homelessness that might be useful in Europe, the Observatory also gets the opportunity to look at a lot of other information. Some of this information relates to how *not* to organise responses to homelessness.

In reality, there is no European country in which at least some mistakes have not been made at some point in time. Different aspects of homelessness have been effectively ignored, been responded to with services and policies that were to prove at least partially inappropriate or ineffective and responses to different forms of homelessness and homelessness in different locations have been – and continue to be – variable. In a context where everyone has made at least some mistakes, it would be unfair to highlight some examples of mistakes over others, indeed to point at particular countries, service models or policy responses, so this article will focus on mistakes in general, rather than the particular experience of any one country.

DEFINING HOMELESSNESS

It is possible to cause homelessness by defining it in very narrow terms. Using a very narrow definition means that research, strategy and service delivery are concentrated only on very small groups of people. The best example of this is when homelessness is effectively defined *only* in terms of people with very high support needs whose experience of homelessness is *sustained* or *repeated*. This means people living rough or in emergency accommodation, who have very poor health, unusually high rates of severe mental illness and who also use illegal drugs and drink alcohol at very problematic levels.

This group of homeless people does exist and their needs are high. There is a clear, powerful, humanitarian argument, as well as strong financial arguments, for stopping this form of homelessness.⁴ Yet the evidence also shows that only *small* numbers of homeless people have very high support needs and experience sustained and repeated homelessness. They are often

regarded as the majority of homeless people because they use homelessness services more *often* and for much *longer* periods than other homeless people, and are also more likely to spend significant time living on the street.⁵ When homelessness is discussed and thought about, it is often this small – but highly visible – group of people who politicians, and some service providers and researchers, tend to focus on.

People with lower support needs, who are short-term users of emergency accommodation and who experience living rough for shorter periods can receive less attention. This is in part because they are not around for as long and service providers and researchers are less likely to notice them, particularly if there is no systematic recording of who exactly uses homelessness services over time.⁶ This means a key aspect of homelessness may be missed.

Focusing on this small group also effectively contributes to homelessness causation in other ways. If homelessness is defined *only* in terms of very high need people living on the street, or in emergency accommodation, it narrows the discussion of homelessness and narrows the focus of policy and service delivery. The key effect is that homelessness that is primarily, or only, caused by economic and social factors receives much less attention, or is simply ignored. Multiple families living in housing designed only for one family, many people sharing a single, small room in a house, people living in housing, other buildings or structures, that are unfit for human habitation, are *not* defined as homeless. Equally, people with no legally guaranteed rights at all to their accommodation, and groups including homeless women and young people, who may be more likely to sofa or couch surf are *not* defined as homeless.

By definitions and measures used in some European countries, such as Finland or the UK, these groups of people *are* homeless and are clearly experiencing the most damaging form of extreme poverty in Europe. Yet these groups can either be classified as experiencing housing problems or not recognised at all, because they are hard to track, and receive less attention than a minority who, in reality, just happen to be homeless in a much more visible way, because they are in emergency accommodation and on the street.

PERCEIVED CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS

The focus on this small, very high need group allows several things to happen. First, it becomes possible to disassociate a lack of affordable, adequate housing from homelessness causation. Second, it becomes possible to dissociate lack of sufficient income and more general labour market failures to provide reasonably paid work as a cause of homelessness.

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2 <http://feantsaresearch.org/spip.php?article85>

3 <http://feantsaresearch.org/spip.php?article146>

4 http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/feantsa-studies_03_web.pdf

5 http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/fea_020-10_en_final.pdf

6 http://repository.upenn.edu/spp_papers/96/



Definitions of homelessness shape policy responses. A narrow definition, focused on emergency shelters and living rough, allows homelessness to emerge and to grow in Europe.

There is clear evidence that inadequacies in affordable housing supply, lack of comparatively well-paid work can be associated with homelessness causation. Yet if homelessness is largely viewed only in terms of very high need people, with high rates of severe mental illness and problematic drug/alcohol use, the possible roles of economics and affordable housing supply in homelessness causation *appear* to be quite limited.

Focusing only on a high-need group can mean that individual support needs are seen as the main reason - or perhaps the *only* reason - as to why homelessness has occurred. Economics and housing supply might still be portrayed as having a role in homelessness causation, but only in the sense of providing a context in which the effects of high support needs, always seen as the main 'cause' of homelessness, are amplified by wider problems, such as a lack of affordable housing supply. An individual, couple, or family, losing housing through poverty, or effectively homeless in insecure, inadequate, overcrowded, unsafe accommodation, because that is all that is affordable, effectively *disappears* from debates about homelessness. Again, this is essentially because they are homeless in places in which they are not seen.

Using drugs and drinking, if presented as a choice, means failures and shortfalls in mental health, health, social work and social protection systems can also be largely, or wholly, ignored as possible causes of homelessness. Here, particular pictures of homelessness, derived from visible, high need populations living rough and in emergency services on a sustained or repeated basis, combined with mass media images of homeless people as drug users, are important. Following these ideas, the problem is not that, for example, mental health systems failed and that caused homelessness, it was the 'choice' of the homeless person to drink alcohol that meant mental health systems could not engage, or perhaps just a 'refusal' to keep appointments, which 'caused' their homelessness.

In reality, newer research suggests that people often experience deteriorations in well-being as homelessness becomes repeated or sustained.⁷ This makes the argument that behaviour and support needs directly cause homelessness in every case, or at least in most cases, harder to sustain. It might be argued that homelessness persists in part because someone takes drugs. However, if that drug use starts after homelessness occurs, it is whether that drug use really causes homelessness, or whether it is the fact that homelessness occurred and was allowed to persist in the first place, due to various trigger factors that may be unrelated to individual actions, that is the real issue. There is now almost overwhelming evidence that services

built specifically for very high need, repeatedly and long-term homeless people, that attempt to solve homelessness by changing *behaviour*, are founded on a misconception. Housing First, throughout Europe, is showing that services that respect fellow human beings, which are not based on ill-founded assumptions that they themselves are the ultimate cause of their own homelessness, are the ones that are most likely to work.⁸

A revolution in service delivery, the use of Housing First and housing-led services, is underway, not just in Europe but throughout the economically developed World. These services, whose now undoubted effectiveness centres on recognising that sustained and repeated homelessness is something experienced by fellow human beings, who have opinions and rights that should be respected, are positively transforming European policy towards long-term and repeated homelessness.⁹

Definitions of homelessness shape policy responses. A narrow definition, focused on emergency shelters and living rough, allows homelessness to emerge and to grow in Europe. Chronic insecurity of tenure, inhuman levels of overcrowding, various forms of accommodation that are unfit for human habitation and links between general income poverty and of homelessness - among homeless people who do *not* have high rates of severe mental illness, do *not* use drugs and do *not* drink alcohol to excess - are largely ignored. It means that homeless people who are less likely to use homelessness services and more likely to sofa surf, including vulnerable young people and women with sometimes high support needs are often ignored. It means that family homelessness, the homelessness of children in insecure, unfit, unaffordable, overcrowded housing is not defined as 'homelessness'.

Further, the reality of the needs of those people who are actually seen as being 'homeless', i.e. living rough and in emergency shelters, can also be misunderstood. In reality, not everyone who sleeps on the street or stays in emergency accommodation is necessarily a very high need individual who is homeless on a sustained or recurrent basis; there are those with lower needs, who can just require adequate, secure, affordable housing. Understanding that this need also exists, which may be particularly important in stopping homelessness from becoming sustained or repeated, is important. Finally, the idea that homelessness is always a choice, linked to specific behaviours that must be changed, stands on brittle glass and services built on that assumption perform less well than services that do not pathologize homeless people.

7 http://works.bepress.com/dennis_culhane/119/

8 http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/fea_020-10_en_final.pdf <http://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/2008/substancemisuse.pdf>

9 http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/np_and_ib.pdf

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