



Portugal - National Report

Housing Solutions for People who are homeless

FEANTSA Annual Theme 2008

Housing and Homelessness

Introduction

The “Instituto da Segurança Social, I.P.” [Institute of Social Security, P.I.] (ISS) conducted various studies in 2004 and 2005 to ascertain the situation of the homeless. These studies were published by said Institute in 2005 providing a summary of the main conclusions and proposals for action:

- “Homeless – Trends in studies at European level and an examination of the situation in Portugal;”
- “The homeless: (in)visible realities;”
- “Characterisation of social responses and services for the homeless;”
- “Rooms, boarding houses and lodging houses: the housing situation in Lisbon and Porto;”

This study and the information made available by the various national partners, in particular the “Associação CAIS,” the “Serviço de Assistência das Organizações de Maria” (SAOM), the “Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa,” and data collected by the “Instituto da Habitação e Reabilitação Urbana” (IHRU) as well as information gathered through newspapers, constitute the basis for this report.

The long-term housing instability is precisely one of the elements that contributes most to the accumulation of precariousness and that frequently shapes the combined effect of family breakdown and alienation from work and society.

Housing in a room is an effective option for avoiding extreme situations, compared with the possibilities of temporary accommodation such as hospices or reception centres. Recent studies have shown the importance of housing first for the successful integration into society of homeless persons, for without housing the remaining support strategies cannot succeed easily (ISS,IP, 2005: 224)

This study (ISS, 2004/05:27) makes the following recommendations for housing:

- Restructure and expand the network of transitional housing (currently arranged by temporary accommodation centres or social housing), by creating mechanisms that make it possible to go from emergency housing situations to integration processes in social housing;

- Promote links with the “Instituto Nacional de Habitação” (INH) [National Institute of Housing] so that the homeless can gain access to housing as part of self-help processes;
- Ensure that the quality of the housing is commensurate with the costs, thereby guaranteeing a certain uniformity in the quality patterns as well as coherent value for money;
- Clarify the nature of the relationship between the institutions that provide housing support and service providers, in particular as regards issues of an ethical nature, about the transmission of information concerning the users and the way in which they are treated;
- Consider the importance, potential and limitations of transitional housing.

The condition of the homeless is the most serious manifestation of social exclusion given the estimated number of persons afflicted by this problem, with a preponderance of men over women.

1. Basic questions about the housing market

According to information provided by the “Agência Lusa” on 7 March 2008, the “Programa Especial de Realojamento” (PER) [Special Re-housing programme] was launched in 1993 with the promise to put an end to huts in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto; in the meantime, fifteen years later, there are still several thousand families to be re-housed near the large cities. The afore-prepared study refers to the existence of 1.6 million households in need of small and medium-sized repairs, and defines as a priority the re-housing of more than 160 thousand families who live under insalubrious conditions.

The housing overload (more than half a million) and the existence of families housed in precarious conditions were the elements that enabled experts to conclude that there is a need for 200 thousand housing units in Portugal, and for works in 190 thousand units.

When the PER was created, the housing shortage was estimated at 30 thousand housing units, plus the survey conducted by the former “Instituto de Gestão e Alienação do Património Habitacional do Estado” (IGAPHE) [National Institute for the Management and Transfer of Housing Assets], pointed to the existence of some 43 thousand huts in the Lisbon and Porto areas, and the need to build more than 48 thousand housing units.



The data provided by the Porto city council on 31 December 2007 on the social housing offer are as follows:

Number of districts: 48

Number of social housing units: 12,960

Number of families residing in social housing: 12,722

Average rent: €3.51 (not including the districts of S. João de Deus and S. Vicente de Paulo)

The houses of the former “Comissariado para a Renovação Urbana da Área da Ribeira-Barredo” (CRUARBCH) [Commissariat for the Urban Renovation of the Ribeira-Barredo Area] comprise 888 housing units.

In recent years, poverty in the city of Porto and the surrounding municipalities has worsened, through a combination of the failure to meet basic needs such as food, clothing and housing, and factors of a subjective nature. Social exclusion is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon owing to various causes, including in particular long-term unemployment, addiction to legal or illegal drugs, deficiency, mental or emotional fragility, lack of education or occupational skills, isolation and loneliness. (Colectânea de ensaios CAIS [Anthology of Essays], 2004).

2. Public accommodation/housing policies

The State has de facto a leading role to play in the fight against and prevention of social exclusion owing to housing, not only because it defines the policies to be applied at the local, regional and national level, but also as the guarantor of the applicability and efficacy of projects and programmes that it creates for that purpose.

In the meantime, there are no public housing policies geared to the homeless.

Beginning in the 1960s, the state invested in the construction of Social Housing Districts. Up to that time, there were no fewer than fifteen possible arrangements for the promotion of economical housing, with some six dozen certificates or qualifications to that end.

In spite of the many entities connected to social housing, between 1953 and 1962, scarcely 5% of the total housing units were created with state support.

With the accession of Portugal to EFTA (1959), and the commencement of relations with the EEC and the eruption of the colonial war, there was a gradual turn on the economic front, calling for renewed industrial dynamism, and by extension, urban development capable of responding thereto.

Against this background, the Intercalary Development Plan (1965/67) identified deficiencies in public housing, as well as the limitations of the private sector in producing social housing, and launched what would ultimately become Development Plan III (1968-1973).

With the return of the expected migrants, it was necessary to create social infrastructures and facilities, by building nearly 50 thousand housing units, for which purpose the “Fundo de Fomento da Habitação” (FFH) [Housing Development Fund] was created, an entity which from that day would centralise the competencies until then attributed to the Ministry of Public Works as regards housing.

In giving concrete form to – and in managing – the Integrated Plans, the FFH was succeeded by the “Instituto de Gestão e Alienação do Património Habitacional do Estado” (IGAPHE) [National Institute for the Management and Transfer of Housing Assets], the “Instituto Nacional de Habitação” (INH) [National Institute of Housing] and the current “Instituto da Habitação e Reabilitação Urbana” (IHRU) [Institute of Housing and Urban Renewal].

In this way, greater decentralisation and cooperation between the central and local administrative authorities occurred as of 1985 with regard to the Social Housing Programmes for rent (Legislative Decree n° 110 of 17 April 1985 and Legislative Decree n° 226 of 6 June 1987).

In 1993 was established the ‘Plano Especial de Realojamento’ (PER) [Re-housing Special Plan] to fill the housing gaps through the eradication of huts (Legislative Decree n° 163 of 07 May 1993). Nevertheless, this plan is limited only to metropolitan areas registering a strong growth, not only due to migration flows from the country to the city, but also from other countries, in particular Portuguese-speaking African countries (known by the Portuguese acronym PALOP), and Eastern European countries.

In the meantime, since the 1990s, new policies on housing have spread. These policies are geared to the promotion of housing, taking into account private initiative (mortgage loans to private individuals and cooperatives), for acquisition, alteration and renovation purposes geared proportionately to low-income and needy families.

In 1995, the PER absorbed the “Instituições Particulares de Solidariedade Social” (IPSS) [Private Institutions of Social Solidarity] (Legislative Decree n° 87 of 05 May 1995 and Legislative Decree n° 93 of 28 January 1995).

It is the responsibility of the IURH to draw up standards, certify projects, finance programmes for municipalities, cooperatives, companies and private individuals, as well as to manage programmes and to supervise works.

According to the ‘Jornal Publico’ [a Porto daily] of 8 May 2008, the State is now presenting a new “Plano Estratégico da Habitação” (PEH) [Strategic Housing Plan], pursuant to which it is to cease its intervening and providing functions for the population, to assume functions of greater regulation and supervision. Local authorities will assume a preponderant role, and the implemented strategy will give rise to many public-private partnerships. These public-private partnerships are a major innovation, in that they see a “vital” need to adjust the demand to the supply of housing units by making better use of the existing residential stock.

These programmes define the needs and priorities of local authorities regarding housing and, according to the technical recommendations, municipalities should preferably get organised into associations or inter-municipal companies for such purposes. This strategic housing plan relies heavily on rent and on renovation, to the detriment of construction of new housing units. It moreover suggests the public acquisition of real estate to be rented to low-income families and, to give impetus to the rent market, recourse to a regional housing exchange (to be created) that brings together landlords and tenants.

Another factor that is gaining great preponderance in the proposals of the strategic plan is what is known as the “Habitação a Custos Controlados” (HCC) [Controlled Cost Housing], an arrangement of which local authorities normally avail themselves to deal with the housing needs of their own councils, which could be given new garb.

3. Access to housing as a cause of exclusion linked to housing

Access to housing plays an important role in changing the situation of an excluded person. Nevertheless, the problem of social exclusion cannot be solved solely by dealing with the housing issue, because it is a multi-causal problem.

That said, we can neither ignore nor fail to identify the lack of decent housing as a factor standing in the way of adequate social inclusion.

A recurrent problem for the most underprivileged groups is not being able to pay the rent for housing within the stipulated period, and the difficulty in finding people to stand security.

According to the SAOM (2008), a number of factors can be identified that lead to the exclusion of the needy population from access to housing:

- Lack of support for housing (to buy or to rent);
- Lack of integration/connection with other sectors such as health, education, employment, social security;
- The price of housing is an inhibiting factor, because this population does not have the economic means to afford the rent;
- Individual and independent housing is not always adapted to the profile of the homeless.

The main characteristics of this population are a low level of education, mental illness, precarious, poorly paid employment, or scarce income from the “Rendimento Social de Inserção” (RSI) [Social Integration Income].

According to the CAIS (2008), housing such social groups in social housing districts can lead to subcultures at social risk, and even to situations of social exclusion. Up to now, the housing policies in Portugal concerning underprivileged persons, are in themselves conducive to an increase of social risk situations and spaces, thereby being an effect, but not a cause.

“The data examined show that poverty (considering what is known as the “relative poverty line) reaches 38.6% of families, which makes for a social situation which is not more serious that it is, because the population turns to local solidarity networks (family and neighbourhood) for its resources, and resorts to survival strategies, such as informal employment, that attenuates the seriousness of the situations and keeps the persons

economically and socially viable. In the meantime, we are far from the generalised image of poverty, underdevelopment and illiteracy, which many times, partly or totally perplexed, one has of the population residing in social housing.

In this respect, the residents themselves tend to separate themselves from the image of poverty that one often has of them: most of them classify their family as “lower middle class” (21%) or as “middle class” (45%); only 20% consider that their family is “low class” and about 15% do not reply to this question. However, the majority acknowledge that there are “enough” (20%) or even “many” poor families (39%) in their neighbourhood.

There is no doubt that the people who live in such neighbourhoods are exposed to increasing risk of impoverishment and social exclusion, owing to the deficits of education, training and employment. Unemployment rates are between 15 and 20%, most of which is youth and long-term unemployment; 77% of those who do work have a 6th-year primary education, and 90% do not exceed the 9th year; the drop-out rate among in the 15-19 year-old bracket is 41.3%, and the unemployment rate of this group is 48.6%; the majority (83%) of those working have not had access to any vocational training actions.”

Source: International Conference: the Latin model of social protection

4. Role of the accommodation centres

The SAOM (2008), points out that staying in an accommodation centre could prove beneficial as the first step towards the re-integration of the individual into society and for meeting basic needs. Part of this homeless population will never be able to take care of itself, owing to mental or other ailments, so that accommodation in shared residential units is the most appropriate response.

Owing to the lack of temporary accommodation centres, lodging houses paid by Social Security are the most widely used option. These do not apply a coherent intervention criterion, as in most cases they do not constitute a means for one, and secondly they bring together various types of problems, which makes reintegration difficult.

Although these temporary accommodation centres are not the most adequate in most cases, they have nonetheless functioned as a rearguard, as a protection factor, and examples of persons who have succeeded in getting integrated in society are not lacking.

Accommodation centres in Portugal are rather poor, with few physical facilities and human resources, where persons can only stay for the night and where there is little if any social and educational advice and guidance.

Furthermore, there is no educational activity in accommodation centres, although such activity is fundamental to a process of maturity and social integration, for success, where simple routines are taught such as hygiene, the daily chores of a household, respect for others, domestic management, in particular, so as to prepare such people to take care of themselves.

The reception centres should promote daily learning, where people can develop and grow, by promoting and acquiring positive acculturation processes. These should be divided into development phases; in other words, we have people who are in the process of social re-integration accommodated with people who have just come off the street, as their development and transition phases are necessarily different. The social, occupational and above all personal skills must be a priority for accommodation.

5. Access to property

No incentives are granted in Portugal for the acquisition of housing by the homeless population, unless we take into account those who live in huts and who have access to the PER.

According to “Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa” (2008), one of the problems of exclusion connected to housing is access to housing. There are many huts that are shared by various families.

It is fundamental to give priority to the “homeless” question in housing policies in order to guarantee decent housing for all citizens, by fighting effectively this growing form of social exclusion.

Access to loans is more difficult in any event, owing to the financial market and to the banks, the interest rates are much higher, together with the socio-economic situation.

Access to property can be a lasting solution for the homeless, if they work on their personal, social and occupational skills.

In Portugal, many families that live in social housing districts are not very tidy, and have a tendency towards illicit overpopulation.

6. Role of the market in private rented housing

In 2006, the legal framework came into being (Act n° 6 of 27 February 2006), with the new urban lease regime, geared to the gradual updating of old rents, as they are known, with increases ranging from 100% to 300%.

Social Security is the only organisation that provides occasional support to the most underprivileged groups for the rent of houses and rooms. This support is in many cases incommensurate with the real needs, and at times different from district to district, creating distortions and social injustices between those who resort to support.

This population usually has access only to housing far from the centres, services and jobs, in many cases located in “islands” with more habitable conditions. The “islands,” a traditional phenomenon in the city of Porto, are a good example of how the private market develops situations of exclusions linked to housing.

Similarly, rents in lodging houses in cities, are usually characterised by poor conditions.

The sums available for rent support for a house/room, for each Social Security District Centre, vary on average between €150 and €300.

7. The role of social/public housing

The investment in social housing plays an essential role in making housing available to many people who would otherwise not have access to the real estate market, and would be deprived of the right to housing.

Social housing is a form of combating real estate speculation, of guaranteeing the construction of social facilities and of promoting sustainable urban planning.

The Ministry of Housing, Public Works and Transport, through Order in Council n.º 580 of 17 May 1983, states that “the fundamental objective of the social housing policy must be to provide housing service, in the following forms:

- Facilitate access to property, by stimulating private savings for family earnings who, although they have limited recourses, are unable to acquire property in the normal real estate market, and should thus benefit, as a matter of priority, from reduced prices resulting from the planned and financially supported construction;



- Offer access to rented housing to families with insufficient income to buy, whereby the State is to assume the difference between the technical rent (established according to the cost of construction and the operating and maintenance expenses) and the rate that the tenant can afford, with a rent according to his income (social rent);

- Ensure the minimum habitability conditions for needy households.

It will then be up to the State to promote housing for families that do not have income to buy, by guaranteeing that the community effort in this promotion corresponds to the aforementioned social purposes.”

At present, the social housing policy is highly geared to families and not to persons who live in the street, whether they have families or not, as is the case of the “homeless.”

According to IHRU, the Social Housing Policy is being pursued through:

- PROHABITA – A programme for financing access to housing
- Iniciativa Porta 65
- Porta 65

There are also certain urban renewal programmes:

- RECRIA – provides support for preservation and improvement works for run down buildings and dwellings, through incentives by the State and by the Municipalities.
- REHABITA- consists of the extension of the RECRIA programme and is geared to supporting municipalities to reclaim derelict urban areas.
- RECRIPH – provides support for the preservation and improvement of old buildings through a horizontal ownership scheme.
- SOLARH- is intended to finance, through interest-free loans, preservation and improvement works for own dwellings and for unoccupied single or public dwellings, including the common areas of the buildings.

8. Prevention of exclusion linked to housing

The housing of persons such as the “homeless,” as already pointed out, is a problem that is not easy to solve, although in many situations these persons manage through rooms paid for



by the social security and by rent supported by the same organisation. Many of these responses are not really successful, because they lack an advice and support service. This is why they do not pay the rent on time, and do not know how to manage and to keep their dwelling properly.

Thus, eviction is a problem that affects the homeless when Social Security ceases to ensure the rent payment, or when these people engage in anti-social behaviour.

The counselling service could function as prevention and as added value, intervening on two occasions, to acquire and to keep the dwelling.

In the first case, it can function as a means to make information available, and in the second, to intervene in the socio-educational process, through advice and guidance in the management of this new property. The socio-educational intervention can be an efficient form of preventing social exclusion linked to housing.

There are other factors that contribute to exclusion, such as drug trafficking, improper use of housing and illegal occupation.

The Porto diocese of the International Catholic Association for Girls (ACISJF), supports, through the social response of the integration community, girls and boys, who find themselves in a situation of family exclusion, homelessness and in socio-economic conditions conducive to a particularly vulnerable situation or which affect their family stability.

Another social service, known as the “Serviço de Refeições” [Meal Service], provides support to families and individuals who are victim of the most varied forms of social exclusion.

To summarise, the work of the ACISJF is pursued through the following actions:

- Support in meeting basic needs such as: housing, food, hygiene, clothing, medical care, and others;
- Group dynamics focussing on the development of skills for inter-personal relations, conflict solving and family mediation;
- Awareness raising for citizenship questions, in particular regarding rights and obligations;
- Awareness raising and reflection on parental issues;
- Awareness raising about budget/home economic management;
- Instruction on daily life tasks;
- Support and orientation for vocational training or employment, through advice and guidance for the various services, as well as the drawing up of a curriculum vitae;



- Strengthening of society bonds/neighbourhood network;
- Support in finding housing.

The ultimate aim of this work is to secure an overall context for promoting the development of capacities/skills that are indispensable to enabling users fend fully for themselves. We consider that these two elements constitute valuable support for the elimination of poverty and exclusion and the promotion of inclusion.

9. Right to housing

Access to decent housing is essential to attaining a decent standard of living beyond simple survival. Housing meets:

- the physical needs of providing security and shelter from climatic conditions;
- the psychological needs by providing a feeling of personal and private space;
- the social needs, by providing a common space for the family.

The right to housing is recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services." (Article 25º, nº 1)

The Constitution of the Portuguese Republic enshrines, in article 65, that everyone has the right, for himself and for his family, to housing of adequate size, in hygienic and comfortable conditions, which preserves personal and family privacy.

This right is an essential factor of integration and social inclusion and a *conditio sine qua non* for guaranteeing, for every citizen, the satisfaction of a basic need that is fundamental for human development.

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