

A close-up photograph of a baby's face, looking directly at the camera. The baby's hand is near its mouth, and the background is dark. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

CHAP. 2

**CHILDREN FACING
HOMELESSNESS AND
POOR HOUSING**
A EUROPEAN
REALITY

35

1.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS PUT TO THE TEST

Regardless of whether they are living on the streets, in shelters and hotels, or forced to settle in makeshift shelters, slums, or overcrowded housing, many children in Europe lack the basic conditions needed for a dignified life and healthy development. Given the diverse forms of housing exclusion and substandard living conditions these children experience, pinpointing their exact number is difficult. However, existing studies, data, and reports from organisations working on the ground all point to a deep and widespread problem. This wholly unacceptable situation in one of the world's most prosperous regions is doubly harmful to children. Not only do the multiple detrimental effects of homelessness or poor housing conditions affect their current lives, but they may also hinder their future prospects and opportunities. It is undeniable that housing serves as a cornerstone for the development, well-being, and empowerment of young people. Physical and mental health, social and emotional relationships, education, and schooling are all aspects that heavily depend on the existence and quality of a child's home environment.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE NUMBERS

Child poverty in Europe

Child poverty is still a significant issue within the European Union¹. In 2023, nearly one-fifth of the population under the age of 18, amounting to 15.6 million young people, were living below the poverty threshold². In that same year, 4.2 million children under the age of six in Europe were growing up in families experiencing severe hardship. This issue affected both Eastern and Western European countries alike. In **France**, **Italy**, and **Spain**, as well as in **Bulgaria** and **Romania**, over one-fifth of very young children lived in households with extremely low incomes. The data also showed that single-parent families were particularly exposed to poverty³. In 2023, nearly one-third (31.9%) of individuals raising one or more children alone were unable to provide a decent standard of living for their families. In **Slovakia**, **Malta**, **Bulgaria**, **Luxembourg**, and **Spain**, more than two in five single-parent families faced some sort of financial hardship.

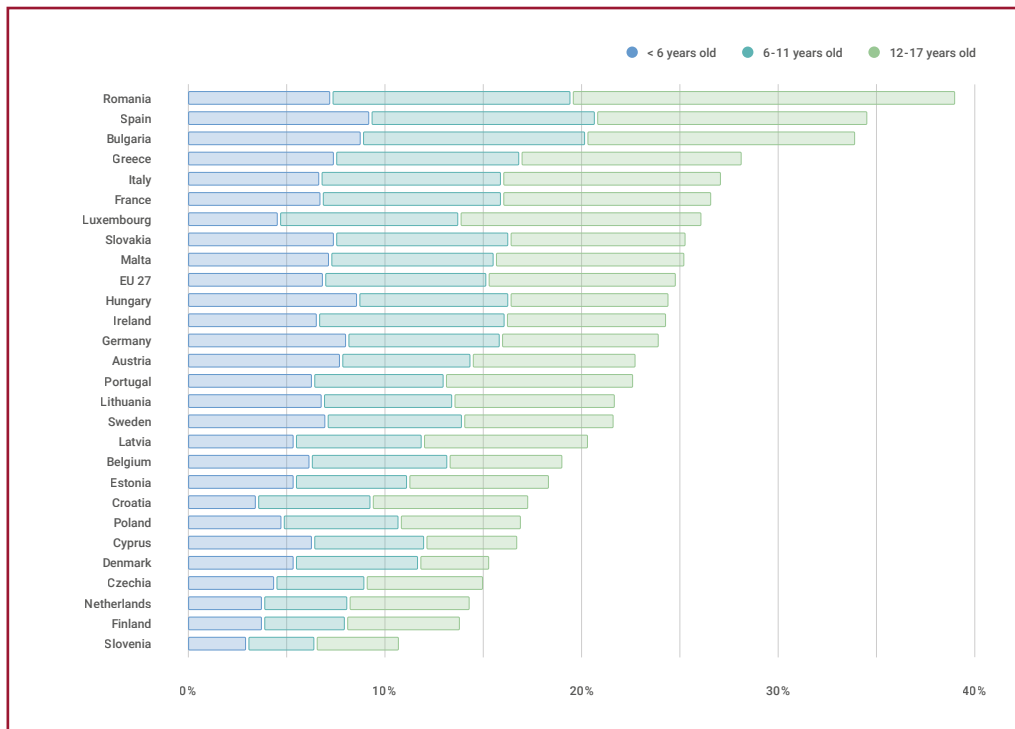
Combining the economic, social, and material dimensions of poverty in one indicator gives us a picture of a particularly alarming situation. In 2023, nearly one in four children in Europe (24.8%) was at risk of poverty, living in a household with low work intensity, or suffering from severe material and social deprivation (*figure 1*). In total, almost 20 million young people under the age of 18 in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Among them, 27.9% were aged under six, 33.4% were between the ages of six and 11, and 38.7% were between the ages of 12 and 17. A strong correlation exists between parents' educa-

tional attainment and children's socio-economic conditions⁴. In 2023, while the risk of poverty or social exclusion affected only 10.7% of children whose parents held a higher education degree, it impacted 61.8% of those whose parents had not completed secondary education.

These average figures across Europe masked significant national disparities. In 2023, the rates of risk of poverty or social exclusion among minors were particularly high in **Bulgaria** (33.9%), **Spain** (34.5%), and **Romania** (39.0%). This contrasts sharply with the much lower rates observed in the **Netherlands** (14.3%), **Finland** (13.8%), and **Slovenia** (10.7%), which were well below the European average. Additionally, the risk did not affect all age groups equally across Member States. In **Romania**, out of the 1.36 million children at risk of socio-economic hardship in 2023, half were between the ages of 12 and 17. Conversely, in **Germany**, **Hungary**, and **Cyprus**, the majority of affected children were aged under six years. In **Denmark**, **Ireland**, and **Belgium**, children between the ages of six to 11 were slightly overrepresented among those at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

CHILDREN FACING HOMELESSNESS AND POOR HOUSING A EUROPEAN REALITY

**FIGURE 1 - MINORS AT RISK OF POVERTY OR SOCIAL EXCLUSION
(2023, IN %)**



Source: Eurostat · [ILC_PEPSOIN](#) / Last updated: 2024-06-20 / Series break in 2023: Croatia · France

The living conditions and opportunities for the development of children in Europe can also be assessed using another composite indicator proposed by Eurostat⁵. This indicator includes 17 items covering various material and social aspects deemed essential (12 pertain specifically to children, while five relate to the households they belong to)⁶. The rate of child-specific material deprivation refers to the proportion of children under the age of 16 who lack access to at least three of these 17 items due to insufficient

financial resources. In 2021, this form of deprivation affected 13.0% of children in the European Union. More than one-third of children lacked adequate access to these essential goods and services in **Greece** (33.9%), **Bulgaria** (36.5%), and **Romania** (42.5%). The particularly high rates observed in these three Member States stand in sharp contrast to those in other countries, such as **Estonia** (3.8%), **Finland** (3.7%), **Sweden** (3.5%), and **Slovenia** (2.9%).

Around 400,000 homeless children in Europe

Although there have been significant advancements in recent years, data on homeless children at both national and local levels remains fragmented and challenging to compare, largely due to differing definitions and perceptions of the target group⁷. Despite these challenges, the range of available figures suggested that the issue is likely substantial and widespread.

In **Germany**, according to the latest count conducted in 2023 by the Federal Statistical Office, 101,505 children were living in accommodation facilities with their families⁸. These minors represented 28% of the total recorded individuals, and were predominantly of foreign nationality (90%), with a significant proportion being Ukrainian refugees. Meanwhile, surveys conducted by GISS & Kantar Public in 2022⁹ estimated that there were 1,121 children living on the streets and 5,575 minors temporarily accommodated by family/friends due to lack of housing. Advocacy groups believe these figures may be an underestimate, especially in light of a study by the Deutsches Jugendinstitut, which found that Germany had at least 7,500 minors sleeping on the streets in 2016¹⁰.

In **Austria**, the latest count of individuals officially registered as homeless by municipalities¹¹ reported 2,067 minors not having a home, which represents 11% of the population recorded in 2022. The data collection method used by Statistik Austria did not provide details on the specific housing exclusion situations of these children. However, it did offer precise information on their geographic distribution with nearly half of the homeless children recorded in 2022 (i.e. 48%) concentrated in Vienna.

In **Belgium**, minors have also been included in counts conducted in various cities and provinces over the years. In 2023, with the support of regional authorities and under the auspices of the King Baudouin Foundation, researchers estimated that there were 5,946 homeless children in Flanders and 4,713 in Wallonia¹². In the Brussels-Capital Region, the most recent count in 2022¹³ identified 977 minors as homeless. This number represented 14% of those recorded, a slight decrease from the previous count of 18% in 2020. In a compilation of all the most recent reliable data, the total number of homeless children in Belgium was estimated to be at least 11,697.

In **France**, data on the number of homeless children is relatively scattered. The most recent national survey conducted by Insee in 2012¹⁴ reported a total of 30,700 homeless children. Although several estimates have been made since then, there was no comprehensive statistical study offering a precise measurement. Nevertheless, it is clear that the problem has worsened as evidenced by figures from the national integrated reception and orientation services (SIAO), which manage accommodation placements¹⁵. On the night of 21 to 22 August 2023, for example, 29,780 children were accommodated in hotels with their families due to a lack of housing solutions. On the same night, 1,990 children could not be referred to accommodation services due to a shortage of available places.

In **Hungary**, children and families experiencing financial hardship and lacking housing solutions are typically placed in temporary shelters managed by child protection services. According to annual data from the country's Central Statistical Office¹⁶, 6,871 children were accommodated in shelters dedicated to families in 2023. Additionally, 783 children were placed in dedicated shelters that year. These numbers showed a slight increase compared to 2022, when 6,714 children were housed in shelters

dedicated to families and 672 in shelters dedicated to children.

In **Ireland**, which has been grappling with a severe housing crisis for several years now, the number of families in emergency accommodation had risen sharply. During the week beginning 25 December 2023, the Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage (DHLGH)¹⁷ recorded 1,916 households, comprising a total of 3,962 children, staying in various hotels and state-supervised facilities. From early 2021 to the end of 2023, the number of families sheltered in these facilities nearly doubled, while the number of children accommodated grew by 70% over the same period.

In **Italy**, of the 96,197 people identified as homeless during the population census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics in 2021¹⁸, 12,804 were under the age of 18, representing 13% of the total. Nearly two out of five of these minors (38%) were of foreign nationality, and almost half were concentrated in the country's three largest cities (44%). Alongside this census, Italy's Federation of Organisations for the Homeless (fio.PSD) conducted a survey among its members in early 2024 to assess the situation. Out of 31 organisations, 16 reported that children were living on the streets in the areas where they operated, mainly in the northern regions. Most of these children, regardless of whether they were unaccompanied or living on the streets with their families, were of foreign nationality and came from non-EU countries.

In **Portugal**, data collected nationwide by the umbrella organisation ENIPSSA in 2022¹⁹ revealed that 15% of the 10,773 homeless individuals identified were under the age of 18 – a proportion that increased by 25% in just one year. While minors accounted for only 4% of those accommodated in shelters dedicated to the homeless, they made up nearly a quarter of those living on the streets or in emergency accommodation. It is worth noting

that in the Alentejo region, children and adolescents comprised 42% of the recorded homeless population.

In the **United Kingdom**, each nation employs its own methods to track the number of children in temporary accommodation. According to the government department overseeing hotel and emergency housing placements²⁰, 71,270 families, including 145,780 children, were receiving support in England at the end of December 2023, i.e. an increase of 9,300 families and 19,460 children from December 2022. Welsh government statistics²¹ showed that on 31 December 2023, 3,077 out of 11,273 people in emergency accommodation were under the age of 16. In Scotland, official data²² revealed that 9,860 children were living in temporary housing as of 30 September 2023, reflecting an 8% rise over the previous year. In Northern Ireland²³, authorities reported 4,556 households and 4,844 children residing in temporary accommodation as of January 2024.

In **Czechia**, a study commissioned by the country's Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and conducted by SocioFactor in 2022²⁴ provided two key insights into the number of children facing homelessness. Of the 12,445 individuals temporarily accommodated in hotels or municipal shelters due to a lack of housing solutions, 1,393 were children under the age of 15. The study also found that 7,144 minors were living in unsuitable or unconventional housing (such as non-residential spaces, squats, or mobile homes) representing more than two-fifths (44%) of those forced to live under such conditions.

While these data do not provide a comprehensive account of child homelessness across Europe, they can serve as a basis for estimation²⁵. To calculate this, statistics from point-in-time counts referring to minors in situations described by ETHOS Light categories 1, 2, and 3 have been compiled, i.e. a total of 150,844 children across six countries. This figure is then compared to

the total number of minors in these six countries (35,833,050 according to Eurostat data) to obtain an average rate (0.421%). Applying this percentage to the total population of minors in Europe (94,915,891 children, including the United Kingdom), the estimated number of children who are unsheltered, in emergency accommodation, or residing in shelters for the homeless is approximately 399,561.

400 000

ESTIMATE OF THE NUMBER OF
CHILDREN LIVING ROUGH,
IN NIGHT SHELTERS AND IN
TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

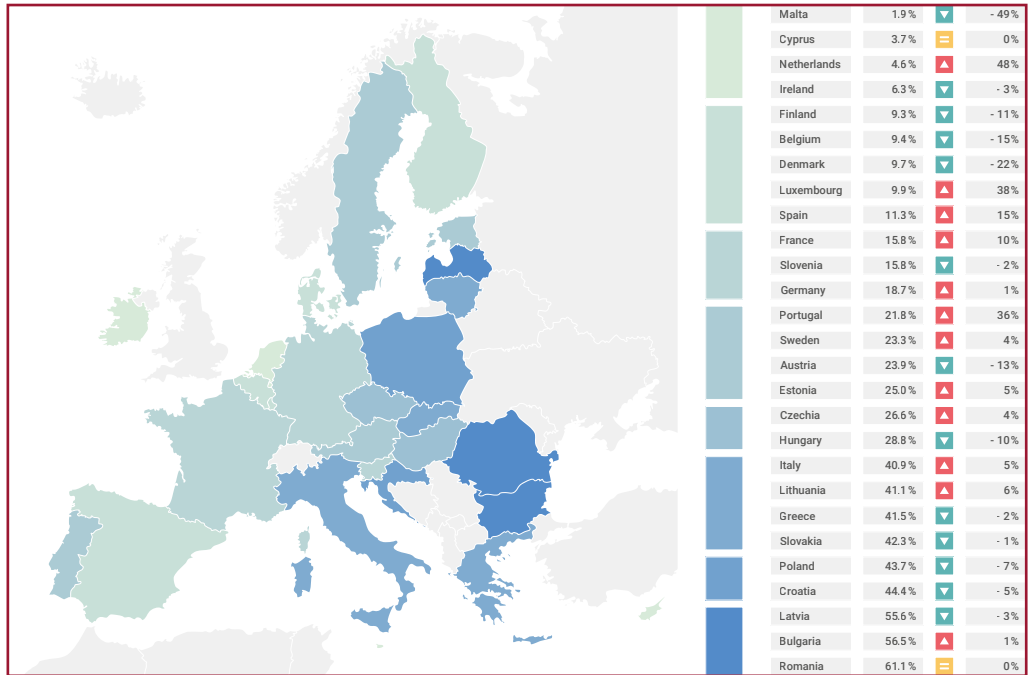
Additionally, the overcrowding rate varies significantly depending on household composition²⁶. In 2023, single-parent families in the EU had an average overcrowding rate of 26.6%, while larger families (two adults with three or more dependent children) saw a rate of 34.8%.

Several million children are victims of poor housing conditions

Overcrowding was undeniably one of the major factors contributing to housing exclusion for children and their families. In 2023, one in four minors in the European Union – and over one in five children under the age of six – were living in overcrowded conditions. Young people are significantly more affected by this issue. By way of comparison, the overcrowding rate for the general population in the same year was 16.8%. Some countries were far more affected than others (*figure 2*). Over half of minors faced these poor housing conditions in **Latvia** (55.6%), **Bulgaria** (56.5%), and **Romania** (61.1%), while less than one in 20 children were affected in **Malta** (1.9%), **Cyprus** (3.7%), and the **Netherlands** (4.6%).

CHILDREN FACING HOMELESSNESS AND POOR HOUSING A EUROPEAN REALITY

**FIGURE 2 - MINORS LIVING IN OVERCROWDED HOUSING
(2023, IN % / CHANGE FROM 2022 TO 2023, IN %)**



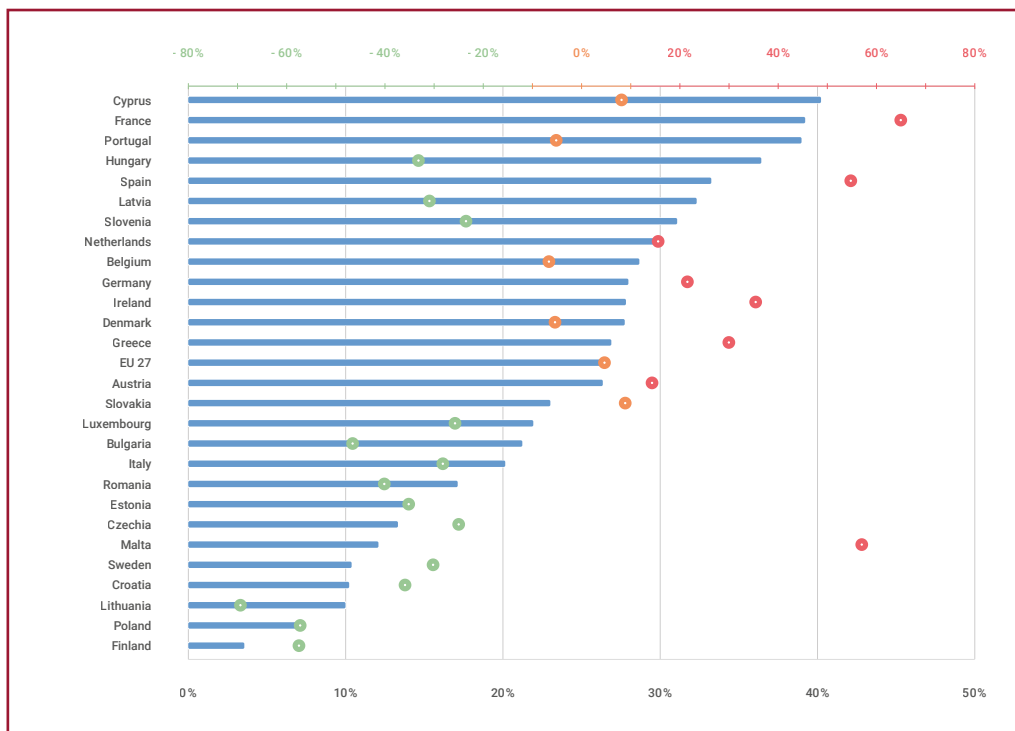
Source: Eurostat · ILC_LYH005A / Last updated: 2024-06-20 / Series break in 2022: France - Luxembourg / Series break in 2023: Poland

In 2023, nearly 14.5 million children in Europe were living in housing with leaks, damp foundations, or mould²⁷. These conditions, often hazardous to the health and development of young children, affected an average of 18.3% of those under the age of six. More than one in five minors were living in such sub-standard environments in **Luxembourg** (20.5%), **Spain** (25.7%), **France** (27.1%), **Cyprus** (30.2%), and **Portugal** (33.0%). Poor families, often unable to afford housing and forced to settle for the most run-down parts of the

housing or rental market, were particularly hard-hit (*figure 3*). In Europe, over a quarter of poor families (26.5%) lived in such deteriorating and potentially unsafe housing in 2023. The situation was revealed to be even worse in **Spain** (33.3%), **Hungary** (36.5%), **Portugal** (39.0%), **France** (39.3%), and **Cyprus** (40.3%). Over the past decade, the share of poor households with children living in these conditions had more than doubled in **Spain** (+54.9%), **Malta** (+57.1%), and **France** (+65.1%).

CHILDREN FACING HOMELESSNESS AND POOR HOUSING A EUROPEAN REALITY

FIGURE 3 - HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY THRESHOLD IN UNFIT HOUSING (2023, IN % / CHANGE FROM 2013 TO 2023, IN %)



Source: Eurostat · ILC_MDH001 / Last updated: 2024-06-12 / Missing data for 2023 (2020 data used instead); Ireland
Series break in 2013: Germany · France · Ireland · Luxembourg / Series break in 2023: Ireland

Poor housing conditions affecting children can take other forms. In 2023, over five million households with children were financially unable to maintain their homes at an adequate temperature (10.5% of families in Europe)²⁸. That same year, energy poverty affected 23.3% of households with children living below the poverty threshold in the European Union – impacting more than two out of five poor families in **Greece** (40.1%), **Bulgaria** (41.8%), and **Cyprus** (54.7%). Single-

parent families were particularly hard-hit in this regard. On average, 18.9% of single-parent families in the EU could not adequately heat their homes. It comes as no surprise that low-income individuals raising one or more children on their own are even more vulnerable. In eight of the 27 Member States, over a third of these families were forced to turn down the heat, compromising their well-being. In **Romania**, 60.1% had this problem, and in **Cyprus**, the figure reached 74.7%.

3. AN INTERPLAY OF MULTIPLE FACTORS GIVING RISE TO VARIED CIRCUMSTANCES

« There is increasing discrimination in the rental market. When a landlord hears a slight foreign accent over the phone, their decision is already made. It is the same for applicants with low incomes. And when it comes to the number of children, it is even worse than having pets. »²⁹

*Pascale Francotte, social worker,
30 September 2023*

For the most part, children who are homeless or facing housing exclusion are collateral victims of their parents' circumstances. These situations typically arise from a complex web of factors, making it difficult to pinpoint a single explanation. The loss of a home might occur due to relationship difficulties or psycho-social problems that have become overwhelming for a family that is already financially vulnerable. A family's planned move into housing may be derailed by a job loss or the withdrawal of a residence permit. A mother and her children might be evicted because she can no longer afford her bills due to rising costs. Generally, researchers analysing the mechanisms behind homelessness and housing exclusion³⁰ identify three broad categories of causes.

- **Structural factors** refer to the broader socio-economic conditions. The growing income inequality over the long term and the rise in job insecurity, combined with skyrocketing real estate prices and a shortage of affordable housing, create fertile ground for housing exclusion to spread. Racism and discrimination, territorial segregation, and political responses to migration flows – which leave many people in a legal limbo – are also key elements of these

structural factors.

- **Individual factors** encompass the personal and family experiences that shape life trajectories. Chronic illnesses, disabilities, mental health issues, and addictions are challenges that, when compounded by other vulnerabilities, can severely hinder access to housing or the ability to maintain it. Life events and traumas – such as the loss of a loved one, a marital breakup, or family estrangement due to violence – can also lead to or accelerate the loss of a home.
- **Institutional factors** include both failures in public policies and inadequacies in legislative standards. A shortage of support services or shelters; gaps in care; and dysfunctions in coordination, guidance, or allocation can significantly affect the duration and severity of homelessness or housing exclusion for individuals and families. Certain legal measures such as evictions can also be particularly harmful when implemented without either mediation or support.

The situation of unaccompanied foreign minors

In 2023, more than 41,000 asylum applications were submitted by unaccompanied minors (UAMs) in EU countries – the second highest number recorded since 2015³¹. The increase in these young people seeking international protection has led to several legislative and policy changes aimed at expediting procedures. However, these changes have been met with criticism from humanitarian organisations, which report signs of a gradual deterioration in reception conditions³². Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor highlights severe shortcomings in accommodation, healthcare, education, and social integration. In **France**, “many are forced to live on the streets, where they are exposed to various risks including sexual exploitation and illegal or hazardous work”³³. In **Greece**, overcrowded shelters have led some minors to abandon these facilities altogether and, in some cases, even sleep outdoors³⁴. Additionally, procedural delays and arbitrary denials of formal recognition of minor status often leave these children without the housing and support they are entitled to. Reports of illegal deprivation of liberty or inhumane detention conditions are also noted, particularly in **Spain, Lithuania, and Poland**³⁵. In **France**, the *Observatoire des expulsions de lieux de vie* (Observatory on evictions from living places) reports that “many UAMs have reported experiencing police violence (including rubber bullet shootings, repeated and unjustified use of tear gas, and racially motivated verbal abuse) during eviction operations conducted by law enforcement”³⁶.

Living rough in France

« The gap between the number of available places and demand is increasingly vast, and we constantly find ourselves highlighting the lack of sustainable and structural solutions: we keep fixing things only to see them unravel. Previously, having a baby automatically made you a priority group. Today, the criteria are becoming stricter, and having a child over one year old or being three months pregnant no longer necessarily qualifies you as a priority. Unfortunately, we are forced to categorise people, which is very harsh and completely disregards the principles of continuity and uncon-

ditional support that we strive to uphold. But we have no choice. And this is just the beginning; these numbers reflect developments over a very short timeframe. With the housing crisis worsening daily, if the government does not provide a more sustainable solution, the challenges will only worsen. »³⁷

Nathalie Latour, director of the Fédération des acteurs de la solidarité, 2 November 2023

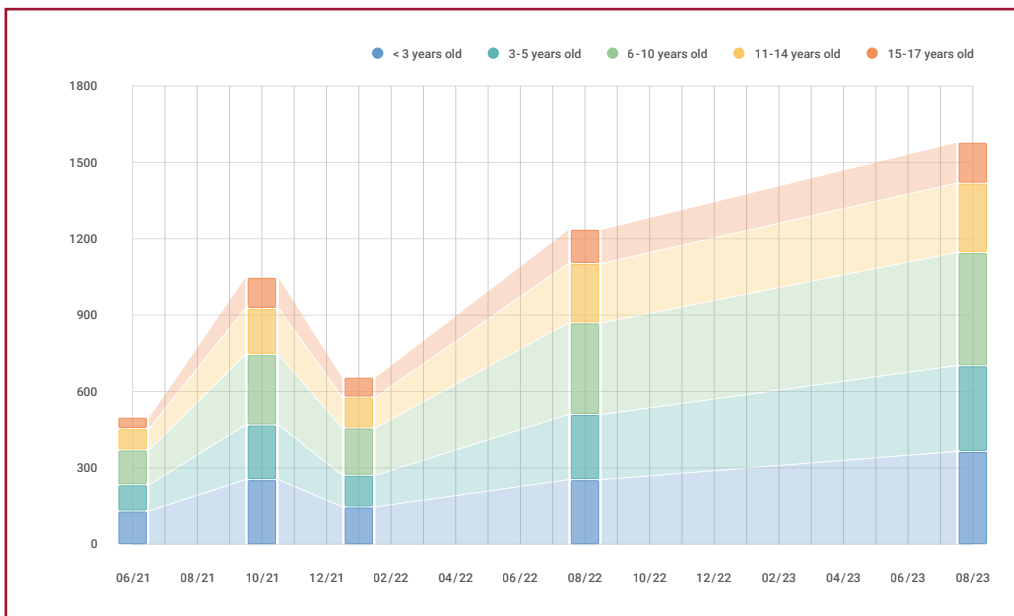
Following the first interministerial committee on childhood held on 21 November 2022³⁸, the French government, through its Prime Minister, announced an ambitious goal of achieving “zero children on the streets” as quickly as possible. One year later, charities were sounding the alarm. Not only has this promise not been fulfilled, but the situation had worsened. According

to data from integrated reception and orientation services (SIAO)³⁹, the number of children forced to spend the night outdoors has increased by 29%. On the night of 21 to 22 August 2023, out of 6,049 people who could not be housed due to a lack of space in suitable accommodation, 1,990 were under 18. More than three-quarters of these minors had slept on the streets the night before their families called 115 (the emergency accommodation number).

« There was a large tent where several families slept at night, sharing mattresses and blankets. We spent four nights like that, and then the children got gastroenteritis – they were really ill. We only ate tacos or whatever was given to us, as we could not cook anything ourselves. »⁴⁰

*Father of a family living on the streets
(beneficiary of Caritas), May 2024*

FIGURE 4 · FRANCE: CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF MINORS LIVING ROUGH (FAS & UNICEF · 2021-2023)



Source : Eurostat · [ILC_LVHC05A](#) / Dernière mise à jour : 2024-06-20 / Rupture de série en 2022 : France · Luxembourg / Rupture de série en 2023 : Pologne

As reflected in the SIAO data analysed by UNICEF and the Fédération des acteurs de la solidarité in their annual reports (*figure 4*), the situation is highly concerning. Between the first and most recent data extractions, conducted

in June 2021 and August 2023 respectively, the number of children who were sleeping outdoors more than tripled (+235%). Of the 1,567 minors recorded as homeless in 2023, a significant proportion were very young children: 699 were

under the age of six (45%), 365 were under the age of three (23%), and 150 were under the age of one (10%). It is important to note that these statistics only account for children whose families requested shelter and were turned away. The actual number of minors on the streets, living in tents or makeshift shelters, was likely much higher. Paradoxically, the government further reduced budgets and the capacity of existing shelters in 2023, a move that is incomprehensible to organisations advocating for a more robust homelessness prevention policy to tackle these urgent challenges⁴¹.

Since January 2023, the Utopia 56 association has been holding nightly support sessions in front of the city hall in Paris to assist families living on the streets. These sessions provide an opportunity to meet with individuals, provide socio-legal support, and, depending on availability, direct them to shelters managed by NGOs or even to volunteers who will host them for a few nights⁴².

Temporarily in a hotel in Ireland

« Our aim is to swiftly transition families out of homelessness in order to lessen the trauma it inflicts on children. We also work to mitigate its impact by supporting children once they are housed, including organising activities outside the shelter or offering help with homework. Some children are anxious about attending school and our social workers are available to accompany them if needed. Although we cannot diagnose conditions, many of the children we encounter display signs of autism. Families are occasionally excluded because of a child's challenging behaviour, which clearly is not in

the child's best interest. Additionally, a notable number of those we assist have a history of domestic violence or mental health issues. »⁴³

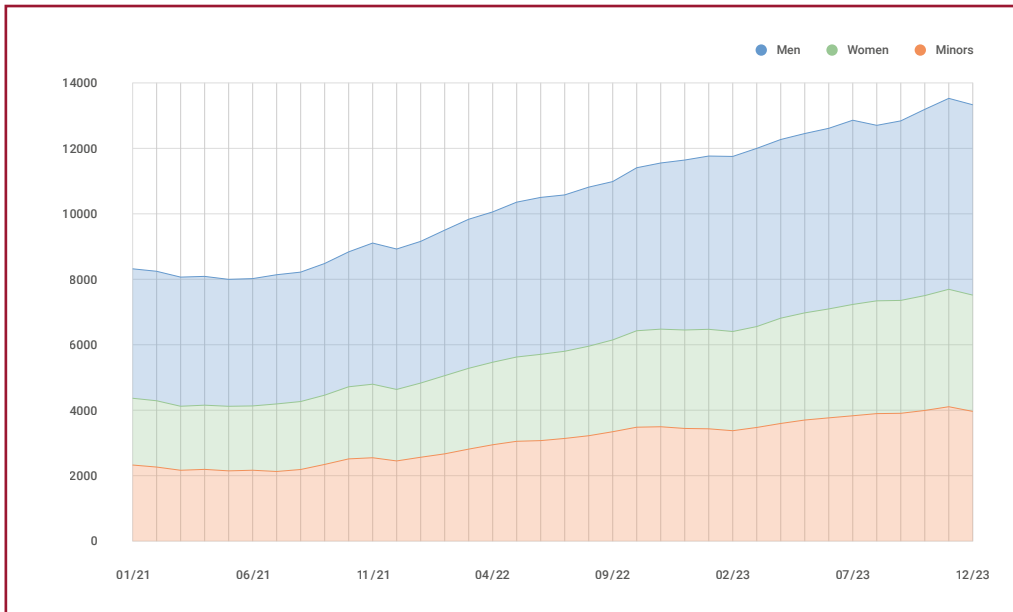
*Hester Rodenhuis,
coordinator of the Focus Ireland Family
Homeless Action Team, 7 May 2024*

Each year, the Children's Rights Alliance publishes a report to assess the implementation of the Irish government's policies on children and young people. The latest review is unequivocal⁴⁴: the number of children in emergency accommodation is at its highest since the first data were collected in 2014. In the six months following the lifting of the eviction moratorium in April 2023, the number of families in emergency housing increased by nearly 10%. In the spring of 2023, the Taoiseach established the Child Poverty and Well-Being Programme Office to coordinate efforts on child poverty and well-being. Child homelessness was one of the six priorities identified by the government⁴⁵. While organisations welcomed the initiative, they remained cautious nonetheless about its future effectiveness.

« I had to move every day for nearly three months with my four children, including my two-month-old infant. We had to leave the accommodation each morning by 10 am and could not get in until 7.30 pm. I was on the streets all day with my baby while the other children were at school. »⁴⁶

*Mother of a family housed in emergency
accommodation (MLRC beneficiary),
November 2019*

**FIGURE 5 • IRELAND: CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE ACCOMMODATED BY SEX AND BY AGE
(DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND HERITAGE - 2021-2023)**



Data extracted from the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PASS) and published monthly by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH)⁴⁷ provided a detailed view of the situation. During the week of 25 to 31 December 2023, 1,916 families with a total of 3,962 children were accommodated in state-supervised hotels and other emergency shelters. The Dublin region housed the overwhelming majority of this population (73% of families and 76% of children). Long-term data revealed a dramatic increase in homelessness across the country (*figure 5*). Between January 2021 and December 2023, the number of children and families accommodated grew by 70% and 98% respectively. The proportion of minors in emergency accommodation during this period ranged between 26%

and 31%. Although the Irish government has implemented a strategy targeting young adults aged between 18 and 24 who were homeless, no specific measures were introduced for children in emergency accommodation.

In August 2024, during the inauguration of a family shelter, the Ombudsman for Children, stated that successive governments must take responsibility for what he described as a “traumatic breach” of the rights of children and young people who have grown up in emergency accommodation facilities⁴⁸.

In a shelter in Belgium

« Approximately 80% of the women we host have been victims of violence. The children have either experienced violence themselves or have been witnesses. They struggle to express themselves and have a hard time managing their emotions and anger. A significant number of them also face academic difficulties. While it is important not to generalise, we often see that parents are overwhelmed by these extremely challenging situations. My colleague organises activities that address the issue of violence. Concerning education, once the children arrive here, they receive dedicated support from an educator. Another challenge is the close quarters in the rooms, which can be difficult for the children to handle. Unfortunately, due to the building's design, we cannot change this, and it can lead to tensions between siblings, for example. »⁴⁹

Charlotte Vanraeynest, director of Home Victor Du Pré, 9 April 2024

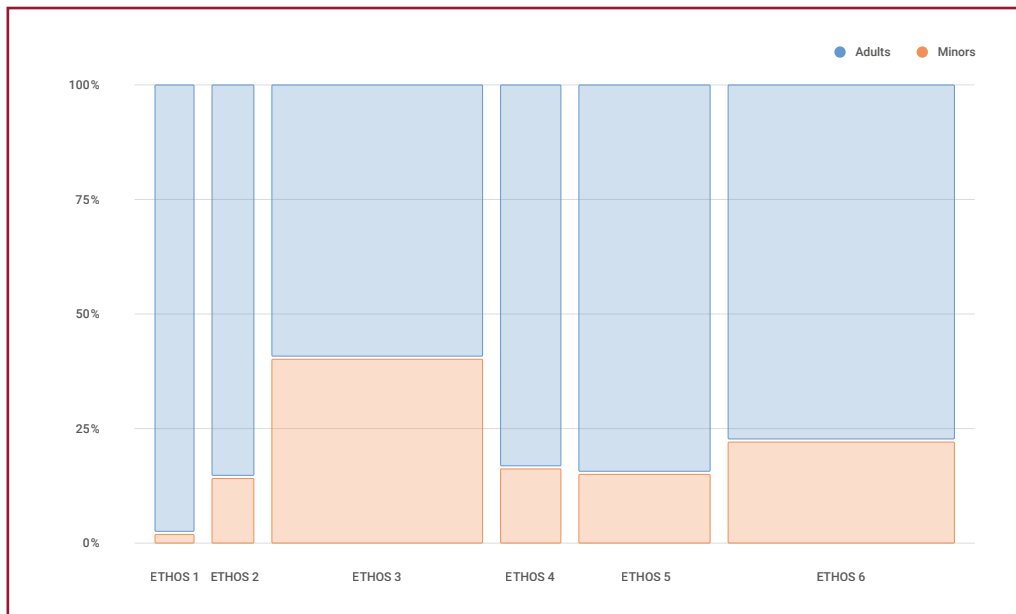
In **Belgium**, the staff working in shelters are unanimous: the number of women with children seeking shelter due to domestic violence is sharply on the increase⁵⁰. Consequently, for teams working in centres dedicated to this group, supporting parenting can be a significant challenge. In addition to the trauma related to violence, these families often face various psycho-social issues. The support work, which aims to ensure the well-being of the children and the autonomy of the mothers, must therefore be approached as a long-term commitment. However, as highlighted by the federations representing these shelters, the duration of stay restrictions imposed by regulations are sometimes inadequate, leading to considerable frustration for frontline workers⁵¹.

« The older one acts as if everything is fine, but deep down, he is not well at all. For the younger ones, it manifests differently, often through a lot of anger and tears. It is psychologically extremely difficult. We feel helpless. We are here to overcome our own struggles, and when we are not doing so well ourselves, it can be hard to manage this on top of everything else. »⁵²

*Mother of a family in a shelter
(Maison d'accueil le 26), December 2023*

CHILDREN FACING HOMELESSNESS AND POOR HOUSING A EUROPEAN REALITY

**FIGURE 6 • BELGIUM: DISTRIBUTION BY AGE ACCORDING TO ETHOS LIGHT CATEGORY
(BRUSS'HELP / FRB & REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIONS • 2022-2023)**



For a long time, Belgium's federal system made it difficult to quantify homelessness on a national level. However, comprehensive local counts and coordination efforts over the years now provide a clear picture of the situation nationwide⁵³. The existing statistics compiled showed that minors account for 26% of the recorded individuals (11,697 children compared to 34,163 adults). The overwhelming majority of them were either accommodated in shelters or transitional housing or were temporarily housed by family/friends due to a lack of housing solutions (*figure 6*) – children make up over 40% of those in these two situations. In the Brussels-Capital Region, the number of children accommodated in shelters increased from 178 to 275 between 2008 and 2022, representing a 55% rise. In 2022, these children constituted 36% of the population served by shelter and support structures.

In March 2024, the Walloon Parliament passed a series of decrees related to health and social action. Among the provisions, the new legislation included a reform of the support sector for people experiencing homelessness: shelters, in particular, will receive additional resources to support women who are victims of domestic violence as well as to organise subsequent support for families after their initial stay⁵⁴.

4. GROWING UP IN UNACCEPTABLE CONDITIONS

A threat to physical and mental health

It is now widely accepted that housing is one of the key social determinants of health. In its final report published in 2008, the commission established by the World Health Organization (WHO) to identify these determinants emphasised that “access to quality housing and shelter and clean water and sanitation are human rights and basic needs for healthy living”⁵⁵. Although the impact of homelessness and poor housing on health, particularly children’s health, remains insufficiently addressed, it is now well-documented⁵⁶. Living on the streets, between temporary shelters, or in unsuitable housing can severely impact sleep, nutrition, and hygiene – essential to the critical period of cognitive and emotional development in childhood. For younger children, physical illnesses or mental health issues resulting from these sub-standard living conditions can leave lasting scars that affect their future. These health problems are often exacerbated by the lack of access to care, with homelessness presenting a significant barrier to receiving medical attention⁵⁷.

For children living in slums or squats, basic services such as access to water and waste collection are often lacking. The resulting **poor hygiene** facilitates the spread of infectious diseases (such as whooping cough, measles, and tuberculosis) and the development of potentially severe dermatological and digestive conditions (including severe dermatitis, wound infections, and intestinal parasitosis). In **Bulgaria**, available statistical

studies revealed that Romani communities are particularly vulnerable to epidemics due to the unsanitary conditions in settlements: 89.3% of the 24,047 people infected during the measles outbreak in 2009 were from this community. The high population density and inability to isolate the sick also facilitated the spread of viruses such as hepatitis A⁵⁸. Additionally, the segregation of Romani communities further complicates access to healthcare – half of the Romani population in **Bulgaria** lacks health insurance⁵⁹. In **Czechia**, data showed a higher infant mortality rate among Romani communities, with poor housing conditions identified as a key factor⁶⁰. In **France**, neonatal mortality (aged under one month) and infant mortality (aged under one year) among communities living in slums are nine times and five times higher, respectively, than the national average⁶¹.

Poor housing conditions can also directly impact children’s **nutrition**. Due to financial constraints and the impossibility of cooking, many families staying in emergency shelters or hotels are forced to skip meals and/or consume lower-quality food. In France, the 2013 ENFAMS (children and families without private housing) survey conducted in the Paris region found that “nearly eight out of ten families and two out of three children” had experienced hunger⁶². The study also revealed that nearly half of the families had suffered from anaemia due to nutritional deficiencies: 50.3% of mothers and 37.7% of children⁶³.

Sub-standard living conditions are the cause of many health issues. In the United Kingdom, research based on the National Child Mortality Database⁶⁴ revealed that temporary housing conditions were among the factors contributing

to the unexpected deaths of 55 children between April 2019 and March 2023 – 42 of whom were under one year old⁶⁵. Factors cited include faulty heaters, leaks, and inadequate thermal insulation. Repeated exposure to damp conditions can also lead to respiratory problems such as asthma or persistent cough⁶⁶. For example, a two-year-old child in the **United Kingdom** died on 21 December 2020, from severe lung disease caused by mould in their home⁶⁷. Additionally, lead in old paint is a particularly dangerous source of poisoning, potentially leading to growth delays, behavioural disorders, or kidney disease⁶⁸.

Overcrowding which is common in hotels, emergency shelters, or when staying with family/friends, increases the likelihood of contracting infectious diseases. Children living in overcrowded conditions are ten times more likely to develop meningitis, a potentially life-threatening illness that can lead to complications such as hearing loss or blindness⁶⁹. Additionally, the close quarters and accompanying noise directly affect the quality of children's sleep, sometimes causing headaches, irritability, and disordered appetites⁷⁰. Disrupted sleep can further impair growth, hinder nervous system maturation, and affect memory development⁷¹.

According to a study conducted in France, children experiencing **energy poverty** were more likely to suffer from colds and sore throats (83.8% compared to 59.3% of children not exposed), exhibit more wheezing (29.8% compared to 7.1%), and develop migraines more frequently (35.0% compared to 16.9%)⁷². Additionally, challenges in maintaining an adequate temperature often compel households to rely on unsuitable or malfunctioning space heaters, raising the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning for children⁷³. In **Bulgaria**, due to a lack of funds to buy firewood, people living in slums often burn a variety of materials, some of which are toxic. Besides the health risks, these fires frequently cause acci-

dents, such as the one in February 2006 that resulted in the death of an infant⁷⁴.

Moreover, the risks associated with homelessness or poor housing can sometimes endanger the **physical safety**, or even the lives of children. According to Shelter, a charity advocating for tenant rights in the **United Kingdom**, "almost half of all childhood accidents are associated with physical conditions in the home. Families living in properties that are in bad condition are more likely to experience a domestic fire"⁷⁵. In **France**, on 14 February 2022, 13-year-old Aissé tragically died in a fire at a public housing apartment in Val-d'Oise⁷⁶. The fire was caused by a faulty electrical surge in one of the apartments, which lacked a fire safety system.

Mental health – defined by the WHO as "a state of well-being in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community"⁷⁷ – can be significantly impacted when someone's living environment fails to provide protection. Several studies indicate that the prevalence of mental health disorders is particularly high among homeless children. According to the ENFAMS survey conducted in France in 2013, 19.2% of children in temporary housing facilities suffer from mental health issues, compared to 8.0% of children in the general population⁷⁸. Various factors can influence children's psychological development. Sleep disorders, common in overcrowded housing, particularly affect learning and emotional regulation. The lack of stimulation, such as limited space for play and movement, can also lead to developmental delays⁷⁹. Environmental toxins play a role as well. Lead exposure is linked to impaired intellectual development and reading deficits, while mercury exposure can cause sensory-motor and cognitive disorders, impacting memory, visual attention, and coordination⁸⁰.

More broadly, sub-standard living conditions and instability are significant factors leading to stress, **anxiety and depression for children**. According to a report by Shelter in the **United Kingdom** published in 2006, children who had lived in temporary accommodations for more than a year were three times more likely to suffer from anxiety and depressive disorders⁸¹. In **France**, a 2018 study identified stress factors reported by children living in hotels. These included material conditions (such as lack of space, dilapidation, or unsanitary conditions), regulatory constraints (such as bans on making noise or receiving visitors), and the instability of their situation (frequent relocations, changing schools, uncertainty about the duration of their stay, and fear of sleeping in an unsuitable place)⁸². These children are particularly exposed to the stress of parental problems, not only because they experience deprivation daily but also because the lack of space means they are constantly exposed to adult conversations⁸³.

All these conditions are even more dangerous because homeless children and young people often face **significant barriers when it comes to accessing healthcare**. According to a report published by the European Commission in this regard⁸⁴, despite having greater physical and mental health needs, these minors face various practical challenges, such as a lack of financial resources when services are not free, the requirement to provide proof of address or identification, and difficulties in scheduling or confirming appointments. They also encounter institutional barriers, including the inability to meet certain timing obligations, long waiting periods, and a lack of continuity in their care. Additionally, they are often subject to stigmatising attitudes, with insufficient attention to their specific needs, as well as suspicion and judgement from some service providers.

Inadequate accommodation for children's needs

In Dublin, the accommodation provided by authorities for the homeless are generally unsuitable for children with disabilities or specific health needs. Some families are relocated to housing far from their original neighbourhoods, effectively cutting them off from the medical services they had fought hard to access. "It's just hard, it's so, so hard... if I don't get put back on northside accommodation my kids are going to lose their services, and I have to re-start on this side", said one mother who has five children with various physical and mental health issues (including kidney problems, chronic laryngitis, growth delays, and behavioural disorders). It took years to get these conditions diagnosed, and now the children's ongoing care is at risk⁸⁵.

A compromised family and social life

« Teenagers can struggle significantly with their self-image. They often hesitate to reveal that they live in a shelter, feeling stigmatised because they do not have access to the same opportunities as others. »⁸⁶

*Kathleen Vander Auwera,
coordinator of L'Arbre à Bulles, 4 April 2024*

The family generally serves as the basic social unit that allows children to grow and develop: “as the primary instance of socialisation, it shapes the child’s emotional and relational experiences and thus greatly contributes to the development of their psychosocial skills, essential to their well-being”⁸⁷. However, the uncertainty and instability associated with a lack of housing, as well as the overcrowding and insecurity linked to sub-standard living conditions, can profoundly affect family relationships and cohesion. Frequent relocations, constant changes in routines and familiar surroundings prevent the establishment of a daily routine; lack of space, rest, and privacy foster tensions and conflicts within the family. Overwhelmed by worry, frustration, and stress related to their situation, parents may be unable to provide the necessary attention to their children. As a result, attachment is often less secure for children and adolescents who are homeless or facing poor housing. “Family roles can also be disrupted by the high level of responsibility placed on children”⁸⁸. Several studies show that homeless minors are more likely to protect and care for their parents, assuming responsibilities disproportionate to their age⁸⁹.

Inadequate housing or housing exclusion can sometimes directly result in family breakdowns. Without suitable housing solutions that accommodate diverse family structures or when forced

to leave an increasingly expensive home, family members may be left with no option but to separate⁹⁰. Additionally, there are cases where parents are denied joint custody because they lack the necessary space or comfort to accommodate their children⁹¹. In **Hungary**, a study by the Utcárol Lakásba association reveals that housing problems are among the main reasons for intervention by child protection services. Between 2008 and 2013, some 881 children were placed in care due to sub-standard housing conditions, and 127 due to their parents being homeless⁹². More broadly, housing issues can impair or worsen the parent-child relationship. In France, a 2002 Senate report emphasised that the prevalence of sub-standard, unsanitary, or overly cramped housing, coupled with a lack of suitable accommodation, hampers parents’ ability to raise their children effectively. Consequently, parents are often forced to send their children outside for reasons of convenience or safety, resulting in a lack of parental supervision⁹³.

In overcrowded housing or accommodation, children are often deprived of privacy and forced to live constantly under the scrutiny of others. According to a UNICEF survey in **Germany**, minors housed in refugee centres suffered acutely from this lack of privacy, particularly due to toilets that do not lock⁹⁴. A 2023 study conducted in the **United Kingdom** found that 313,244 children had been forced to share their beds with other family members⁹⁵. The research also indicated that one in six children was living in cramped conditions with no personal space. Without a “place of their own”, it is difficult for children to find the peace needed for sleeping, playing, and dreaming, and impossible for teenagers to create their own space and gain independence⁹⁶. “The lack of space, discomfort, and unsanitary conditions are ongoing daily constraints that children internalise. For these children, the social world becomes a place of material constraints that limit their potential”⁹⁷. More generally, housing

exclusion impedes children's social interactions, particularly because it limits their ability to invite peers into their homes. It also leads to shame, embarrassment, or fear of mockery when discussing their situation⁹⁸.

Impact on access to school, learning, and academic achievement

« School is even more important for these children because it is their only way out. These are children who are exhausted, who fall asleep in class, and therefore do not have the same opportunities as others. »⁹⁹

Fanny Talbot, teacher, 30 August 2022

School serves as both a place for knowledge transmission and one of the primary spaces for socialisation. For homeless and poorly housed

children, it can also become a "safe haven", offering a temporary escape from the rigours of daily life¹⁰⁰. However, the school system, in that it often exposes and perpetuates social inequalities, can also be a source of insecurity for these young people who are already facing stigma. Although school relationships are vital for homeless children and teenagers, they can easily be weakened by various material and symbolic barriers: not being able to afford school meals, wearing different clothes to their peers, or missing out on school trips that cost money¹⁰¹. The social exclusion these students experience is so significant that teachers frequently need to adjust their practices. According to Shelter, a **United Kingdom**-based charity, 49% of teachers work in schools that educate at least one child living in a hotel or temporary accommodation funded by local authorities¹⁰². Various socio-pedagogical tools have been developed by organisations to help teachers identify these students, address their specific needs, and provide support to their families¹⁰³.

Réseau d'Aide aux Élèves Sans Toit

In August 2023, at least 400 children were living on the streets in the Lyon metropolitan area¹⁰⁴. In response to this situation, the *Réseau d'Aide aux Élèves sans Toit* association¹⁰⁵ has been actively working for several years to provide support to homeless families. Teachers and parents, who are evidently in a key position to identify the issues affecting these children, have been working to raise awareness among public authorities and striving to find housing solutions. Families are often temporarily sheltered in schools and gymnasiums, with nearly sixty establishments serving as temporary refuges since 2014. Similar collectives have emerged in major cities across France to advocate for the rights of homeless children.

The school experience of homeless children is partly shaped by their life outside the classroom. A social psychology study¹⁰⁶ conducted in **France** demonstrated the impact of socioecono-

mic conditions on how often and for how long preschool children speak in class. According to the researchers, while affluent parents encourage their children to express their individual-

lity and stand out, parents facing economic hardship tend to advise their children to avoid drawing attention to themselves. "Because of limited resources and the unpredictability of their living conditions, they don't encourage them to believe they can have an impact on the world. Instead, they teach them to adapt and follow the rules *because life is hard and you just have to live with it*"¹⁰⁷.

« When he was at college, he was the best in his class. He learned French in three months. But now it's really complicated for him. »¹⁰⁸

*Santi, single mother facing homelessness,
10 January 2024*

Poor housing conditions also have a significant impact on students' learning and academic performance. Chronic exposure to noise, for example, affects reading skills, long-term memory, and attention span. Additionally, the length of time spent in sub-standard living conditions has a notable effect on school results¹⁰⁹. An econometric analysis conducted in France in 2016 specifically found that, "all other things being equal, a student living in overcrowded housing is 1.5 times more likely to struggle academically than a student in adequate housing", and that "noise exposure increases the likelihood of academic delay by 1.4"¹¹⁰. The instability that characterises the lives of homeless children also has serious consequences on the continuity of their education. It is well established that frequent relocations negatively affect reading and maths performance, and over time, increase the risk of dropping out¹¹¹.

Although education is a fundamental right, homeless children face numerous barriers to schooling. Issues such as the lack of a permanent address can complicate school registrations¹¹², and frequent changes of accommodation and

evictions disrupt the continuity of their education¹¹³. In **France**, among the 7,000 children living in squats and informal settlements in 2023, 70% had either never attended school or had dropped out¹¹⁴. Since 2020, school mediation programmes led by the French Interministerial Delegation for Housing and Access to Housing (DIHAL) helped to double the number of these children enrolled in school (3,577 minors enrolled in 2022-2023, compared to 1,431 in 2019-2020)¹¹⁵. In **Romania**, the segregation of Roma children remains a persistent issue. Although the government acknowledged the gravity of the situation in 2004 and banned this practice through an ordinance in 2007, many public schools continue to perpetuate this form of discrimination. Children living in informal settlements, ignored in local urban planning, often lack access to nearby schools or end up in segregated educational institutions. Between 1998 and 2016, the proportion of such segregated schools increased significantly¹¹⁶.

5. ENDING HOMELESSNESS AND POOR HOUSING FOR CHILDREN

The essence of the foundational texts: ensuring decent housing for children

The right to housing for all is enshrined in several major international texts. These declarations and treaties, which consistently link housing to other essential needs, establish from the outset the idea that this right should be guaranteed to both individuals and families – a recognition dating back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. Article 25 explicitly states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of oneself and one’s family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services”¹¹⁷. Building on this foundational declaration, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted on 20 November 1959 outlines a set of needs and protections specific to children. Among these rights, which “every child shall be entitled to without any exception whatsoever [...] and without distinction or discrimination”¹¹⁸, is the right to housing: “a child has the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate nutrition, housing, leisure, and medical care”¹¹⁹.

Since these foundational texts are not legally binding on states, the international community has progressively worked to develop a series of obligations derived from these principles. This lengthy process culminated on 16 December 1966, with the adoption of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural

Rights. Article 11.1 of this treaty recognises “the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing, and housing”¹²⁰, and commits signatories to take appropriate legislative, administrative, budgetary, and judicial measures to fully realise the proclaimed rights. This commitment was reiterated ten years later with the adoption of the Vancouver Declaration at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements¹²¹. The declaration reaffirms the fundamental nature of the right to housing and¹²² the obligation of governments to ensure this right by all necessary means for “vulnerable groups which have special needs – such as children, the elderly, the handicapped, and the disabled”¹²³.

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted on 20 November 1989, by the United Nations General Assembly, expands upon the provisions outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As the most widely ratified treaty in history, this convention also completes the 1959 Declaration by definitively recognising the child as a fully-fledged legal subject. Comprising 54 articles and three optional protocols, the text outlines not only the civil, economic, political, social, and cultural rights that children are entitled to but also the obligations that governments must fulfil. While not central to the Convention, the right to housing is explicitly mentioned in Article 27.3: “states parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing”¹²⁴.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is the United Nations body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the 1966 Covenant by its signatories. It meets regularly for working sessions to review the progress reports of Member States. After its sixth session, held in 1991, the Committee issued a general comment on the right to housing to provide clearer guidance on its application. This comment clarifies the terms of Article 11.1 of the Covenant, stating that “individuals as well as families, are entitled to adequate housing regardless of age, economic status, group or other affiliation or status and other such factors”¹²⁵. The document further defines what is meant by the “right to adequate housing”, emphasising that it cannot be reduced to merely “having a roof over one’s head”. Instead, it should be understood as “the right to live somewhere in security, peace, and dignity”. The Committee outlines several factors that must be taken into account, including security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, and accessibility¹²⁶.

There is indeed an international consensus on the need to guarantee children’s right to housing, but the various existing texts lack the binding mechanisms necessary for their effective implementation. Across Europe, despite the expressed intention to develop a strategy to combat child poverty and homelessness, the measures in place remain insufficient.

Insufficient EU provisions

The principles of the Council of Europe regarding the protection of children are outlined in the European Social Charter, dated 18 October 1961. The Charter stipulates that “children and young

persons have the right to a special protection against the physical and moral hazards to which they are exposed”¹²⁷ and that all appropriate measures must be taken by the contracting parties to ensure the effective realisation of this right. Article 16 of the Charter further states that these parties “undertake to promote the economic, legal and social protection of family life by such means as social and family benefits, fiscal arrangements, provision of family housing, benefits for the newly married, and other appropriate means”¹²⁸. The revised version of the Charter, which came into force on 3 May 1996, explicitly asserts that “everyone has the right to housing”¹²⁹. According to Article 31 of this new treaty, Member States are required “to promote access to housing of an adequate standard; to prevent and reduce homelessness with a view to its gradual elimination; and to make the price of housing accessible to those without adequate resources”¹³⁰.

The European Union has also incorporated international principles into Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which states that “children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being”¹³¹. Moreover, Article 7 provides for respect for his or her private and family life¹³². Although the Charter of Fundamental Rights was integrated into the EU’s functioning treaties with the signing of the Lisbon Treaty, its implementation remains highly complex.

Adopted on 17 November 2017, by the European Parliament, the Council, and the European Commission, the European Pillar of Social Rights reaffirms a set of rights outlined in the treaties. Although the document lacks coercive power, it aims primarily to revitalise a social Europe by setting a framework for national policies on equal opportunities, employment, social protection, and inclusion¹³³. Principle 11 of the Pillar specifically states that “children have the right

to protection against poverty”, emphasising that “children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities”¹³⁴. Meanwhile, Principle 19, which addresses homelessness and poor housing, urges Member States to fulfil three commitments: “access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need; vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction; and adequate shelter and services shall be provided to the homeless to promote their social inclusion”¹³⁵.

Following the action plan for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights presented by the Commission on 4 March 2021, Member States unanimously approved a recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee. While this text is non-binding and specifically targets children at risk of poverty, it encourages each government to identify and catalogue “homeless children or children experiencing severe housing deprivation; children with disabilities; children with mental health issues; children with a migrant background or minority ethnic origin, particularly Roma; children in alternative, especially institutional, care; and children in precarious family situations”¹³⁶. Additionally, the recommendation reaffirms the necessity for these children to have unconditional access to “free healthcare, free education, affordable early childhood education and care, decent housing, and adequate nutrition”¹³⁷. It stresses that this guarantee is a crucial mechanism “to combat social exclusion among children and minimise the risk of homelessness”¹³⁸.

Recognising the limitations of the European Child Guarantee, Ursula von der Leyen has proposed an increase in funding as part of the political guidelines for the next European Commission¹³⁹. It is hoped that Member States will also take more proactive measures to address these challenges.

More widespread measures

Addressing homelessness and poor housing where children are concerned requires significant structural changes, such as raising wages and social transfers, regulating the housing market and capping rents, increasing the supply of affordable housing for families, and expanding and renovating social housing. Additionally, a variety of measures that have already been tried and tested across Europe could be scaled up to address the immediate needs of homeless children.

- **Identifying** situations of housing exclusion among children is crucial for ensuring immediate and appropriate support. Such identification should be conducted by all services that may come into contact with parents and in all places frequented by children, especially in schools. In **France**, the Réseau d'Aide aux Elèves sans Toit guide has developed a guide for teachers and parents of students¹⁴⁰ to better address the needs of families with school-aged children. This guide covers the identification of families without a permanent address, paying close attention to specific behaviour in children, and directing families to the appropriate social and administrative services. Additionally, preventive and intervention methods in schools have also been tested in the **United Kingdom**¹⁴¹.
- Public authorities should prioritise **preventive measures** to thwart evictions and loss of housing. Adapting and enforcing eviction moratoriums, expanding debt mediation services, conducting rapid interventions in cases of rent arrears, and providing immediate housing for families by temporarily covering their rent are all strategies that can help break the detrimental cycle of insecurity, which has severe consequences for children.

- The **adaptation of shelter and temporary accommodation facilities** and **engagement** with both children and parents must be central to addressing the needs of households in difficulty. Standards for shelters and accommodation centres need to be adjusted to meet children's specific needs, particularly regarding space, so they can live in a peaceful environment and grow up with dignity. Children should not be placed in centres designed for adults, and families must be able to stay together. While mothers and children are rarely separated, fathers are still too often forced to seek alternatives when space is limited. Furthermore, homeless children and parents should be consulted in the development of school plans⁴².
- Addressing the needs of children and families experiencing housing exclusion requires **integrated services** with providers that are trained to support these individuals. In **Finland**, the national strategy, which combines financial assistance with the widespread implementation of Housing First programmes, has significantly reduced the number of homeless families in the long term.
- The healthy development and well-being of children also require **affordable housing** situated in **suitable surroundings**. On one hand, high housing costs deprive families of many of the requirements that are essential for children's well-being, such as holidays, access to leisure activities, and cultural experiences. On the other hand, homes must be safe, located near public transport, and within the vicinity of green spaces. Like the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), urban planning must take into account children's needs and priorities in order to create more inclusive housing, spaces, and cities. Ensuring suitable housing and environments also involves improving buildings' energy efficiency and implementing local solutions to mitigate the effects of climate change.

CHILDREN FACING HOMELESSNESS AND POOR HOUSING A EUROPEAN REALITY

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