

HOMELESS IN EUROPE MAGAZINE

AUTUMN 2026

# A Childhood Without a Home



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# Editorial

During one visit, a teacher once made an observation that is difficult to forget: children experiencing homelessness are often the “best students”. This was, of course, not praise, but a shocking observation about what children experiencing homelessness have learnt to do: they have learnt to be quiet, take up as little space as possible and go unnoticed.

Children are supposed to be loud. They should be able to ask questions, express their feelings, make mistakes, and ask for attention. The fact that some children learn instead to make themselves invisible highlights the “double silencing” they experience. Their voices are too often disregarded simply because they are children, and even more so when they experience homelessness and social exclusion.

All contributions in this issue point to the same reality: homelessness has profound and far-reaching consequences for children and their families. The figures and trends presented across France, Ireland and Belgium are alarming, and the wider European picture is deeply concerning. According to the 9<sup>th</sup> Overview of Housing Exclusion report by Fondation pour le Logement and FEANTSA, around 400,000 children in Europe are experiencing homelessness, living on the streets or in emergency and temporary accommodation. In many EU Member States, children account for one third of people living in homeless accommodation. Even very young children, pregnant women and women leaving maternity wards are increasingly left without a safe place to stay.

Homelessness threatens children’s development, physical and mental wellbeing, security and future opportunities. Its effects can accumulate across a lifetime, reinforcing intergenerational disadvantage. Yet this cycle is not inevitable: public authorities have a duty to act. Despite repeated warnings, the situation continues to deteriorate, as Dr Niall Muldoon, Ireland’s Ombudsman for Children, also highlights.

Addressing homelessness requires a human rights approach. As Maria José Aldanas, coordinator of Housing Rights Watch, reminds us, child homelessness represents a profound social injustice and can entail violations of a range of human rights. Children are rights-holders and States and public authorities are duty-bearers, with obligations to respect, protect and fulfil those rights. The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in every decision affecting them.

Recognising children as rights-holders also means recognising their right to be heard. Their experiences should inform the policies and services intended to support them. Julie Lignon and Paul De Ryck, from UNICEF, illustrate the importance of this approach in their contribution on innovative ways of involving children with lived experience of homelessness.

These principles must translate into action. Advocacy must focus on ensuring that existing rights and protections are implemented in practice. When children are left without a home, the failure is not that of individual families who cannot secure ade-

quate housing. It is the failure of public authorities to ensure that children’s rights are protected.

Responding to homelessness therefore requires more than managing an emergency. As Sarah de Liamchine’s contribution on Samusocial illustrates, emergency accommodation can protect families in immediate danger, but cannot fulfil a child’s right to a home.

Boróka Fehér and Lea Lengyel draw attention to the specific needs of women facing homelessness during pregnancy, highlighting the need for services that respond to pregnancy-related needs. However, support services cannot compensate for the absence of stable housing. Families should not have to fear that seeking help will put them at greater risk. A safe, stable home is essential to family life and the realisation of other human rights.

Child and family homelessness is also a gendered issue. Behind the term “lone parents”, explored in the project coordinated by Daniel Hoey from Focus Ireland, are often women navigating housing insecurity alongside gender-based violence, discrimination and structural inequalities. Effective responses must recognise these realities and address the conditions that make women and their children particularly vulnerable to homelessness.

The contributions also point towards the changes needed. Ireland’s dedicated, cross-departmental and agency-led Child and Family Homelessness Action Plan offers an example of a coordinated, child-centred approach. A similar commitment is needed across Europe through an ambitious, multi-year policy framework that supports people in moving from the streets and emergency accommodation into permanent housing, and that provides organisations with the resources and funding they need to deliver these housing and support solutions. The European Child Guarantee can provide a useful framework for Member States to coordinate these efforts across government and ensure that children experiencing homelessness are not left behind.

The message of this magazine issue is clear, and the teacher’s observation should serve as a warning. No child should adapt to homelessness by becoming quiet and invisible. No child’s development should be shaped by public authorities’ failure to provide the safety and dignity that a home offers. Ending child homelessness requires political commitment, coordinated policies, adequate resources, and accountability for the rights of every child.



By **Dalma Fabian**, Policy Officer, FEANTSA

# Ending Child Homelessness in Europe: From Crisis Response to Children's Rights



By **María José Aldanas**, Housing Team Leader, FEANTSA

*Following a Human Rights Talk held in Brussels on 22 September 2026 by FEANTSA, Housing Rights Watch and the UN Human Rights Representation to the EU, this article explores what it will take to end child homelessness in Europe. It highlights the need to move beyond emergency responses, uphold children's rights to adequate housing and hold governments accountable for turning European policy commitments into concrete action.*

On 22 September 2026, FEANTSA, Housing Rights Watch and the UN Human Rights Representation to the EU co-organised a **Human Rights Talk in Brussels** on ending child homelessness, bringing together European and international institutions and civil society to explore solutions. Drawing on the exchanges, this article examines what it will take to make ending child homelessness a reality across Europe.

## From managing homelessness to ending it

FEANTSA and the Fondation pour le Logement des Défavorisés estimated that around 400,000 children experienced homelessness in Europe in 2023. Millions more live in inadequate housing, while one in four children in the EU lived in overcrowded housing that year. Single-parent and larger families face particularly high risks of housing exclusion.

For too long, homelessness has been treated primarily as a crisis to manage through emergency accommodation and temporary solutions. But managing homelessness is not the same as ending it. Ending homelessness means preventing people from losing their homes wherever possible, ensuring that homelessness is brief when it occurs, and enabling people to access stable, adequate housing.

For children, emergency accommodation can provide essential protection, but it cannot replace a permanent home. Preventing child homelessness requires early intervention, eviction prevention, adequate income support and greater access to affordable and social housing.

At the event, FEANTSA member Fédération des acteurs de la solidarité (FAS) presented evidence from France illustrating the gap between political commitments and the reality of child homelessness, reminding us that commitments alone are not enough to end homelessness.

## Housing is a human rights issue

International and European human rights law establishes a framework of obligations relevant to ending child homelessness. Alongside the right to adequate housing and States' duties to prevent and reduce homelessness, this framework

includes children's specific rights, notably the principle that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning them (Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). The Convention protects children's specific rights, including the right to a standard of living adequate for their development (Article 27). They also require States to support parents and caregivers where necessary, including through material assistance and support programmes addressing housing needs (Article 27(3)).

The European Social Charter provides an additional and particularly important framework in Europe. Article 31 requires States to promote access to adequate housing, prevent and reduce homelessness, and make the cost of housing accessible to those without adequate resources. The Charter also protects children and families and requires action to combat poverty and social exclusion.

These legal obligations require States to go beyond responding to homelessness once it occurs. They call for measures to address housing unaffordability and shortages, prevent forced evictions and ensure that families at risk receive timely support. They also require assessing whether these measures effectively protect children from homelessness and enable those affected to access adequate, stable housing. The availability of emergency accommodation alone is not sufficient to demonstrate that these obligations are being fulfilled.

### **Europe has the tools, now comes the accountability test**

There is reason for cautious optimism. Housing has become an unprecedented priority within European institutions, and the policy landscape has changed significantly.

The European Child Guarantee recognises children at risk of poverty and social exclusion as a priority and includes access to housing among the areas requiring action. In May 2026, the European Commission adopted its first EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, strengthened the European Child Guarantee and proposed a Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion. The new framework brings poverty, housing exclusion and homelessness together and places prevention and access to stable housing at the centre of the response.

The European Platform on Combatting Homelessness has likewise brought governments, civil society and other stakeholders together around a commitment to end homelessness through integrated, person-centred and housing-led approaches.

These developments matter. But recognition is not the same as accountability. If child homelessness is already recognised as a policy priority, we need to be able to assess whether policies are actually preventing it.

This remains difficult. European homelessness data are fragmented; definitions differ between countries and important information about evictions and homelessness among children and families is missing. Better data are not an end in themselves, but without reliable information on how many children are becoming homeless, how long families remain in temporary accommodation, and whether they are ultimately rehoused into adequate and stable homes, it is difficult to hold governments to account.

### **The test of Europe's new housing agenda**

For a child, a home is a place of safety, continuity and belonging. Losing it can mean changing school, losing friends and community connections, living without privacy and growing up with constant uncertainty. These experiences must remain at the centre of Europe's housing debate.

Ending child homelessness is also a question of equality, human dignity and children's rights.

Europe has the legal frameworks and policy tools; the challenge now is to turn them into effective action. The success of Europe's new housing and anti-poverty agenda should be measured not only by strategies adopted, investment announced or homes built, but by concrete outcomes: fewer children becoming homeless, more families protected from losing their homes, and children who do experience homelessness moving quickly into safe, adequate and stable housing.

Ending child homelessness should be one of the clearest measures of Europe's progress towards ending homelessness altogether. No child should grow up without a place to call home.

# FAS and UNICEF Barometer Exposes France's Failure to Tackle Child Homelessness



By **Emmanuel Bougras**, Director of Public Policy and Legal Affairs, Fédération des acteurs de la solidarité (FAS)

*The latest FAS and UNICEF barometer reveals that at least 2,355 children in France were left without accommodation just days before the start of the 2026 school year, a 42% increase since 2022. Chronic shortages of accommodation, increasingly inaccessible housing and cuts to social housing provision are exacerbating child homelessness. FAS calls for an ambitious, multi-year strategy to tackle homelessness, strengthen support services and ensure every child has access to safe and stable housing.*

**In France, more than 2,300 children were homeless just days before the start of the school year**

This year, the French Federation of Solidarity Actors (FAS) and UNICEF published the eighth edition of their barometer on children experiencing homelessness. Once again, despite repeated warnings, documented evidence and political commitments made over the past ten years, the situation continues to deteriorate.

Child homelessness is increasing sharply, and the figures in this latest barometer merely confirm this trend. On the night of 18–19 August 2026, just two weeks before the start of the school year, at least 2,355 children – **including 514 under the age of three** – were left without accommodation after their parents called 115. This represents a 9% increase on the previous school year and a 42% increase compared with 2022.

*These figures continue to rise, highlighting the failure of successive governments to honour their commitment that ‘no child should ever have to sleep rough’.*

These deeply alarming figures on unmet requests for accommodation reflect only part of the reality of child homelessness. They do not include people whose calls to 115 – France’s emergency number for people experiencing homelessness – went unanswered, or those who no longer call the emergency number. Nor do they shed light on the situation of unaccompanied minors. In June 2025, the National Coordination Network for Young Exiles at Risk recorded **at least 1,087 unaccompanied minors awaiting a judge’s decision on their age, forced to live on the streets, in squats or in informal encampments.**

The rise in the number of people whose requests to 115 go unmet affects all household types, reflecting widespread difficulties in accessing accommodation or housing. However, families account for a significant proportion of people experiencing homelessness. **Of the 6,840 people for whom 115 could not find a solution because no accommodation places were available, 4,300 were in families** – 63% of all people whose

**requests went unmet.** Their number rose by 6.5% compared with last year and by 37% compared with 2022.

Among people in families whose requests went unmet, **41% were single women with children, representing 1,755 people — twice as many as in 2022.** More broadly, the number of women experiencing homelessness is increasing, whether they are with their families or on their own. On the night of 18–19 August, at least 604 single women were left without accommodation after calling 115. Their number has doubled since 2022. This increase is consistent with findings from the Senate Delegation for Women's Rights and with FAS surveys on women's homelessness, as seen by frontline outreach and social monitoring services, which point to the growing feminisation of homelessness.

The number of children under the age of three whose requests for accommodation go unmet is also rising. On the night of 18–19 August, **at least 514 children under three were left without accommodation after their parents called 115 — 2% more than last year and 40% more than in 2022.** Of these, 173 were under one year old. These figures confirm what the Integrated Reception and Orientation Services (SIAO) have been reporting: a growing number of very young children and pregnant women, or women leaving maternity wards, are being left on the streets.

Although incomplete, these figures confirm **a worrying trend in homelessness and point to major failings in public policies intended to prevent it.**

### **A blocked pathway from emergency accommodation to housing**

**The rise in the number of children whose requests for accommodation go unmet is primarily due to chronic pressure on the accommodation system.** Although capacity has increased considerably in recent years — particularly to meet the needs that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic — before stabilising at a historically high average of 203,000 places per year, **it is clearly still insufficient to meet growing needs.**

**This pressure is largely the result of increasingly difficult access to housing.** In response, the French government launched its Housing First strategy in 2018, presented as a profound transformation of public policy to tackle homelessness. Implemented through a five-year plan renewed in 2023, the strategy aims to help people experiencing homelessness access housing quickly and remain there in the long term, through close

cooperation between state services, local authorities, charities and social landlords. Welcomed by stakeholders, this approach has produced tangible results: the number of housing allocations to homeless households has risen steadily since 2017, reaching 31,845 in 2025 — 12,800 more than in 2017. **However, these advances remain insufficient at a time when needs are soaring.**

Yet a major contradiction is undermining this strategy: **while the success of Housing First depends, among other things, on a sustained increase in the supply of affordable housing, policies pursued since 2017 have contributed to weakening it.** Financial levies imposed on social housing providers through the solidarity rent reduction (RLS) — introduced to offset cuts to personal housing benefit (APL) — combined with reduced capital subsidies for housing construction and rising building costs, have severely affected social housing output. The number of social homes receiving funding fell from 124,000 in 2016 to just 95,000 in 2025. This decline has inevitably affected allocations within the social housing stock, which have fallen by 20% since 2017 to a historic low of 385,000 allocations in 2024, while demand has never been higher.

**At the same time, private rented housing has become increasingly unaffordable for the poorest households and for a growing proportion of middle-income households.** Despite this, the government has been slow to make rent controls permanent and extend them more widely, even though the trial — which has demonstrated clear benefits — is due to end in November 2026.

### **Charities' capacity to act is shrinking as poverty deepens**

**In recent years, funding for accommodation has also been systematically under-budgeted,** reflecting a recurring tendency to limit increases in the initial finance bills without any link to an objective assessment of needs. Successive governments have regularly used supplementary budgets or end-of-year adjustments to cover some of the gap between approved budgets and the funding required to keep services running. **However, this budgetary approach — criticised by the Court of Auditors and the inspectorates-general for finance, social affairs and public administration — places considerable strain on the organisations running these services, most of which are charities.**

Data collected by FAS from its network for its survey 'Solidarity charities on the brink of extinction', published in September 2025, reveal how fragile the voluntary sector has become. The findings show that nearly a quarter

of charities had less than two months' cash reserves at the end of 2024; half faced delays of more than 90 days between starting an activity and receiving their first public funding payment, forcing them to bear the financial burden themselves; and nearly a third were in a critical position that could lead to closure in the short term. Once again, the late adoption of the budget and funding that fails to match charities' needs and costs are now forcing them to close accommodation places, scale back their activities or discontinue integration programmes. Unprecedented in more than 50 years, this situation reflects a profound retreat in public solidarity policies, which began after the COVID-19 health crisis and the 'whatever it takes' approach.

Although this latest barometer paints a deteriorating picture, child homelessness is not inevitable. Action can still be taken, starting with an ambitious, multi-year policy to support people's journey from the streets into housing, providing organisations with the resources and certainty they need. Beyond housing and accommodation policies, a cross-government approach is essential. This should involve child protection services; address residence permit applications for people who have spent many years in accommodation so that they can move into housing; and mobilise health and employment services to remove barriers to social inclusion. The forthcoming presidential election and the next five-year term must rise to the scale of the challenge.

# Preparing for Motherhood Without a Home

## Pregnancy, Social Work and Interagency Cooperation in Hungarian Homelessness Services



By **Boróka Fehér**, Policy Officer, BMSZKI +  
Assistant Professor at KRE & **Lea Lengyel**,  
Social Worker, BMSZKI

*This article explores the challenges faced by women experiencing homelessness during pregnancy, highlighting the importance of coordinated, trauma-informed and gender-responsive support. Drawing on two cases from Hungary, it shows how fragmented systems can limit women's choices and calls for stronger cooperation between homelessness, healthcare and child protection services.*

When people think about women experiencing homelessness, children rarely come to mind. Yet they are almost always part of the story. Some children are already adults, others live with relatives or in the child protection system, while some have not yet been born. Motherhood - whether experienced in the past, the present or the future - remains a defining part of many women's lives, even when they no longer have a home.

Our interest in pregnancy among women experiencing homelessness emerged from **an earlier European collaboration on women's homelessness**, where motherhood repeatedly surfaced as one of the central themes. We soon realised how little is known about women who become pregnant while already homeless. In Hungary, reliable data are scarce, and this period of women's lives has received little attention in either research or service development. Yet pregnancy is often the moment when decisions are made that will shape not only a woman's future, but also the life of her child.

This article draws on our experience as practitioners at the Budapest Methodological Centre of Social Policy and Its Institutions (BMSZKI), Hungary's largest homelessness service provider, and on our research into the lives of pregnant women using our services. Rather than describing the Hungarian homelessness system, we focus on a more fundamental question: **what does it mean to prepare for motherhood without having a home?**

### When Pregnancy Changes Everything

For several years, BMSZKI has operated a trauma-informed gynaecological clinic for women experiencing homelessness. The service was established in response to a simple observation: many women avoid gynaecological care because of previous experiences of violence, trauma or discrimination within healthcare. The clinic therefore aims not only to provide medical care, but also to create a safe environment where women feel respected, listened to and able to make informed decisions about their own health.

Our experience quickly showed that pregnancy creates needs extending far beyond healthcare. Organising antenatal appointments is only one part of the process. Many women have no stable address, limited family support and very little trust in public institutions. Some have experienced childhood trauma.

ma or domestic violence; others live with mental illness or substance use problems. Many have had limited access to education and possess little knowledge about reproductive health, contraception or sexually transmitted infections. Whether pregnancy is planned or unexpected, it often becomes a turning point in their lives.

Questions that many expectant parents take for granted suddenly become urgent. Where will I live after the birth? Will I be able to keep my baby with me? Who will support me? Will asking for help protect my family - or put us at greater risk?

Supporting pregnant women experiencing homelessness therefore requires much more than arranging medical appointments. It means helping them navigate a complex network of healthcare providers, child protection services, family support organisations, housing services and welfare agencies. Although each institution has an important role, co-operation is often based on individual professional relationships rather than established pathways of care.

Throughout this process, one principle remains fundamental. The role of social work is not to make decisions on behalf of pregnant women, but to ensure that they have the information, trust and support necessary to make decisions for themselves. Whether a woman decides to raise her child, consider adoption or terminate her pregnancy, each pathway is emotionally demanding and requires coordinated, respectful professional support.

## Two Women, Two Different Journeys

No two pregnancies are alike, and this is especially true for women experiencing homelessness. Yet one feature is common to almost every story: pregnancy is never the only challenge. Housing insecurity, poverty, trauma, health problems and uncertainty about the future all become part of the journey towards motherhood.

One of the women in our study became pregnant while living in a homeless shelter with her partner. They welcomed the pregnancy and shared a clear goal: they wanted to raise their child together. Contrary to common stereotypes, they were not passive recipients of support - they had plans, actively engaged with services and were determined to build a stable future for their family.

Their greatest obstacle was not a lack of motivation but a lack of housing. As the pregnancy became known, it was obvious that the shelter where they lived could not provide an appropriate environment for a newborn. Together with their social worker, they contacted numerous

family shelters and mother-and-baby services. Some had no vacancies, others could not accommodate couples, and waiting lists stretched well beyond the expected due date.

Eventually, the woman secured a place in a specialised mother-and-baby service - but several hours away from Budapest. The arrangement offered safety for the baby, yet separated the couple during the first months of their child's life. This had a profound impact on the father's mental wellbeing. Although the formal casework ended when the mother moved into the mother-and-baby home, their social worker continued to support the family as a volunteer. A few months later, this sustained support helped the couple reunite in a family shelter in Budapest, where they were finally able to begin life together with their child.

*The case illustrates a broader question faced by many services: when support is organised around institutional boundaries rather than family needs, who bears the cost of those compromises?*

The second story follows a single pregnant woman who had been living with epilepsy since childhood. She visited her five-year-old son every week, who was being raised by foster carers. Learning about her pregnancy brought both hope and uncertainty. Although she always arrived at medical appointments with the required documentation, she was repeatedly turned away because of prejudice, resulting in delays to several essential antenatal examinations. Eventually, it became necessary for a support worker to accompany her to every appointment to ensure that she received the care she was entitled to.

Alongside concerns about housing, her health and the future of her unborn child, another difficult decision emerged. The only available mother-and-baby home was located so far from Budapest that moving there would make regular contact with her older son virtually impossible for several months. Ultimately, she chose to relocate, believing that it offered the best chance to provide a safe start for her newborn, while accepting the painful consequence of temporary separation from her first child.

Although these women followed very different paths, their stories point to the same conclusion. Pregnancy does not simply add another task to homelessness services. It exposes how deeply housing, healthcare, mental health, social care and child protection depend on one another—and how difficult it can be for women to navigate systems that rarely operate as a coordinated whole.

## What Pregnancy Taught Us About Homelessness Services

Our research changed the way we think about pregnancy in homelessness.

At first, we assumed that the greatest challenges would be access to healthcare and safe accommodation. Both remain essential. Yet our experience suggests that the real challenge lies in helping women retain their ability to make meaningful choices at a time when almost every aspect of their lives is uncertain.

Pregnancy does not change the purpose of social work - it changes its context. The focus remains on supporting the woman, but every decision now also shapes the future of a child. The task is therefore not to decide what is best for either the woman or the baby, but to create the conditions in which informed decisions can genuinely be made. This requires trust, time and coordinated professional support.

Our cases also revealed a broader systemic challenge. Pregnancy brings together professionals who rarely work closely with one another in homelessness services: obstetricians, midwives, health visitors, child protection professionals, housing providers and social workers. Each contributes valuable expertise, yet collaboration often depends on personal commitment rather than established pathways of care. As a result, women frequently find themselves navigating fragmented systems at one of the most vulnerable periods of their lives.

For homelessness services, this means taking on a role that extends beyond traditional case management. Supporting a pregnant woman often involves connecting institutions that were not designed to work together, while maintaining a trusting relationship with someone who may have experienced repeated trauma, exclusion and institutional mistrust. At the same time, professionals must balance two equally important principles: respecting the woman's autonomy while recognising the responsibility to safeguard the wellbeing of the unborn child. This balance cannot be achieved through procedures alone; it requires collaboration, reflection and mutual trust across professions.

These experiences have prompted important developments within our organisation. BMSZKI is currently developing a multidisciplinary protocol to support professionals working with pregnant women experiencing homelessness. We are also planning a specialised mother-and-baby service for women who become mothers while already homeless. Rather than creating a parallel service, our goal is to strengthen cooperation between homelessness services, healthcare and child protection, ensuring that women experience these systems as a coordinated network rather than a series of disconnected institutions.

Although our work is rooted in the Hungarian context, the questions raised are probably shared across Europe. How can services support women without undermining their autonomy? How can healthcare, homelessness services and child protection work together more effectively? And how can we intervene early enough to prevent homelessness from becoming an intergenerational experience?

We do not present our approach as a model to be replicated. Instead, we hope it contributes to a broader professional conversation about pregnancy, homelessness and the importance of coordinated, gender-responsive support. Every country will find different answers, but we believe they should begin from the same place: listening to women, respecting their choices and recognising pregnancy not only as a period of vulnerability, but also as a unique opportunity to support both mother and child.

If we want to prevent homelessness from becoming an intergenerational experience, support cannot begin at birth. It begins during pregnancy - by trusting women, strengthening their choices and ensuring that no child's future is shaped by homelessness before they are even born.

We hope that, in the near future, there will be more opportunities to exchange experiences with organisations across Europe working with pregnant mothers experiencing homelessness during their pregnancy and after giving birth. Learning from one another's practices will help us adapt successful approaches to our own local context and strengthen the support we provide to women experiencing homelessness.

# Family Homelessness in Ireland – Current Picture



By **Dr Niall Muldoon**, Ombudsman for Children, Ireland

*Ireland is currently dealing with thousands of children living in emergency accommodation and experiencing significant impacts on their rights and wellbeing. The Ombudsman for Children calls for a child-centred, cross-government approach focused on prevention, stronger support in emergency accommodation, and accelerated exits from homelessness.*

There are currently 5,659 homeless children in Ireland. That's 5,659 children whose young lives will be irrevocably impacted by this experience. For some, it might only be for a short period of time spent in emergency accommodation or even on a relative's couch. But for other children, they find themselves spending months or even years without a permanent place to call home. Official figures show there were 734 families in emergency accommodation in Ireland for up to six months at the start of this year, while just under 600 have spent more than two years there.

For a country as well off economically as Ireland, this is nothing short of a national scandal.

The impact of homelessness and unstable living conditions on children is catastrophic. It affects every aspect of their lives; education, wellbeing and self-development. It also has a monumental impact on their ability to access services and supports.

*"A new way of thinking is needed from Government. The State needs to move away from prioritising financial interests that view housing as a commodity, and instead recognise it as a social good, offering children and families a secure place to live in dignity."*

Child and family homelessness is an issue that my Office has been highlighting consistently as far back as 2012, and sadly since then, the problem has grown exponentially. In 2019, we carried out a consultation with children<sup>2</sup> around their experience of living in Family Hubs<sup>3</sup>, speaking with over 70 children (and their parents) aged 1 to 17 years old. Space, privacy, noise, not being able to have visitors, feelings of shame and embarrassment, were all issues raised by the children who talked to us.

It is exasperating for me to repeatedly have to make these points, but it must be said again and again: even short-term exposure to homelessness can have a lifelong impact on children. It is not just about a child's right to a home; it impacts their right to education, health, play and recreation. Children have told us what it is like to share a room with their parents and siblings, what it is like to go to school from homelessness accommodation, to study and do homework.

We began that consultation when there were around 2,500

children in emergency accommodation. Fast forward seven years and that figure has more than doubled. But we knew as far back as 2017, that a lot of families were falling into homelessness simply because of economic reasons allied with poor Government policies - such as limited security of tenure for renters. Policies that outsourced all housing supplies to private enterprises and the simultaneous move in philosophy from Government to "leave it to the market" - where the Government allowed the private sector to set the prices and Government would accept it. But this way of working was essentially ignoring huge swathes of families who had only limited resources.

Before this, and over many decades from the Second World War onwards, the Irish state consistently built social housing locally to cater for and care for those we knew to be in need. That social contract was torn apart following the economic crash of 2008 and despite numerous warnings - no Government since then has been prepared to return to that way of working.

As Ombudsman for Children, I have made recommendations, met with Ministers and officials, but still the number of children who are living in homeless accommodation continues to grow.

Since about 2018, we have been pushing for successive Governments to recognise that Child and Family Homelessness requires different tactics and strategies in order to:

- Prevent the families going into emergency accommodations
- Support them when they are in Emergency Accommodation and
- Exit them quickly from homelessness.

In March this year, we were delighted with the breakthrough announcement from Ireland's Government, to develop a dedicated cross-Departmental and agency-led Child and Family Homelessness Action Plan. This child centred action plan is needed because we must finally acknowledge the additional vulnerability of children. We must recognise their unique rights and plan to meet their individual needs. Current laws and policies ignore children's rights and treat them simply as a dependent of homeless adults - that is wrong.

We very much welcome that children and young people will be consulted as part of the development of the plan and that a pilot Children's Rights Impact Assessment will form part of its development.

However, amendments to our housing legislation undermine this positive

shift. My Office is deeply concerned about recent changes to our laws that will make it harder for families to access emergency accommodation by introducing eligibility criteria. Those who are deemed ineligible, may be offered 'night-to-night' accommodation at the discretion of their local authority. This is not child centred nor in their best interests.

Indeed, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing recently intervened and warned Ireland that this could have severe consequences for victims of trafficking, people who have experienced domestic and gender-based violence, migrant communities and other vulnerable groups, and raises concerns that the legislation could contribute to an increase in dangerous rough sleeping.

Ireland has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) recognising their individual rights, but in planning for housing provision and addressing child homelessness these rights are not being fully considered.

*In order for the State to fully protect, respect and fulfil children's rights, the UNCRC must be fully and directly incorporated into Irish law, and driving that change is something my Office is also working on.*

Bold, brave measures are needed now to address what is a crisis of epic proportions for children in Ireland.

Our recommendations to the Irish Government are:

#### **Full and Direct Incorporation of the UNCRC**

Embed a children's rights approach into all decision-making to ensure housing policy, laws and practice fully uphold children's rights.

#### **Focus on Prevention**

Stop homelessness before it happens by supporting families at risk of losing their housing security.

#### **Cross-Government Coordination**

Treat child homelessness - not just as a housing issue, but as a multi-agency crisis requiring joined-up work across health, education and local government.

#### **Support in Emergency Accommodation**

Provide wrap-around supports for children stuck in emergency hubs covering education, physical and mental health and nutrition.

### **Accelerated Exits**

Create explicit, fast-track pathways and ring-fenced allocations to move families quickly out of temporary accommodation.

### **Voice of the Child**

Actively consult with children and young people with lived experience of homelessness to shape future housing policies.

I know it is not a simple problem to solve but it must be done.

Despite these concerns, I do remain optimistic that with political will, the new action plan can be a turning point, but I am also aware of the old saying – “If you make a promise, you create hope, and if you keep your promise, you create trust.”

### **ENDNOTES**

- 1 From Ombudsman for Children's [Annual Report](#), 2017
- 2 From [No Place like Home](#) a report by the Ombudsman for Children's Office outlining children's views and experiences of living in Family Hubs.
- 3 In Ireland, a 'Family Hub' is a temporary emergency accommodation centre designed for families who are experiencing homelessness. These were created to replace being placed in hotels and similar environments to offer a more stable and supportive environment while families wait for permanent housing.

# Creating Trust and Participation in Homeless Services for Families and Children in Ireland



By **Daniel Hoey**, Research Manager, Focus Ireland

*An increasing number of homeless families and children in Ireland are accommodated in forms of emergency accommodation that are often substandard. There are currently no mechanisms for users of emergency homeless accommodation to meaningfully input into how it is designed or delivered. Focus Ireland took part in an EU-funded research project that facilitated a group of lone parents with experience of homelessness to develop recommendations to improve homeless services and engage with policymakers to advance them.*

The latest monthly homelessness statistics for Ireland show that 5,830 children and 2,800 families are homeless. Family homelessness has risen sharply for over a decade, particularly in Dublin, Ireland's largest city and capital, and increasingly nationwide. Between July 2014 and August 2026, the number of homeless families rose by 738 per cent—from 334 to 2,800. Most of these families are becoming homeless for the first time because of evictions from the private rented sector. Many are headed by a lone parent caring for two or more children.

Families that become homeless are accommodated in short-term housing known as emergency accommodation. This accommodation is organised by the local authority (municipality) and can include hotels, bed-and-breakfasts, or dedicated 'Family Hubs' that are purpose-built or acquired to house the growing number of homeless families. The time spent in emergency accommodation varies. Most families exit within six months, but for many the period can be longer, sometimes a year or more.

Conditions in emergency accommodation vary because of the wide range of providers (some are private operators and others are homeless NGOs) and differing levels of support. Research undertaken by Focus Ireland with 52 families in emergency accommodation described '*cramped living quarters, inadequate facilities for children, a lack of privacy, poor-quality food and offensive and discriminatory treatment from staff. This was compounded by a fear of making a complaint because of a fear of repercussions, including a risk of losing their accommodation. These living conditions had a profound and damaging impact on the mental health of parents and their children.*'

Emergency accommodation is a vital component of Ireland's (emergency) response to homelessness. Unfortunately, demand for this service will continue to rise as the housing crisis deepens and becomes increasingly entrenched. In that context, it is crucial that the service meets the needs of parents and children placed in vulnerable and traumatic situations. While the service is managed in partnership with homeless NGOs that have the expertise to support and advocate for most families, there is no mechanism through which the voices or opinions of the families themselves can be heard by the local authorities that provide the services.

For the last four years, Focus Ireland has participated in a Horizon 2020-funded project called Involve. A core objective of the project was to investigate the inclusion of marginalised groups in consultation processes relating to policy formation and public services in the areas of health, education, employment, and housing across eight European countries. Focus Ireland's role was to conduct research with a group of lone parents who had been through the homelessness system, explore their experiences of using housing and homelessness services, and co-produce recommendations for improvement.

The research was grounded in the PAHRCA (Participatory Action Human Rights and Capabilities Approach) methodology, which brings together participatory, human rights, and capability theory in a single research approach. The goal of PAHRCA is to empower people to understand and challenge the structures that cause their marginalisation and oppression through a process of co-producing knowledge and action. The research with lone parents, which involved in-person discussion groups over the course of two years, produced many recommendations in the areas of access to housing, service delivery and administration, and support needs.

Good research will reliably provide recommendations. However, getting those recommendations into the hands of the people that can effect change is a significant challenge for researchers and advocacy groups alike. With this in mind, Involve utilised a process referred to as 'cross-talks' to bring together key stakeholders to discuss the recommendations arising from the research. Several stakeholders in policy and politics were invited to attend an event at which the lone parents shared their "stories" of homelessness and offered their solutions. The stakeholders also shared their own "stories" about their understanding of and experience with the homelessness crisis in Ireland.

The event was a hugely positive experience for all attendees. Many stakeholders said it was their first experience of such an event and that hearing directly from people with lived experience of homelessness had a powerful impact.

*The lone parents in attendance felt empowered by sharing their stories and greatly encouraged by the engagement of stakeholders in the room. They felt seen and heard.*

The event culminated in an agreement by senior government officials to explore the implementation of one of the research recommendations: a support resource for parents and children living in emergency accommodation.

Several months later, this recommendation is being implemented by a working group that includes government officials and representatives from health, homelessness, and child-focused agencies and NGOs. The resource will provide parents entering emergency accommodation with a comprehensive and trauma-informed range of relevant information in both physical and online formats. It will be particularly useful when a parent does not have a keyworker or is waiting to be assigned one. The aim is for parents to be able to use this resource during a particularly difficult and uncertain time, helping them understand their options and take the first steps towards moving out of homelessness.

The development of this resource is not only a great success story for the Involve project and the lone parents themselves; it is also a hugely significant development for co-production, inclusion, and active, open public consultation in homeless services in Ireland more broadly. Regrettably, this type of consultation with people who use homeless services is generally absent from service design and delivery. The Involve project shows how valuable it can be for all stakeholders, not least the parents and children who will continue to enter emergency accommodation in the months and years to come.

# Listening to Children to Strengthen Public Responses to Homelessness



By **Julie Lignon**, Child Poverty Advocacy Officer, UNICEF France & **Paul De Ryck**, Child Participation Advocacy Officer, UNICEF France

*UNICEF France shares an innovative approach to involving children experiencing homelessness in public decision-making, based on their lived experience and right to be heard.*

*Through workshops and direct exchanges with parliamentarians and public authorities, children developed and presented their own recommendations, while gaining confidence and agency.*

*The experience also highlights the conditions needed for meaningful participation, including safe spaces, adequate support, safeguarding and a genuine commitment to giving children's views influence.*

Child and family homelessness has become a structural feature of housing exclusion. In France, people with families account for 63% of people who, after calling the 115 helpline, are unable to access accommodation<sup>1</sup>, while children represent one-third of those living in homeless shelters and emergency accommodation<sup>2</sup>. Yet, despite their growing numbers, children are largely overlooked in policies aimed at addressing homelessness.

In light of this, UNICEF France advocates for greater consideration of children's needs and rights in housing and shelter policies and actively involves the children concerned. This practice not only fulfils the obligation to respect children's rights to be heard and to have their views taken into account but also contributes to improving public policies. Indeed, children possess valuable "user expertise", grounded in their lived experiences and everyday realities. They understand homelessness from the inside, and their perspectives are essential to designing policies and programmes that truly meet their needs.

## Listening to homeless children: an innovative project

Thus, in autumn 2025, UNICEF France conducted focus groups with 15 children aged 11 to 16 living in emergency accommodation and a social hotel in the Paris suburbs and supported by the Samusocial de Paris. During these sessions, the children developed their own recommendations to improve their living conditions and those of their families. These recommendations were then presented by the children themselves to around ten Members of Parliament at the French National Assembly in October 2025. A few months later, UNICEF France and Samusocial de Paris were invited by the Interministerial Delegation for Accommodation and Access to Housing (DIHAL) to support the children in presenting their recommendations at a conference focused on improving children's living conditions and care in emergency accommodation settings. After an additional preparatory workshop, three teenage girls from the original group presented their recommendations to experts.

## An impactful and empowering approach

One of the most striking outcomes of the project was the shift in perspective among the parliamentarians and DIHAL staff

who took part. By engaging directly with children, decision-makers discovered first-hand the value of listening to young voices. Several parliamentarians said they were impressed by the depth and quality of the children's insights, which shed light on realities and challenges they had previously been unaware of. The experience not only broadened their understanding of the issues at stake but also convinced them that children's perspectives should play a greater role in public decision-making.

The project also proved to be a powerful confidence-building experience for the children involved. Over the course of the workshops, participants who had initially been hesitant to speak began to express their views with growing ease and conviction. Their confidence and ability to speak spontaneously increased throughout the workshops, culminating in their presentations to parliamentarians and their contribution to the DIHAL workshop. Their journey illustrated not only the value of creating spaces for children to be heard, but also the remarkable capacity of young people to find their voice when given the opportunity.

Finally, another key outcome is that UNICEF France can build on this experience to promote children's participation in political decision-making. Several government bodies have been inspired by the project and are now interested in involving children in their own discussions and policy reflections, particularly on issues related to the digital environment.

### Challenges in involving children and young people in decision-making

However, for children and young people's participation to be both ethical and effective, it must adhere to key principles. Indeed, the risk of tokenism is significant, as children's participation in decision-making can easily become a mere "tick-box" exercise, meaning a superficial or symbolic attempt to involve children without genuinely considering or acting upon their views.

Thus, UNICEF France relies on the well-established Lundy Model of child participation, which is built around four key elements: providing children and young people with a safe and inclusive **space** in which to express their views; providing them with the information and support necessary to facilitate the expression of their **voice**; ensuring that their views are communicated to an **audience** with the power to make decisions; and ensuring that children's views are given due consideration and have an **influence** on decision-making.

Furthermore, UNICEF France also followed the nine basic requirements for the implementation of the right of the child to be heard, as set out by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its General Comment No. 12 (2009), stating that "all processes in which a child or children are

heard and participate, must be: transparent and informative; voluntary; respectful; relevant; child-friendly; inclusive; supported by training; safe and sensitive to risk; and, finally, accountable<sup>3</sup>.



Laura Lundy's Child Participation Model (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015 – 2020*, 2015)

Despite this theoretical framework, UNICEF France and Samusocial de Paris still faced challenges in involving seldom-heard children and young people in decision-making processes. A key difficulty lay in balancing the need to adapt workshop pacing to children's rhythms with tight deadlines for presenting recommendations to members of Parliament. Other logistical issues arose, such as ensuring transport for the children, as the emergency accommodation centre was over an hour away from the social hotel, requiring close coordination to ensure appropriate support for children during transport.

Ensuring meaningful participation also proved challenging. At times, children's accounts of their daily lives were corrected during workshops, some adults used language that was not child-friendly or addressed accompanying adults rather than the children themselves. Questions regarding voluntary participation also emerged, as some children later reported being strongly encouraged by their parents, occasionally finding themselves conveying their parents' demands.

However, despite the length and intensity of the workshops, children remained engaged throughout the process. This was largely due to the transparency of the adults leading the project and the creation of a safe environment for participation. Children were informed about the purpose of their involvement, reminded of their freedom to participate or withdraw, and made aware of their rights. Participatory, childfriendly tools—such as games and photobased discussions—were used to promote learning and meaningful engagement.

An important step was the close monitoring of the initial workshops. This made it possible to identify shortcomings, such as overly long sessions, inappropriate adult behaviour, or forced participation and to adjust practices accordingly. Lessons learned informed the subsequent workshop for the DIHAL conference, which was more carefully planned, shorter, and supported by clearly defined adult roles.

### **Ensuring meaningful influence: a critical aspect of child participation**

Crucially, the project addressed a key and often overlooked dimension of child participation: the real influence of children's voices. During the presentation at the National Assembly, parliamentarians listened attentively to the children's recommendations, as did experts at the conference.

A feedback session with the children and their families reinforced the sense that their opinions mattered. Children reported feeling genuinely heard by decisionmakers, particularly following a senator's visit to the emergency accommodation centre after their presentation.

Following this project, DIHAL committed to organising workshops on topics related to the children's recommendations and publishing national guidelines on accommodation conditions for children. Although the children's recommendations have not yet led to direct legislative outcomes, UNICEF France continues to advocate for them with public decisionmakers, ensures follow-up and promotes the institutionalisation of such participatory mechanisms.

In conclusion, this experience demonstrated the significant value of involving children in political decision-making. Not only can children's participation help improve the relevance and effectiveness of public policies, but it can also serve as a powerful empowerment tool for young people themselves. This is particularly true for children experiencing poverty, as they are subject to "double silencing": due to their status as children and their social exclusion<sup>4</sup>. Thus, they are often underrepresented in formal participatory bodies such as local youth councils in France<sup>5</sup>. Fostering a culture that encourages children to speak out, and establishing mechanisms to gather and value their voices, is also an essential tool for protection.

*When children have safe spaces to speak out, they can report, challenge, or denounce violations of their rights.*

At the same time, meaningful child participation cannot be improvised. To be ethical, safe and truly effective, it must be guided by clear principles and supported by adequate resources. Engaging children in decision-making requires time, skilled professionals, appropriate training and a child-friendly environment, including robust safeguarding procedures and participation tools tailored to children's age and abilities.

Child participation should therefore never be treated as a box-ticking exercise. Yet, when implemented thoughtfully and with genuine commitment, it becomes a powerful democratic tool, enabling public institutions to make better-informed decisions while strengthening children's confidence, agency and sense of citizenship.

## ENDNOTES - LISTENING TO CHILDREN TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS

1 UNICEF France, FAS, [Baromètre “Enfants à la rue” 2026](#)

2 Direction de la recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques, [Les centres d'hébergement et les logements adaptés accueillent 374 000 personnes en 2021](#)

3 UN Committee on the rights of the child, [General Comment n°12, The right of the child to be heard](#) (2009)

4 Tess Ridge, “Childhood poverty: a barrier to social participation and inclusion” in *Children, Young People and Social Inclusion. Participation for What?*, Bristol University Press, pp. 23-38, 2006.

5 UNICEF France, [Vers une démocratie inclusive : intégrer la voix des enfants dans les décisions politiques](#), 2024.

# 'Never. A child should never sleep on the street.'

Drawing on the experience of children living in emergency shelters in Brussels



By **Sarah de Liamchine**, Chief Executive, Samusocial Brussels

*A child should never have to sleep on the streets. Yet one in four people accommodated by Samusocial is a child. To mark International Children's Rights Day, Samusocial launched a campaign in autumn 2025 to raise awareness of the reality faced by children experiencing homelessness. The campaign also calls for urgent and structural measures to ensure that emergency accommodation centres provide dignified accommodation that is appropriate to children's needs.*

In Brussels, the growing number of children experiencing homelessness is an alarming reality. The latest count carried out by Bruss'Help in November 2024 identified 9,777 "people without a home", including 1,678 children and adolescents. In just two years, their number has increased by 72%.

Against this backdrop, Samusocial is currently the main organisation in the Brussels-Capital Region providing emergency accommodation for families throughout the year. At Samusocial, one in four people accommodated is a child. Every day, nearly 500 people in families sleep in a Samusocial bed. Mothers who have just left maternity wards with their newborns, young children and adolescents, often accompanied by a lone mother: this increasingly prevalent reality is part of the daily experience faced by Samusocial teams.

With a capacity of 564 places for families (as of 23 July 2026), provision remains far from sufficient: during 2025, 7,203 people in families could not be accommodated due to a lack of places. At times, this figure reaches 100 people per day, and it is increasing exponentially, causing growing concern.

*"We are not able to accept every request for accommodation. We are supposed to deal with emergencies. But when everything is an emergency, how do you decide what comes first? It's hard, especially when there are children. These children didn't ask for any of this."*

**Emie, social worker in an emergency accommodation centre for families.**

While emergency accommodation centres are tasked with providing shelter and supporting families towards a pathway out of homelessness, they cannot erase the consequences of instability. A lack of privacy disrupted schooling, difficult life circumstances and exposure to violence all contribute to an environment in which children grow up without their fundamental needs being fully met.

Protecting children therefore requires a more comprehensive approach. Although emergency accommodation remains essential, it is crucial to adapt support to children's specific needs in order to provide an environment conducive to their development. Protecting children means, above all, guaranteeing their fundamental right to a stable and fulfilling childhood.

## **I. Lone mothers, often victims of intimate partner and/or domestic violence**

*“My father had hit my mother on the head, and she started bleeding, so we decided to leave.”*

**Omar, 10 years old.**

At Samusocial, almost 70% of families accommodated are lone mothers with children. More than one third of these women have fled intimate partner and/or domestic violence, losing their home overnight and, in some cases, their right to reside.

They are then forced to turn to Samusocial's already saturated emergency services, which are often ill-equipped to meet their needs for safety and stability. These family ruptures, frequently marked by violence, profoundly weaken the parental unit and disrupt children's lives, undermining their emotional security and wellbeing.

In situations of acute distress, these mothers must shoulder sole responsibility for their children while also dealing with complex administrative and legal procedures: filing a complaint, looking for housing, renewing or regularising their residence permit, and so on. Many of these children, forced to take on significant responsibilities, grow up too quickly: they accompany their parents to administrative appointments, act as interpreters and take on responsibilities far beyond what would be expected for their age. Women and children therefore need specific forms of reception and support, which can sometimes be difficult to provide in an emergency accommodation centre.

## **II. Growing up in emergency accommodation: conditions that are not suited to children**

Emergency accommodation centres, originally designed to provide temporary shelter, sometimes become places where children live and grow up – and, in some cases, are even born. Yet these spaces are not designed to accommodate families over the longer term.

*“I don't want to stay here for the rest of my life, actually.”*

**Sofia, 9 years old.**

Children's daily lives are profoundly disrupted: they cannot invite friends over or celebrate their birthdays with their peers. There is no accessible kitchen where they can prepare their own meals, and no evening bath. This fragmented daily life affects the parent-child relationship, particularly for younger children, for whom such rituals provide essential anchors.

This is compounded by structural instability: frequent moves, changes of school, and the regular departure and arrival of new friends. These repeated disruptions deprive children of a reassuring routine, which is nevertheless essential to their wellbeing. In this temporary and cramped environment, where communal living is imposed and family life is disrupted, children lack stability and privacy, while opportunities to flourish are restricted.

Other fundamental needs are also difficult to meet. Communal meals do not always reflect families' habits or needs, while snacks, which are an essential part of children's daily routines, receive no structural funding. Every year, Samusocial therefore spends more than €25,000 (excluding VAT) on purchasing snacks for children accommodated in its centres.

Early childhood is a particularly sensitive issue. The “first 1,000 days” are a crucial period for a child's physical, emotional and social development, with lasting consequences for their future. Yet emergency accommodation conditions often struggle to meet the specific needs of very young children. In 2025, 353 babies under one year old were nevertheless accommodated by Samusocial.

To respond to these needs, Samusocial has established a dedicated Early Childhood Unit to support parents and promote young children's development. Its work includes facilitating access to childcare, monitoring vaccinations and preventing health problems, providing occasional childcare and distributing appropriate equipment such as pushchairs, cots, bottles and clothing.

Beyond issues relating to accommodation conditions, some children have specific needs that cannot be adequately addressed: physical or mental health issues, discharge from hospital, autism spectrum disorders, Down syndrome or physical disabilities, among others.

## **III. School: a constant thread in an unstable daily life**

In Belgium, education is compulsory from the age of five, including for children in an irregular administrative situation. Children accommodated in Samusocial's family centres therefore attend school.

*“We're afraid people will make fun of us. That's how it is.”*

**Cristiano, 9 years old.**

In a daily life marked by instability, school often represents a stable and structured point of reference, as well as a source of social connection. It can even become a driver of solidarity and collective mobilisation when networks of parents come together to support families experiencing hard-

ship, for example by providing school materials or organising transport.

However, living in emergency accommodation can undermine children's educational pathways. Uncertainty, frequent moves and the difficulties they experience on a daily basis affect their concentration, emotional wellbeing and sense of security, increasing the risk of disengagement from school. Many children are also reluctant to talk about their situation for fear of how others may perceive them. Some pupils feel embarrassed or even ashamed to discuss their circumstances, which can undermine their self-esteem.

Moreover, despite compulsory education being free of charge in Belgium, many costs continue to place a heavy burden on families experiencing poverty, including those accommodated in emergency centres: school supplies, school meals, extracurricular activities such as cultural outings, school camps and trips, lunchtime supervision, sports equipment and so on. According to the Ligue des familles, these costs amounted to several hundred euros for a primary school pupil and could exceed €1,000 for a secondary school pupil at the start of the 2024–2025 school year.

Transport costs are also a barrier. Because they are unable to provide the required administrative documents (identity card, passport or temporary residence permit), many children are not eligible for reduced fares. For just one Samusocial accommodation centre, these costs amount to more than €30,000 per year (excluding VAT).

*As a result, the most vulnerable children – for whom school should provide a fundamental point of stability – paradoxically find themselves furthest from fully enjoying their right to education.*

Not having the required school materials, missing out on a school trip, a hot meal or an educational excursion is not simply a financial difficulty: these forms of deprivation contribute to a sense of exclusion and injustice that can have a lasting impact on children's self-esteem and educational trajectories.

#### **IV. Samusocial calls for urgent and structural measures**

Because no child should ever have to sleep on the street, emergency accommodation remains essential. However, in its current form, it cannot

provide an environment conducive to children's development.

Beyond the need to address the root causes of exclusion by strengthening prevention policies – including simplifying asylum procedures, strengthening social support and investing in a structural policy for affordable and sustainable housing – it is also essential to guarantee dignified accommodation and support adapted to children's needs.

In light of these alarming findings, Samusocial Brussels calls on public authorities to:

- **Strengthen support for women experiencing violence and their children, including effective access to psychological care;**
- **Adapt accommodation to children's needs and provide appropriate psychosocial support;**
- **Provide appropriate support for early childhood, including suitable accommodation for mothers and newborns leaving maternity wards, and ensure structural funding for existing services;**
- **Support the education of accommodated children by ensuring free access to education, school meals and transport.**

Protecting children is not simply about providing them with a roof for the night: it means guaranteeing the stability they need to develop, enabling them to learn in good conditions, ensuring access to adequate food and allowing them to grow up in a safe and secure environment.

Tackling child homelessness therefore helps lay the foundations for a healthier, fairer and more inclusive society.

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Co-funded by the European Union. By the EaSI strand of the ESF+ programme.

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