

# III. WHY AND TOWARDS WHAT A WAY OUT MUST BE FOUND

**T**he right to accommodation is a fundamental right, which must not be called into question. It does not run counter to the right to housing; it is a backup in emergency situations. In Europe, the emergency reception system fulfils a role that it should not have to. Systematised emergency accommodation is a reactive response to homelessness (neither curative nor preventive), disorganised (without strategy) and segmented (not continuous). The usefulness of dedicated emergency accommodation is not in question here; it is the widespread and institutionalised use of emergency accommodation as the main system of response to homelessness that needs to be challenged. Where homelessness has been successfully tackled, emergency accommodation is still present, in a residual way. In **Helsinki**, after the implementation of a proactive and integrated homelessness eradication policy based on Housing First principles, there are now 52 emergency beds where people only stay for a very short of time because they are supported and redirected as quickly as possible to a safe housing solution.

# 1.

## THE COST OF HOMELESSNESS IN EUROPE

The human and social cost of the rise in homelessness in Europe is enormous. The fact that today, throughout Europe, more and more people are living on the streets or in unsuitable emergency accommodation for a long time is a continuing violation of the most basic human rights. But in reality, political decision-making is at least as much motivated by the cost-effectiveness of public policies as by the respect and implementation of human rights. It is therefore important to stress that the failure to combat homelessness and the maintenance of ineffective homelessness policies also have real economic costs, which are sometimes greatly underestimated. When it becomes a long-term stop-gap solution and loses its primary function of responding to emergencies, accommodation inevitably entails very high costs<sup>103</sup>.

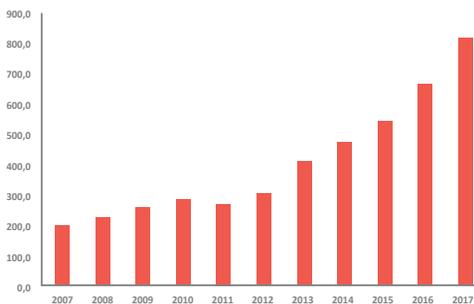
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See European Observatory on Homelessness (2013), 'The Costs of Homelessness in Europe – An assessment of the current evidence base', EOH Comparative Studies on Homelessness, available at: [http://www.housingfirstguide.eu/website/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/feantsa-studies\\_03\\_web-Cost-of-Homelessness.pdf](http://www.housingfirstguide.eu/website/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/feantsa-studies_03_web-Cost-of-Homelessness.pdf)

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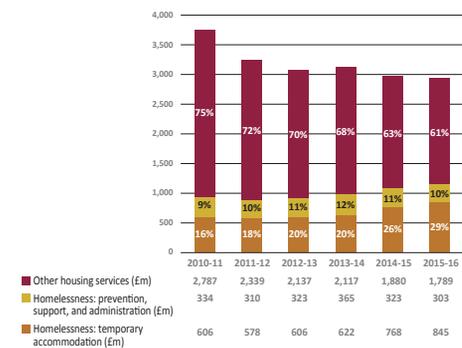
National Audit Office - England (2017), 'Homelessness Report', available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Homelessness-Summary.pdf>

### TRENDS IN SPENDING ON EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION IN FRANCE (IN MILLION EURO)



Source: Foundation Abbé Pierre (2019), 24e Rapport sur l'état du mal-logement en France [24th Report on housing exclusion in France].

### TRENDS IN LOCAL AUTHORITY SPENDING IN ENGLAND ON PREVENTING AND COMBATING HOMELESSNESS



Source: National Audit Office (2017), *Homelessness Report*.

In **England**, the National Audit Office, which is in charge of evaluating public policies, criticised the ineffectiveness of public measures to combat homelessness, particularly in terms of cost-effectiveness, in 2017. It pointed to the increase in public spending on homelessness services coupled with the simultaneous reduction in spending on prevention. Local authorities' spending on temporary emergency accommodation increased by 39% between 2010-2011 and 2016-2017, while spending on housing services decreased by 21% over the same period.<sup>104</sup> In Ireland, public spending on emergency and temporary accommodation increased from EUR 19 million in 2013 to EUR 46 million in 2017, according to Focus Ireland. There is also the question of delegating services to private stakeholders. In Dublin in 2017, more than 50% of emergency accommodation

## OVERSUBSCRIBED, INSECURE AND UNSUITABLE: EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION IN EUROPE

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European Observatory on Homelessness (2019), *op. cit.*

### 106

Foundation Abbé Pierre (2019), *24e Rapport sur l'Etat du Mal Logement en France* [24th report on housing exclusion in France], *op. cit.*, p. 298.

### 107

Pleace N. & al. (2013), in Demaerschalk E., Lescauwae D. (2015), *The Costs of Flemish Homeless Care*, European Journal of Homelessness Vol. 9, No. 1, June 2015, available at: <https://www.feantsaresearch.org/download/article-4-4165792000-4194371024.pdf>

### 108

Sullivan & al. (2000), in Demaerschalk E., Lescauwae D. (2015), *op. cit.*

### 109

Van Leerdam J. (2013), 'Analysing Costs and Benefits of Homelessness Policies in the Netherlands: Lessons for Europe', European Journal of Homelessness Vol. 7 No. 2, available at: [https://www.feantsaresearch.org/download/jvl\\_review/172622809360155612.pdf](https://www.feantsaresearch.org/download/jvl_review/172622809360155612.pdf)

### 110

The scope of the cost includes the contribution of the public authorities to housing, fees, rent (e.g. subsidies/grants, housing assistance); the cost of social assistance, if any; the cost of social or adapted property management, where appropriate; and the cost of using health services. Agence Nouvelle des Solidarités Actives (2017), *Le Logement d'abord, et après – Bilan et propositions pour la généralisation du logement d'abord en France* [Housing first and foremost – summary and recommendations for the general application of a "Housing First" policy in France], pp. 14-15, available in French] at: [https://www.solidarites-actives.com/sites/default/files/2018-03/Ansa-AT-Logementdabord-Rapport\\_2017\\_VF.pdf](https://www.solidarites-actives.com/sites/default/files/2018-03/Ansa-AT-Logementdabord-Rapport_2017_VF.pdf)

spending was directed to private for-profit operators, whose objectives are not always in line with the needs of the people accommodated. In the same year, the top service providers for homeless households were hoteliers/B&Bs and five voluntary organisations.<sup>105</sup> In Dublin, annual spending on stays in hotels and guesthouses increased from EUR 455,000 in 2012 to EUR 36 million in 2016. Allocating public money to lucrative entities that do not, in the first instance, have the desire, expertise or experience to provide decent accommodation for homeless people is absolute nonsense, especially when one considers the drastic consequences of living in hotels on families and children, as described above. In **France**, the use of hotels represents an average daily cost of EUR 17.10 (compared to an average of EUR 6.70 per day for a place in rental intermediation), or nearly EUR 281 million for 45,139 places in 2017.<sup>106</sup> Contrary to popular belief, night shelters are not the cheapest option in terms of public spending. The expenses incurred by one night in a shelter have been estimated by various studies. On average one night costs EUR 53 in **Flanders** (including spending on staff, infrastructure, maintenance, as well as morning and evening snacks), EUR 43 in **France**, EUR 54 in **Germany** and EUR 78 in the **Netherlands**.<sup>107</sup>

The costs associated with homelessness go beyond those associated with emergency accommodation alone: a homeless person may cross paths with health, police and court services along his or her journey. In **Flanders**, the annual cost of a person who has spent eight months in emergency shelter and four months in prison is estimated at EUR 28,320; a person who has spent six months in an emergency shelter and six months in psychiatric service costs EUR 62,280 per year. It should be noted, however, that not all homeless people involve such a high level of public spending given that not all homeless people go through night shel-

ters, the psychiatric services or prison services. For example, some studies show that homeless people with psychiatric problems actually use public services less than the general population.<sup>108</sup> According to a cost-benefit study conducted in 2013 in the **Netherlands**, investing EUR 1 in effective homelessness eradication policies reduces public spending on other important ancillary areas (health, criminal justice, housing) by at least EUR 2: prevention is better, in human and financial terms, than cure.<sup>109</sup> Research in **France** has estimated that over five years, the paths of homeless people who have managed to access social housing cost an average of EUR 9,000 per person per year, while the paths of people who went back and forth between the streets and the accident and emergency department cost around EUR 20,000 per person per year, more than twice as much.<sup>110</sup> According to a study by Crisis, in **England**, allowing a person to sleep rough for 12 months costs public authorities, in addition to the human cost, GBP 20,128 (about EUR 23,000), compared to GBP 1,426 (about EUR 1,629) if a successful prevention response were implemented.<sup>111</sup>

More generally, the total annual cost of housing exclusion in Europe is estimated by Eurofound at EUR 194 billion. The transformation of inadequate housing, or at least the upgrading of sub-standard units to an acceptable level, would cost around EUR 295 billion (based on 2011 prices). If all improvements were made immediately, the cost to European economies would be repaid within 18 months through the estimated savings (health care gains and improved societal benefits). In other words, for every three euros invested, two euros would be recovered in one year.<sup>112</sup>

Governments must invest in the eradication of homelessness. Across Europe, the number of people in need of emergency accommodation is increasing, or at best remaining stable, and ways

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Crisis (2015), 'At What Cost', available at: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/knowledge-hub/cost-of-homelessness/>

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Eurofound (2016), 'Inadequate housing in Europe: Costs and consequences', Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/fr/publications/report/2016/quality-of-life-social-policies/inadequate-housing-in-europe-costs-and-consequences>

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For more information on integrated strategies to eradicate homelessness, see FEANTSA and Fondation Abbé Pierre (2018), 'Third Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2018', available at <https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2018/03/21/the-second-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe-2017>

**2.****INVESTING IN A 'HOME'****114**

Pleace N, Quilgars D. (2013), 'Improving Health and Social Integration through Housing First | A Review', Centre for Housing Policy/ University of York and European Observatory on Homelessness, available at: [https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/2013/improving\\_health\\_and\\_social\\_integration\\_through\\_housing\\_first\\_a\\_review.pdf](https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/2013/improving_health_and_social_integration_through_housing_first_a_review.pdf)

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<https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2018/03/21/the-second-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe-2017>

**116**

Y-Foundation (2018), 'A Home of Your Own', *op. cit.*, p. 30.

out are blocked. Simply continuing to increase public spending on emergency measures will not solve the system being overwhelmed. The implementation of real strategies, allowing targeted investment in the prevention and a lasting way out of homelessness, is the only effective solution.<sup>113</sup> It is against this backdrop that emergency accommodation will be able to fulfil its

function, more humanely and with greater dignity, as an emergency solution only. It has been proven through a number of studies that Housing First represents a more efficient use of public money than other services. The reason for this is simple: Housing First's success rates in ending chronic homelessness are higher than any other service model<sup>114</sup>.

The previous edition of this report<sup>115</sup> showed that the eradication of homelessness was not utopian but required the adoption of integrated, proactive, realistic strategies based on access to housing as a fundamental right. The transition from a system of managing emergencies to an effective homelessness policy must be supported in financial and political terms: a place in secure emergency accommodation cannot be replaced by the availability of a single place in individual housing. In **Finland**, the experience of implementing a Housing First public policy has shown that a place in secure emergency accommodation should be offset by making five new places available in individual housing. For example, Helsinki's largest night shelter Alppikatu 25 was converted into 81 supported housing units between 2009 and 2011. A

common goal for improvement was set, residents were included from the very beginning in the planning and implementation of changes, rules were redesigned to no longer throw anyone out without a solution, restrictions were replaced with rights and responsibilities teams were trained in new measures and more professionals were hired. Overall in Helsinki, night shelters and hotels had 2,121 places for homeless people in 1985, compared to 52 in 2016. On the other hand, the number of people in supported housing has increased since the 1980s and since the adoption of Housing First principles in 2008. In Helsinki, the number of supported housing places increased from 127 in 1985 to 1,309 in 2016 and the number of places in independent rental units from 65 in 1985 to 2,433 in 2016<sup>116</sup>.

## OVERSUBSCRIBED, INSECURE AND UNSUITABLE: EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION IN EUROPE

**THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF HOUSING FIRST IMPLEMENTATION HAVE BEEN DETAILED BY THE HOUSING FIRST EUROPEAN HUB<sup>117</sup>.**



Certain conditions must be met to implement the transition.<sup>118</sup> These include a better understanding and rigorous monitoring of homelessness; respect for the unconditional right to accommodation; massive provision of affordable housing and the mobilisation of a strong non-re-sidualised social housing sector; organising support in housing according to the needs of the individual; strengthening capacity for leadership, training and change among professionals in the homeless sector and related sectors; as well as strengthening cross-disciplinary, preventive and integrated approaches.

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<https://housingfirsteurope.eu/>

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See Haut Comité pour le Logement des Personnes Défavorisées (2018), *5 conditions nécessaires à la mise en œuvre du "Logement d'Abord"* [Five conditions necessary for the implementation of "Housing First" policies], available [in French] at: <http://www.hcpld.gouv.fr/parution-du-rapport-annuel-cinq-conditions-a-la-ai76.html>

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Rosary H. & Lardoux C. (2018), *op. cit.*

regulation of the private rental market, support for temporary occupancies in urban areas, etc. are all potential levers. A necessary cultural and perception shift in political leaders and the general public is essential in order to promote housing as a right and not as a commodity. The criminalisation of homelessness and the creeping privatisation of public space should be strongly condemned.

**In Scotland**, the law requires local authorities to provide permanent accommodation for homeless people. To make the law effective, local authorities rely on social housing. In Edinburgh, 75% of public housing places were allocated to homeless households in 2016/2017.

Budget cuts at the expense of emergency accommodation services in the name of Housing First are a major concern, e.g. in France and the United Kingdom, and rightly so.<sup>119</sup> Reducing the emergency accommodation stock should not be taken as a starting point for the implementation of a Housing First plan, but as the result of such a plan, proving its effectiveness.

Emergency accommodation in its rightful place must become a short-term transition service, accessible to all, and a platform for redirecting people to appropriate solutions. Empowerment, peer support, adaptation of the environment and professional practices to the needs and resources of the people being cared for must be at the centre of homeless services. The psychological, emotional and social needs of the people being cared for must become the basis for action by the services, through an inclusive approach, both in the physical environment and in interpersonal relations.

**'... But how can housing be found?'**

Member States and cities as well as the different levels of local, regional, national and supranational governance must get better at cooperating and leaving more room for manoeuvre. In parallel with putting a halt to social welfare cutbacks under austerity, particularly in relation to housing, there is no shortage of levers that could be used. The mobilisation of social and 'very social' housing, the private housing stock, and vacant housing for social purposes as well as the

**“Roberto is an alcohol-dependent wheelchair-bound resident who has complex needs. He consumes five litres of alcohol per day. He made a lot of trips back and forth between services, until he came here. We asked him what the minimum amount of alcohol he could handle in a day was. He told us three litres. So, we made an arrangement: the nurse gives him one litre in the morning, one litre at noon, one litre in the evening; he pays for the alcohol, we administer it. It’s been five months since he arrived at the residence and his situation has greatly improved.”<sup>120</sup> JJ**

The principle of continuity of care in emergency accommodation must not only make it possible to avoid putting people back out on the streets after one night, which is key to safeguarding people’s dignity, but also to ensure that solutions are always ‘a step up’ i.e. towards sustainable, secure, safe and affordable housing solutions for housing, supported or not, depending on the individual’s needs. Prevention and early intervention have a key role to play here. It is important for service providers to understand behaviours as well as to focus more on the needs and difficulties of people who are chronically homeless. There is a vicious circle between homelessness and trauma. Housing should be obtained as soon as possible to minimise the possibility of traumatic experiences being accumulated.

**“Professionals are not sufficiently aware of low-threshold treatment. It is essential to train teams in this. All stakeholders must understand that there are people who will never reintegrate, not in the way we understand it. These people need to be helped, too. That’s the meaning of not abandoning anyone.”<sup>121</sup> JJ**

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Sonia Veloso,  
medical doctor and  
director, URPSA,  
Porto (October 2018).

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Sonia Veloso,  
medical doctor and  
director, URPSA,  
Porto (October 2018).

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National Audit Office  
(2017), *op. cit.*

Homelessness is a structural problem, caused by the perpetuation of inequality, poverty, and the failure of social, housing, migration and health policies. A cross-disciplinary approach, meaning the end of public action being taken in isolation, is therefore key to making an effective transition. The failure of austerity to public policies is obvious. Irrespective of whether we are talking about specialised child welfare centres, hospitals, prisons, institutional and community mental health facilities, or support systems for asylum seekers, budgetary restrictions make it impossible to monitor long-term progress.

In general, the drastic austerity measures applied to social policies has had a direct impact on homelessness. The reform of housing benefits in **England**, by making housing even less affordable for people receiving benefits, has been criticised by the Court of Auditors as one factor that explains the increase in the number of homeless people.<sup>122</sup> Since 2012, the termination of a private rental contract has become the leading cause of homelessness in England. According to studies conducted by Shelter, by 2020, 83% of housing in England will be unaffordable for tenants receiving housing assistance. It is therefore essential, and possible, to combat housing exclusion at its source, through homelessness prevention policies closely linked to policies to combat social exclusion. Effective prevention would consist of ensuring that in all public social services it is possible to ensure their users benefit from decent and safe housing at any given moment and without exception.

Prevention is now at the centre of the 2016-2019 national strategy to end homelessness in **Finland**.<sup>123</sup> In Vienna, **Austria**, an effective eviction prevention model for the entire rental sector has been put in place by the city council. The courts are obliged to inform the social services department of an eviction order, which results in better support for the households

concerned. Examples of integrated prevention policies also exist in the **United Kingdom** where a system of legal obligations for local authorities to prevent homelessness has been established. Local authorities in Wales and England have an almost universal duty to try to prevent homelessness for anyone within their administrative borders who is at risk of homelessness within 56 days. This is achieved by setting up a Housing Options team. The team is assigned to a 'at risk' person and gets in touch with other services depending on the circumstances (i.e. security deposits, housing advice and legal assistance, local social housing and letting agencies with quick access to housing as well as comprehensive support for addictions, debts, physical and mental health, social assistance, etc.). These services work closely with homelessness relief services, which aim to rehouse users as quickly as possible and minimise the experience of homelessness when it occurs. The results of this legislation are encouraging. However, 'while legislation may be successful, it will always be compromised by more pressing social problems, such as the lack of available housing, ongoing social reforms that push many people towards homelessness, and chronic cuts in local authority funding'.<sup>124</sup> In Scotland, the same types of Housing Options services were introduced in 2009 with an implementation fund for local authorities which created local platforms for the exchange of good prevention practices.<sup>125</sup> Through the introduction of these prevention services as well as the adoption of local Housing First policies and the abolition of some priority access criteria in 2012, the number of requests for assistance for homeless people fell sharply between 2009 and 2014 in Scotland, and then stabilised.

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Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016-2019, disponible sur : <https://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/action-plan-preventing-homelessness-finland-2016%E2%80%932019>

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University of Salford Manchester (2018), 'Lessons 'need to be learned' from Welsh homelessness law', disponible sur : <https://www.salford.ac.uk/news/articles/2018/lessons-need-to-be-learned-from-welsh-homelessness-law>

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<https://www.gov.scot/policies/homelessness/housing-options/>

**What is meant by 'ending homelessness'?**

- **No one lives on the street**, in tents or in their cars any more.
- **Everyone has a secure and stable place to live**, no-one lives in emergency accommodation in the medium or long term without a quick exit plan to access permanent housing.
- **Where homelessness can be predicted, it can be prevented** : no one leaves their home, or is forced to leave their home or an institution (prison, hospital, child welfare services, etc.) without a housing solution.

Crisis (2018), Everybody in: How to end homelessness in Great Britain, available at: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/the-plan-to-end-homelessness-full-version/executive-summary/>