

SPRING 2022

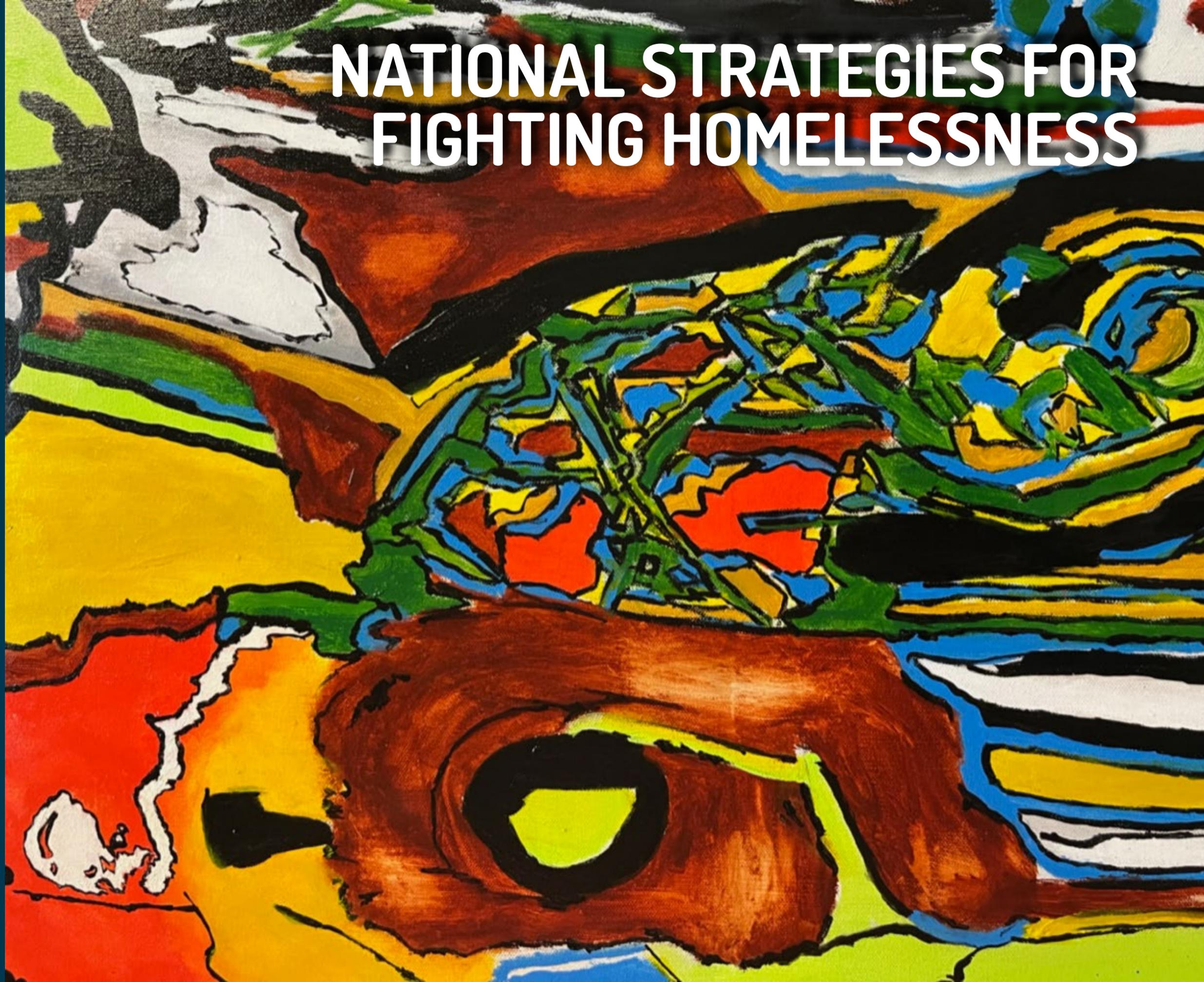
# Homeless in Europe

A Magazine by FEANTSA

## NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR FIGHTING HOMELESSNESS



FEANTSA



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What is striking about the various contributions to this issue of Homeless in Europe is the level of ambition in the various national strategies, and in the case of Germany, a proposed framework for such a strategy, discussed in this edition, and in the deployment of evidence-based responses to achieve their ambition to ending homelessness. In the Welsh paper, a clear statement that ending homelessness means ensuring that the experience of homelessness is rare, brief and unrepeatable is a helpful short-hand way of thinking about what ending homelessness would look like.

However, amongst the contributions, a regrettable outlier in the otherwise ambitious plans is the case of the Czech Republic, where the strategic approach to homelessness, which covered the period 2013-2020, was not renewed in 2021. This is regrettable, because evidence-based, housing-led strategies have demonstrably reduced the number of households experiencing homelessness in two of the countries discussed in this edition, Finland and Norway.

## SYNERGIES BETWEEN HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

The Spanish, German, Danish and Norwegian papers all stress the importance of housing and support in ending homelessness, with, for example, the very significant decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Norway between 2012 and 2020 being attributed to a 'long-term integrated strategy for housing and support services.' Indeed, the case of Norway, although it has not received the same international attention as Finland, demonstrates that prioritising the provision of housing and supports for those experiencing homelessness, evaluating responses, and robust monitoring of trends are the key components in reducing the experience of homelessness.

## MONITORING TRENDS

The importance of robust and consistent data collection is also stressed in the review of the Spanish homelessness strategy, and will inform the new plan which is currently being drafted covering the period 2023-2030. This issue is also highlighted in the Welsh contribution

# EDITORIAL



By **Eoin O'Sullivan**, Professor in Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland



They all emphasise the need to transform the homelessness response system from the provision of emergency shelter beds to the provision of secure and affordable housing.”

which notes that accurate data is ‘critical to understanding the extent of homelessness in Wales, how to respond to it, and how to measure progress.’ In an interesting observation, the authors of the Norwegian paper conclude that both municipalities and politicians take notice of the trends and can move homelessness up the policy agenda.

This is an issue worth considering further; that demonstrating that the number of households experiencing homelessness can be reduced can create a virtuous circle of political support and prioritisation that can further reduce the numbers of people experiencing homelessness. Equally, for those member states that have seen increases in the number of households experiencing homelessness based on robust monitoring mechanisms, the focus of policy can be on galvanising administrative and political support to respond in an evidence-based manner to the increases, rather than an often unproductive debate about the ‘real’ scale of homelessness. Having robust mechanisms of monitoring trends in homelessness is also crucial given the Lisbon target

of ending homelessness by 2030 – without such robust monitoring mechanisms, it will not be possible to determine if the objective of ending homelessness will be met.

## **MAKING THE SHIFT FROM SHELTERS TO PERMANENT HOUSING**

Permanent housing solutions rather than temporary accommodation are core to the Spanish, Welsh, Danish, and Norwegian strategies, as well as to the long-standing demand of the National Federation for the Homeless in Germany (BAG W) for a “National Strategy to Overcome Homelessness and Poverty in Germany.” They all emphasise the need to transform the homelessness response system from the provision of emergency shelter beds to the provision of secure and affordable housing.

However, as the Welsh paper notes, there are currently 7,500 people in temporary accommodation, so providing long-term accommodation will remain challenging in the short-to-medium term, particularly as the flow of people into temporary accommodation remains high. This has prompted increased efforts to prevent the experience of homelessness and to increase housing supply, availability, and accessibility in both the social housing and private rented sectors.

## FINANCIAL INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES

Of great interest is the new Danish policy of changing the funding regime for temporary and emergency accommodation. Central government in Denmark has, until now, reimbursed municipalities 50 percent of the cost of maintaining people in temporary and emergency accommodation without a time limit. However, with the new reforms, this reimbursement will be given for up to 90 days only, after which the full costs for shelter stays will be carried by municipalities. Instead, the central government reimbursement will be transferred to be available for various forms of support in housing following a stay in temporary and emergency accommodation. Rent levels in just over 4,000 units of existing and new public housing will be reduced to facilitate moving those in temporary and emergency accommodation into housing.

Financial incentives and disincentives to maintaining people in emergency accommodation are under-explored in the European context. The Danish data suggest that for the majority (70 percent) of emergency shelter users, the only barrier to exiting the shelter is the provision of an appropriate housing solution. Hence, the proposed shift to increasing the affordability of public housing, allied to dedicated funding to provide support in housing and increasing the costs to municipalities of maintaining people in shelters after 90 days is worth watching closely and, if successful in reducing shelter use, may be an important policy tool for other member states to consider deploying.

# ENDING HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLAN: POST-PANDEMIC TRANSFORMATION IN WALES

With the creation of the new Homelessness Action Group, Wales set out on an ambitious path towards ending homelessness. In November 2021, the Welsh Government published its Ending Homelessness Action Plan following engagement with the homelessness sector and a public consultation. This article offers an inside perspective from Cymorth Cymru, one of the NGOs involved in the process.



By **Katie Dalton** – Director, Cymorth Cymru, Wales

In December 2018, Wales' new First Minister Mark Drakeford appointed Julie James as the Minister for Housing and Local Government. The new Housing Minister made it very clear that she wanted to tackle homelessness and established the Homelessness Action Group<sup>1</sup> in June 2019. The group was asked to identify the policies needed to end homelessness in Wales and members included Cymorth Cymru and other representatives from homelessness, housing, local government, health and academia. The group engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including people with lived experience, and submitted its major report<sup>2</sup> to the Minister in March 2020, just days before Wales entered the first COVID-19 lockdown.

As in many other European countries, the pandemic has been extremely challenging for the homelessness and housing sector in Wales. However, it also presented an opportunity to show leadership, act decisively, remove bureaucracy, improve cooperation, and sharpen our focus on ending homelessness.

At the start of the pandemic the Minister announced £10 million to enable people sleeping rough or in unsuitable housing to access COVID-safe housing and support. This signalled the end for night shelters and people sleeping on the floor of hostels, with self-contained accommodation required to keep people safe. She also told local councils that all people experiencing homelessness should be regarded as a priority for housing during the pandemic. Since then, over 18,000<sup>3</sup> people have been provided with temporary housing, exposing the scale of hidden homelessness in Wales.

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1 <https://gov.wales/homelessness-action-group>

2 <https://gov.wales/homelessness-action-group-report-march-2020>

3 <https://gov.wales/homelessness-accommodation-provision-and-rough-sleeping-january-2022>

However, it is important to recognise that people in temporary housing are still homeless and need a settled home to call their own. During the summer of 2020 Cymorth Cymru worked with the Welsh Government to develop an approach that aimed to increase the quality and provision of housing so that people could start to move on to more permanent homes. The Minister announced another £20 million, which grew to £50 million<sup>4</sup>, to improve the quality of temporary housing and deliver more permanent homes for people to move into. The transformation had begun.

As Wales started to look beyond the pandemic crisis, the Welsh Government's housing department dusted off the Homelessness Action Group reports and looked at how to turn the recommendations into action. Following engagement with the homelessness sector and a public consultation, the Welsh Government published its *Ending Homelessness Action Plan*<sup>5</sup> in November 2021.

In the first few pages of the action plan, the Minister reflects on the pandemic and recognises the challenges faced by services, but maintains a clear focus on transforming the system and ending homelessness.

*"It has been a difficult but necessary change, allowing us to truly begin the transformation needed to achieve our long term goal of ending homelessness in Wales. I have been very clear that we will not change course because the Welsh Government sees homelessness as being simply intolerable."*

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4 <https://gov.wales/written-statement-phase-2-homelessness-update>

5 <https://gov.wales/ending-homelessness-wales-high-level-action-plan-2021-2026>



# However, it is important to recognise that people in temporary housing are still homeless and need a settled home to call their own.”

She also states that responsibility for ending homelessness extends beyond housing and requires action from all parts of government and all public services. This is reiterated in the plan’s policy principles, which also reference the importance of early intervention and prevention, services being person-centred and trauma-informed, and ensuring that people with lived experience inform policy and practice.

The action plan also provides a definition of ending homelessness; making homelessness rare, brief and unrepeated:

**Rare:** People are prevented from becoming homeless.

**Brief:** People who do become homeless can move into a settled home as quickly as possible, with minimal time in temporary accommodation.

**Unrepeated:** People do not experience multiple episodes of homelessness.

The plan contains a number of actions, derived from the recommendations of the Homelessness Action Group. The first section is dedicated to transforming the homelessness system in Wales, with a

particular focus on supporting the transition to rapid rehousing, which is also referenced in the Programme for Government<sup>6</sup>.

Rapid rehousing aims to make sure that when people become homeless, they spend as little time in temporary housing as possible and move quickly into a settled home. This will be a huge challenge, as there are still 7,500 people in temporary accommodation<sup>7</sup> due to the pandemic and we need a significant increase in truly affordable housing. We also need to provide the right support, including mental health and substance use services. The commitment to rapid rehousing also includes reference to expanding Housing First in Wales and maintaining fidelity to the Housing First principles.

Another action commits to legislative reform, which could include reducing the legal barriers to accessing housing. Factors such as whether someone is in a priority group, has a local connection to that

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<sup>6</sup> <https://gov.wales/programme-government>

<sup>7</sup> <https://gov.wales/homelessness-accommodation-provision-and-rough-sleeping-january-2022>

area, or is regarded as having made themselves homeless intentionally are likely to be considered as part of this work. Legislation could also address housing allocations, evictions, and extending homelessness prevention duties to a wider range of public bodies.

Unsurprisingly, there is an action dedicated to increasing housing supply, availability, and accessibility in both the social housing and private rented sectors. The re-elected Welsh Labour Government has made a commitment to building 20,000 low carbon social homes during this Senedd term, and there are plans to expand the Private Sector Leasing Scheme<sup>8</sup> to increase the availability of private rented properties for people leaving homelessness.

Another action focuses on developing a resilient and valued workforce. This pandemic has highlighted the amazing contribution of homelessness and housing support workers, who have protected and cared for people in very challenging circumstances. However, we know that their pay and recognition does not reflect this, with wages being squeezed over the past decade. Support workers also face huge challenges and trauma in their daily work and do not always have access to the psychological support they need. We have been very clear that this needs to change and are pleased to see an action dedicated to this.

The action plan commits to assertive outreach approaches<sup>9</sup> across Wales, recognising the importance of a persistent, person-centred approach to engaging with people who have experienced long-term homelessness and may have low levels of trust in services.

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8 <https://gov.wales/leasing-scheme-wales-guidance>

9 [https://www.cymorthcymru.org.uk/files/8615/7130/0502/Assertive\\_Outreach\\_Principles\\_ENG\\_Final.pdf](https://www.cymorthcymru.org.uk/files/8615/7130/0502/Assertive_Outreach_Principles_ENG_Final.pdf)

The plan also promises to strengthen housing support services, recognising that putting a roof over someone's head is just one piece of the jigsaw. This includes traditional tenancy support, provided by Cymorth's members, and multi-agency support from a range of public services such as mental health and substance use services. This is being supported by £166 million annual funding for housing support services and health funding for services working with people experiencing co-occurring homelessness, mental health and substance use issues.

The next set of actions focus on prevention and include references to reducing poverty and adverse childhood experiences<sup>10</sup>, which research has shown to increase the likelihood of experiencing homelessness. There is also a focus on early intervention, identifying young people at risk of homelessness much earlier, and reviewing family mediation services to ensure that young people across Wales can access support in order to resolve conflict and continue living at home, if that is the right option for them.

This section also commits to working with other public services to prevent homelessness for groups of people who are at greater risk. This includes preventing people from becoming homeless when they leave the care system, hospital, prison or the armed forces. There are also actions focused on improving services for people with mental health, neuro-developmental and/or substance use issues. These actions have been developed with the health department of the Welsh Government and are reflected in the mental health and substance use delivery plans for Wales.

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10 <https://phw.nhs.wales/files/aces/voices-of-those-with-lived-experiences-of-homelessness-and-adversity-in-wales-informing-prevention-and-response-2019/>

The final set of actions include some overarching themes, such as developing a homelessness outcomes framework, which will enable us to monitor progress towards our goal of ending homelessness in Wales. This is accompanied by a commitment to reviewing data collection, which is critical to understanding the extent of homelessness in Wales, how to respond to it, and how to measure progress.

The penultimate action promises to establish a communication programme to reduce stigma and increase understanding of the causes and solutions to homelessness. We know that ending homelessness requires investment in public services and a significant increase in house building in people's communities. Support from the public will be important, and Crisis research<sup>11</sup> has highlighted that we need to increase understanding of these issues. We also want a Wales where people experiencing homelessness are treated with dignity and respect.

The plan ends with one of the most important actions, which we strongly argued for: to empower people with lived experience to influence policy and practice. We provided opportunities for people with lived experience<sup>12</sup> to contribute to the Homelessness Action Group reports and believe passionately that they should continue to be at the heart of policy development. We are delighted to be launching a new *Experts by Experience* project very soon, and will use this to ensure that people with lived experience have their say on how we should end homelessness in Wales.

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11 <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/services-and-interventions/reframing-homelessness-in-the-united-kingdom-a-frameworks-messagememo-2018/>

12 <https://www.cymorthcymru.org.uk/en/news-blog/news/experts-experience-how-we-should-end-homelessness/>

The Welsh Government has already established a series of task and finish groups to start delivering on these actions, and we are looking forward to supporting the transformation over the coming months and years. We cannot underestimate the scale of the challenge ahead of us, but we have to seize this opportunity. Wales has come a long way over the last decade, however we still have so much more to do if we want to end homelessness.

 The plan also promises to strengthen housing support services, recognising that putting a roof over someone's head is just one piece of the jigsaw."

# LEARNING FROM PAST EXPERIENCE: NEW DANISH HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY TARGETS STRUCTURES THAT PREVENT HOUSING FIRST

A majority in the Danish Parliament has adopted a joint homelessness and housing agreement to be implemented from 2022. The agreement is a landmark approach to homelessness in Denmark, as it recognises and addresses structural factors that have prevented previous efforts to combat homelessness. Yet, it leaves out important questions that are necessary to address if all people experiencing homelessness are to benefit from the strategy.



By **Kirsten Skovlund Asmussen**, Communications and Dissemination Officer, projekt UDENFOR and **Anne-Sofie Maini-Thorsen**, Head of Communications and Knowledge, projekt UDENFOR

In November 2021, a political agreement with a plan to combat homelessness was published in Denmark. Its stated goal is to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness significantly and to abolish long-term homelessness entirely. A review of the key elements of the agreement testifies to its potential.

Combining housing and social policy, the strategy seeks to remove barriers that have previously prevented a successful implementation of Housing First at the national level. Thus, recognising and targeting structural causes, the strategy marks an important shift in the way homelessness is perceived and treated, bringing new hope that this strategy will succeed in bringing more people out of homelessness.

## TARGETING THE STRUCTURES THAT PREVENT EFFECTIVE HOMELESSNESS INTERVENTIONS

It is not the first time the parliament of Denmark has wished to implement Housing First. Efforts to put the approach into effect were introduced back in 2009 with the 'Homeless Strategy'. However, to this day Housing First has only been used to a limited extent. According to an analysis by the National Board of Health and Welfare, only 8% of citizens experiencing homelessness have received an intervention based on Housing First in the period from 2019 to 2020.

The analysis shows that providing enough permanent housing with an appropriate rent level has been a problem for the municipalities, which is where the specific homelessness efforts are anchored. In addition, a state reimbursement system has limited the financial incentives of

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the municipalities to find and offer regular permanent housing instead of allocating people living in homelessness to homeless hostels and shelters. According to Danish regulations, the state reimburses municipalities for half of the cost of the stays at these temporary housing solutions.

In combination with the lack of affordable permanent housing, this has contributed to an increase over the last ten years of the number of people with long-term stays in hostels. Statistics demonstrate that the number of people who have lived in a hostel throughout an entire year has increased by 43 per cent in the period from 2010 to 2020. This means that for a significant number of people, a stay at a hostel is a prolonged situation. A survey conducted by the National Board of Appeal shows that homeless hostels themselves assess that almost seven out of ten citizens are “ready” to move into stable housing, but that many have to wait a long time for a proper housing solution.

These are some of the systemic and structural barriers that the new homelessness strategy now seeks to do away with.

The Danish government and the parties behind the agreement intend to implement Housing First on a national level once and for all through several different measures: they plan to reduce the rent in existing public housing, build new affordable houses, reorganise the state reimbursement scheme, and create a new housing benefit clause in the Service Act that reinforces the use of the specialised housing support methods of Housing First. Furthermore, the agreement explicitly emphasises that night shelters, hostels, and other temporary housing solutions should be exactly that – temporary. Finally, it stresses the importance of proper social support in the housing-led interventions.

Key initiatives in the agreement include:

- A temporary rent reduction in 1,800 existing public housing units to which the municipalities have full allocation rights.
- Permanently reducing the rent in up to 2,250 new public housing units.
- A new provision in the Social Service Law regarding social support to citizens experiencing homelessness when they are offered housing and with the purpose of housing retention. This provision will ensure floating support services based on one of the three methods CTI, ICM and ACT.
- New reimbursement rules that dictate that the previous state reimbursement of 50% of the municipalities’ expenses for accommodation in homeless hostels is waived after 90 days. Instead, a 50% state reimbursement is introduced for the municipalities’ expenses for housing support (after the new Social Service Law provision) following a stay at a homeless hostel.
- Establishment of a national partnership with different stakeholders who will observe and discuss developments in the field along the way.

While state authorities are working on the legal texts to support the strategy, we are currently witnessing how Danish municipalities are mobilising resources to organise and investigate possible local efforts that can turn the newly adopted strategy into practice.

Hopefully, the new reimbursement rules in combination with the other key initiatives will work against the institutionalisation of people experiencing homelessness and make way for a basic human right: a home of one's own. Still, the agreement leaves out important questions that are necessary to address if all people living in homelessness are to benefit from the strategy.

## LACK OF FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH, PEOPLE SLEEPING ROUGH, AND EU CITIZENS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

By making a joint housing and homelessness agreement, the Danish government recognises that the problem of homelessness reaches beyond social policy. Unfortunately, it fails to include important health policy perspectives. Even though many people experiencing homelessness struggle with mental illness<sup>1</sup>, neither treatment of mental illness nor psychiatric support have been included as points of attention in the agreement.

Another important shortcoming of the agreement is the fact that it does not mention people sleeping rough, many of which live in social isolation and in dire conditions in the streets. Often their contact with authorities and homeless accommodation services is sporadic or even non-existent. The strategy, thus, fails to consider and address the

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1 A national survey on homelessness by the Danish Center for Social Science Research shows that the most frequently stated cause of homelessness across homeless situations is mental illness. According to the survey from 2019, 41 per cent state that mental illness is the main cause of their homelessness. VIVE, 2019. Hjemløshed i Danmark. Link: <https://www.vive.dk/da/udgivelser/hjemloshed-i-danmark-2019-14218/>

fact that not all people living in homelessness are in contact with the system. A social intervention with this group of people experiencing homelessness needs to be based on social outreach work in the streets, and it should be flexible, patient, and long-term in order to rebuild trust in the same system that has previously failed to help them, making it possible for the system to offer them support and housing-led intervention.

This gap between the social welfare system and vulnerable people who are sleeping rough is further complicated by legislation introduced in 2017 that has caused a de facto criminalisation of rough sleeping. These laws concern a ban on begging and camps that are 'able to create discomfort', making it possible for the police to issue fines and expel those sleeping rough from entire municipalities. Furthermore, they create ground for people sleeping rough to be punished with imprisonment.<sup>2 3</sup> This has, in our experience, made people sleeping rough afraid of the authorities, with the risk of creating further distance between them and the welfare system set in place to help them. Even though multiple actors in the field of homelessness have raised awareness of the consequences of the legislation, it is still in place to this day.

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2 According to the Danish Public Order, it is now prohibited to establish and stay in camps "which are capable of creating discomfort in the neighborhood". Danish Public Order, article 3(4) and 6(3). Link: <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2020/1094>

3 According to Danish criminal law, begging is illegal and punishable by up to six months in prison if the person has received a warning from the police. As of 2017, the penalty for "intimidating begging" has been increased to 14 days of unconditional imprisonment for first-time offenders. Furthermore, punishment is now immediate (no prior warning) in cases where begging is committed in pedestrian streets, train stations, at supermarkets and on public transportation. Danish Criminal Law, article 197. Link: <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2020/1650>

Finally, the strategy does not address the situation of EU citizens experiencing homelessness in Denmark.

Despite strict immigration laws and an increasingly hostile attitude towards destitute foreigners, which has characterised Danish policies in the last fifteen years, the presence of EU citizens experiencing homelessness in Denmark is a fact. Since the government has set the goal to significantly reduce homelessness, it should reconsider its position on excluding EU citizens from the same help that is provided to Danish citizens living in homelessness.

In conclusion, the initiatives in the new agreement show political awareness of the importance of a long-term, national, and cross-sectoral strategy based on Housing First. By focusing on the structural and systemic causes of homelessness, the Danish parliament recognises that the issue of homelessness cannot be solved within social policy alone. Unfortunately, it still fails to include some of the most vulnerable groups in our society, reminding us why advocacy for these particular groups continues to be necessary despite an otherwise ambitious strategy to combat homelessness.

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# SPAIN'S PLAN TO COMBAT HOMELESSNESS: AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE POLICIES IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE

Following its *Comprehensive National Strategy for Homeless People 2015-2020*, Spain is currently developing a new National Action Plan to combat homelessness. The plan seeks to incorporate lessons learnt from the past action plan, aiming to include a change of model and a sustainable and structured rights-based approach. This analysis by Patricia Bezunarte, the General Director for Family Diversity and Social Services in Spain, highlights the considerations surrounding the new National Action Plan, as well as other initiatives the Spanish government supports to combat homelessness.



By **Patricia Bezunarte**, General Director for Family Diversity and Social Services  
Ministry of Social Rights and 2030 Agenda

The fight against homelessness and housing exclusion is one of the main social policy priorities for the Spanish Government. At present, our determination to seek structural solutions is coupled with political and investment opportunities, both at the European and national level, which allow us to look to the future with optimism.

Among the opportunities for the definition of our state policy is the completion of the previous *Comprehensive National Strategy for Homeless People 2015-2020*<sup>1</sup> and the need to articulate a new one, on which we are already working. We are determined that this new framework will promote qualitative progress on homelessness with transformative results.

Some of the key elements that we are incorporating into the new strategic framework, firstly, have to do with adopting a **rights-based approach** as its pillar, thus overcoming the traditional focus on assistance and emergency management.

In addition, we are committed to a **change of model** that will allow us to radically transform both policies and responses in the medium to long term. This change of model must be implemented following the principles of person-centred care, respect for self-determination, and life projects. Furthermore, responses must be community-based and include homelessness prevention. Finally, the Strategy must be **ambitious in its objectives**, aiming to address homelessness in a structural and sustainable way.

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1 Estrategia Nacional Integral para Personas sin Hogar 2015-2020: <https://www.mdsocialesa2030.gob.es/derechos-sociales/servicios-sociales/Personas-sin-hogar/docs/EstrategiaPSH20152020.pdf>

The IEPP<sup>2</sup> recently carried out an evaluation of the Strategy 2015 - 2020, which provides us with very valuable information to promote a new cycle of public policies on homelessness in our country. We need to anchor this new process in the evidence already obtained, both in terms of the progress made and the challenges that still need to be addressed. In this regard, among all the lessons that were learnt in the report, I would highlight the following:

- The existence of a strategic instrument at national level constitutes a reference framework and an inspirational tool for the different public administrations (regional and local) in the care of people experiencing homelessness. There is a broad consensus on the usefulness of this type of instrument for decision-making at regional and local level.
- It is necessary to promote greater knowledge of homelessness in order to plan public interventions that seek solutions. Data collection methodologies must be consistent, harmonised, and structured at the national level.
- We must make an effort to include affected groups that have remained in the shadows, such as women who are victims of gender-based violence or trafficking, young people, youth who have left care, ex-prisoners, or those with chronic or terminal illnesses.
- Shared leadership between social services and housing (responding to the need to develop housing and support-based approaches) needs to be strengthened in both the planning and the implementation of the new Strategy, and a detailed budget has to be developed for its execution.

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2 Instituto de Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas <https://www.mptfp.gob.es/portal/funcionpublica/evaluacion-politicas-publicas/Informes-de-Evaluacion.html>



# It is necessary to promote greater knowledge of homelessness in order to plan public interventions that seek solutions.”

We have already started planning the Strategy for the period 2023-2027, which we expect to complete in 2022, and which will allow us to address all these challenges in an ambitious and participatory way. At its core, the Strategy will be aligned with European recommendations, with the European Pillar of Social Rights, the 2030 Agenda, and with our national priorities, aimed at making significant progress in structural responses to homelessness.

In addition to the Strategy, we are already promoting various initiatives aligned with the aim of overcoming the deficits and addressing the challenges identified in the former evaluation. Among them, we would like to highlight the design of a common methodology of night counts in 2021, in collaboration with the regions, local councils, and the third sector, to improve knowledge of the situation of people experiencing homelessness.

Furthermore, through the funding provided by the European Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, some key projects are being promoted at the national level:

- The simultaneous application in 63 Spanish cities of the new night count methodology, scheduled for the beginning of 2023. This pilot implementation will allow us to advance with a triple objective: on the one hand, to improve and modernise the information systems of the Social Services in Spain; on the other hand, to try out and validate the tool and, finally, to have an initial idea of the situation of homelessness at a national level that we can use as the starting point of a data collection process that will facilitate the elaboration of concrete proposals.
- The financing of 20 national pilot projects, within the framework of a Strategy for deinstitutionalisation and modernisation of Social Services. All of them are based on innovation and/or scaling up of previous pilot experiences that make it possible to experiment with solutions that will be rigorously evaluated. Among them, six include homelessness in their priority groups. After three years of experimentation and generation of evidence, we will turn them into structural public policies. The specific projects address the following topics:
  - Deinstitutionalisation of the homeless care system through permanent housing solutions.
  - The use of early attention to residential exclusion as a strategy to prevent homelessness.
  - Initiatives for the deinstitutionalisation of young people in situations of residential exclusion.

- The creation of a learning community around these collaborative projects (in which both Third Sector entities and Public Administrations are involved). Its aim will be to create dynamics of exchange, mutual learning, and the generation of shared knowledge.

In addition, I would like to highlight the fact that, as a result of the need to activate shared governance mechanisms during the pandemic, inter-administrative collaboration as well as governance spaces, led by our Ministry, have been intensified and improved. This has improved the dynamics of deliberation and decision-making, as well as the reaching of consensual agreements.

However, a European framework is essential to reinforce the transformative effort that many countries are making. The launch of the *European Platform on Combatting Homelessness* is a very important milestone. Our challenge now is to make it a true instrument for transforming European policies. The active promotion of dialogue and cooperation between Member States, as well as mutual learning, the exchange of good practices and the promotion of research at a European level, should be among its top priorities.

We also cannot ignore the fact that we are in the midst of planning the EU's multiannual financial framework 2021-2027, which must include the fight against homelessness as one of its key objectives.

Finally, we are in a moment of change and, therefore, of opportunities. Let us take advantage of them so that the policies to combat homelessness, both in Spain and in Europe as a whole, take a definitive step towards ending homelessness by 2030.

“At its core, the Strategy will be aligned with European recommendations, with the European Pillar of Social Rights, the 2030 Agenda, and with our national priorities, aimed at making significant progress in structural responses to homelessness.”

# HOMELESSNESS IN NORWAY: THE SUCCESS OF LONG-TERM HOUSING-LED STRATEGIES

In Norway, homelessness has been halved since 2012. One major explanation for this reduction is a sustained, coordinated, and integrated strategy, involving the development of housing and support services and the building-up of expertise. Efforts have focused on disadvantaged groups in the housing market in general, and specifically on families with children and those who suffer from substance abuse and mental health problems. This analysis by Husbanken demonstrates the importance of long-term housing-led approaches implemented at a national level.



By **Liv Halseth**, Senior Adviser, Husbanken, Norway,  
**Tine Larsson**, Senior Adviser, Husbanken, Norway and  
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## REDUCTION OF HOMELESSNESS THROUGH NATIONAL COOPERATION

The national survey of homelessness in Norway<sup>1</sup> revealed that there were 3,325 homeless people in 2020. Given that Norway's population is about 5,400,000 inhabitants, this is equivalent to 0.62 per 1,000 inhabitants.

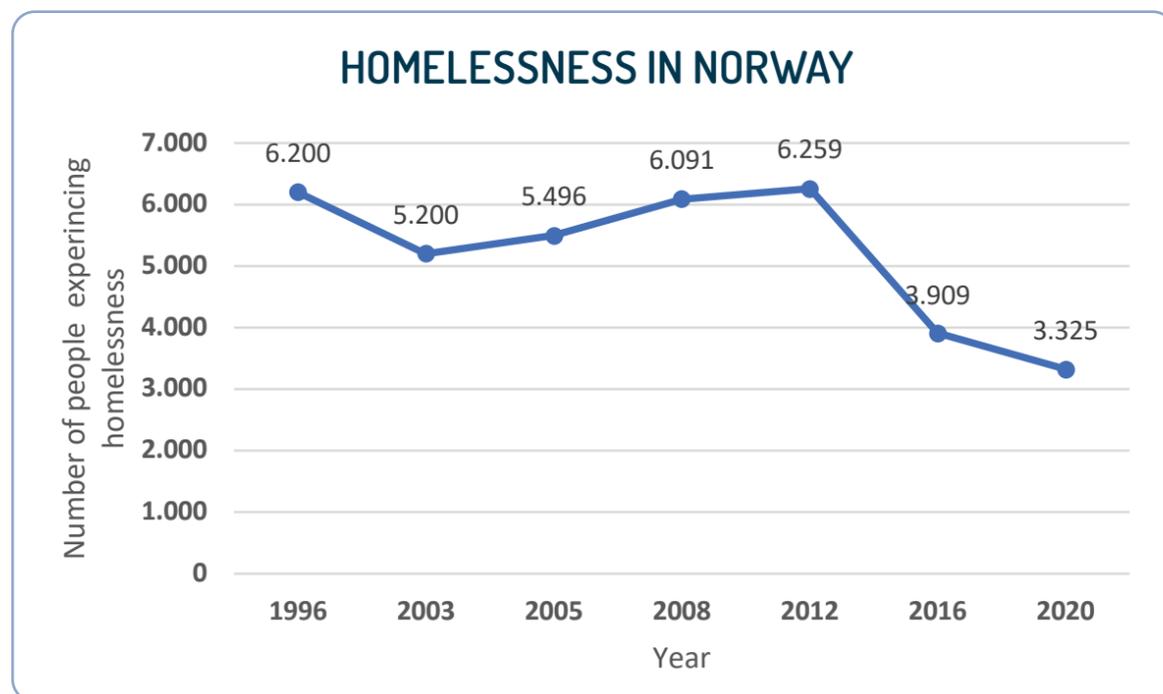


Figure: Nationwide survey; 48th week of the year (NIBR)

1 Dyb, E.; Zeiner, H. H. (2021). *Bostedsløse i Norge 2020 - en kartlegging*. ["Homelessness in Norway 2020 – a survey."] ISBN: 978-82-8309-340-7.

The reduction in the number of homeless people is a result of national cooperation and a long-term integrated strategy for housing and support services.<sup>2</sup> Responsibility for the Norwegian housing policy is split between the state, municipalities, and the private sector. The Norwegian state sets goals and provides a framework through laws, regulations, and financial tools such as loans and grants distributed through the Housing Bank. The public health and welfare services are responsible for homeless people. Municipalities should help disadvantaged groups in the housing market to access and maintain their own homes and are responsible for finding temporary accommodation for homeless people. This is also done in cooperation with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In addition, municipalities are responsible for housing planning, renovating homes, and providing necessary infrastructures for housing development while the private sector (companies, organisations, and individuals) is responsible for building the houses.

2 *Boligsosialt arbeid*: Housing and support services including both providing housing for the disadvantaged in the housing market and strengthening the individual's opportunity to manage his/her own living situation. The work can be divided into operational and strategic tasks. The operational tasks involve providing advice and guidance, providing suitable housing, granting financial support, implementing housing and local community measures, as well as providing follow-up and services in the home. The strategic tasks involve establishing long-term goals, developing measures and tools to achieve these goals, and allocating financial and professional resources for the work, as well as deciding where and by whom the various operational tasks will be solved.

Homeless people in Norway fall within the category of disadvantaged groups in the housing market (housing needs and housing exclusion), defined as people and families who are unable to find and/or maintain a satisfactory housing arrangement on their own. These people find themselves in one or more of the following situations:

- without their own home (homeless)
- at risk of losing their home
- living in an unsuitable housing or living environment

A homeless person is defined as a person who does not own or rent a home; lives in makeshift or temporary housing arrangements; stays temporarily with close relatives, friends, or acquaintances; lives in a correctional service or an institution and is due for release within two months without a home to go to; or does not have any accommodation for the coming night.

The Norwegian definition is based on FEANTSA's (the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) and is the same as the definition used in Sweden and Denmark.

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT HOMELESSNESS

The national survey of homelessness is one of the tools used by the Norwegian state to monitor trends in homelessness. The survey, which is carried out on a national basis and shows the number of homeless people in Week 48, must be viewed as a minimum estimate. To this date, seven surveys have been carried out (since 1996). The national survey of homelessness is initiated and financed by the Housing Bank<sup>3</sup> on behalf of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. The Housing Bank also funds research projects to increase our knowledge about people experiencing homelessness.

Statistically, the typical profile of a homeless person in Norway is a single man in his mid-to-late 30s, born in Norway. He has been homeless for a long time, has a substance abuse problem, and receives social or disability benefits. He lives in a town or city, where he stays in temporary accommodation or with friends and acquaintances<sup>4</sup>. However, the most recent surveys show that this profile is changing slightly.

There are few families with children that are homeless (112 adults and 142 children in 2020). By comparison, 679 homeless children were reported in 2012. From 2016 to 2020, the proportion of homeless people who were born outside Norway rose by 10% to 33%. There were 536 young homeless people under the age of 25 (16% of the total), which is a relatively low proportion compared with other European

<sup>3</sup> For more information visit [The Norwegian State Housing Bank – Husbanken](#)

<sup>4</sup> Dyb, E.; Zeiner, H. H. (2021). *Bostedsløse i Norge 2020 - en kartlegging*. ["Homelessness in Norway 2020 – a survey."] ISBN: 978-82-8309-340-7.



Research and evaluations show a link between the long-term approach implemented through the national strategies and a reduction in the number of homeless people.”

countries. The proportion of homeless people under the age of 35 is falling, whereas there is a slight increase in homelessness amongst people over the age of 55. Moreover, 956 of the homeless people are women (29% of the total).

There are homeless people in all municipalities, but most live in the larger towns and cities. Only 19 of Norway’s 356 municipalities have 20 or more homeless people accounting for 67% of all homeless people in Norway. Almost half (48%) have a long history of homelessness, while for one quarter homelessness was a new acute problem in 2020.

Most homeless people live in temporary accommodation (31%) or stay with friends, acquaintances, or relatives (30%); 18% are people who don’t have a home to go to after leaving a treatment centre or a correctional facility; four percent were staying in a crisis shelter; and 2% have no place to sleep.

## LONG-TERM STRATEGIC WORK AND NATIONAL STRATEGIES

The goal of the Norwegian housing policy is to ensure adequate and secure housing for all, which includes a subsidiary goal of no-one being homeless. Since the first survey in 1996, Norway has worked strategically to reduce homelessness. To this date, there have been five strategic projects in Norway working with homeless people.

In the framework of the project “Local action plans for housing and support services” (1999-2001), the Housing Bank’s role was to provide all municipalities with the expertise and financial resources to draw up action plans for housing and support services. The project “Homeless people” (2001-2004) was a collaboration between the seven largest urban municipalities, NGOs, two ministries and a directorate, as well as the Housing Bank. The aim was to develop methods, practices and models that could be used in all municipalities to prevent and combat

homelessness. The housing and support service strategy “Towards your own home” (2005-2007) was the first national homelessness strategy that set specific targets.

The national strategy “Housing for Welfare 2014-2020”<sup>5</sup> was a collaboration between five ministries, which aimed to ensure a coordinated and targeted government approach to disadvantaged groups in the housing market. It sought to strengthen the ability of municipalities to help disadvantaged groups in the housing market, both at a technical and a financial level. The strategy included national and local measures such as capacity building activities, action plans, targets, and reporting. The strategy did not include any additional funding, but existing grants, loans and human resources were reoriented towards the goals and priorities that it set out. Goals relating to homelessness were also incorporated into the Norwegian Escalation Plan for the Substance Abuse Field (2016 to 2020), which earmarked NOK 500 million for new homes<sup>6</sup>. One of its key goals was to coordinate the work of the various specialist services. The Housing Bank has funding available for financing more homes.

The goal of the current national strategy “Everyone needs a safe home” (2021–2024)<sup>7</sup> is to help more disadvantaged people obtain a secure and adequate home. One of the subsidiary goals is to eliminate homelessness, and various actions have been taken to help achieve these goals. Within the long-term strategic work that has been done,

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5 See English version: [housing\\_for\\_welfare\\_national\\_strategy\\_for\\_housing\\_and\\_support\\_services\\_2014\\_2020.pdf](#) (regjeringen.no)

6 Approximately 50 million euros

7 Only in Norwegian: [oppdatert-versjon-alle-trenger-en-nytt-hjem.pdf](#) (regjeringen.no)

there has been a growing emphasis on cooperation across different areas of welfare provision and management levels from ministries to municipalities, and the approach has always been housing-led.

Research and evaluations show a link between the long-term approach implemented through the national strategies and a reduction in the number of homeless people<sup>8</sup>. The following is a list of factors considered important in Norway’s efforts to reduce homelessness:

- Both national and municipal authorities have shown a willingness to prioritise homeless people and other disadvantaged groups in the housing market.
- In Norway, responsibility for homeless people is shared between many sectors, including social services (including housing), child welfare services, correctional services, and health care services. When responsibility is shared between many sectors, their ability to cooperate is vital, which is something that has been stressed by the national strategies. Homeless people are often suffering from multiple complex problems, which means they need help from several services. If there is good coordination between those services, efforts to combat homelessness are more likely to succeed.
- The strategic projects have had other target groups as well as homeless people. That helps to prevent homelessness and thus combat homelessness over the longer term. It also allows bigger and more robust projects, which is important in a country with relatively few homeless people.

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8 Dyb, E. (2019). *Færre bostedsløse – hva er forklaringen?* [“Fewer homeless people – what is the explanation?”] ISBN: 978-82-8309-280-6.



Within the long-term strategic work that has been done, there has been a growing emphasis on cooperation across different areas of welfare provision and management levels from ministries to municipalities, and the approach has always been housing-led.”

- A high proportion of homeless people are dealing with multiple problems and are considered long-term homeless. This group of homeless people is generally in contact with various support services, which makes it easier to target measures for them than for other groups of homeless people.
- The Housing Bank has financial tools consisting of loans and grants to help provide *suitable* homes for this target group<sup>9</sup>.
- The national strategies set clear goals and targets for homelessness, which the evaluations have considered important to establish and implement local measures.
- Since 2000, Norway has worked to provide more housing to reduce homelessness. This approach has also been incorporated into the strategies of other sectors in Norway, including the Escalation Plan for the Substance Abuse Field, which allocated NOK 500 million towards the building of new homes.
- The Housing Bank is responsible for ensuring that there are regular surveys of homelessness, and that work is done to obtain better data. Municipalities and politicians take notice of the results and homelessness moves up the agenda<sup>10</sup>.
- Young people and families with children have been prioritised over an extended period, which has put the spotlight on these groups and led to measures aimed at them.

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9 OECD (2020), “Better data and policies to fight homelessness in the OECD”, Policy Brief on Affordable Housing, OECD, Paris, <http://oe.cd/homelessness-2020>

10 Dyb. E. (2020) “Reinventing Homelessness through Enumeration in Norwegian Housing Policies: A Case Study of Governmentality.” *Housing, Theory and Society* Vol 38, No 5 ([tandfonline.com](http://tandfonline.com))

- The strategies have stressed the importance of developing and building expertise through the Housing Bank and of sharing knowledge about homelessness with municipalities and other agencies responsible for helping homeless people. An important aspect of this work is gathering and disseminating the experiences of municipalities<sup>11</sup>.
- The national strategies do not set out any particular methodology that municipalities should follow in their work on housing homeless people. Municipalities generally follow the principles of “Housing First”, but with significant local adaptations. These adaptations are necessary considering the high number of municipalities in Norway (356), many of which are small and have relatively few homeless people.

Compared with other countries, there are few homeless people in Norway. On an international level, only Finland has achieved a similar reduction to Norway. Finland and Norway are pioneer countries in adopting and developing a housing-led approach<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> The evaluation of “Housing for Welfare” found increasing expertise at agencies.

<sup>12</sup> Dyb, Evelyn (2019). *Færre bostedsløse – hva er forklaringen?* [“Fewer homeless people – what is the explanation?”] ISBN: 978-82-8309-280-6. 5

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# THE FIGHT AGAINST HOMELESSNESS: THE APPROACH OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN 2021

After following a concrete national action plan to combat homelessness in 2020, the Czech government decided against a new iteration of it for 2021, leaving the country without a systematic approach to address homelessness. While this did not prevent some positive changes in homelessness policies, other developments and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were worrisome. This article by NADĚJE provides insight into the Czech Republic's fight against homelessness over the past year and considers what the future might bring for their country and organisation.



By **Jakub Dutka**, Chief Methodologist, NADĚJE

In the first place, it is crucial to note that in the light of the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the hundreds of thousands of immigrants who have been fleeing from Ukraine and arriving in the Czech Republic, it is extremely difficult to look back and reflect on the last year. It will be necessary to overcome countless challenges on the journey of helping such an enormous number of people who had to leave their homes behind. Some of the challenges we will have to face in the fight against homelessness are well known. They include managing fear and other strong emotions - our own as well as those of people in need-, searching for a dialogue, sources of solidarity, being able to improvise but also having a solution concept in place, having an honest and legit approach while working with information. What can we say then about the fight against homelessness in the Czech Republic in 2021?

Let us start with a brief description of a systematic approach at the national level. Until 2020, the Czech Republic had a specific national concept of prevention and management of the issue of homelessness (*Koncepce prevence a řešení problematiky bezdomovectví v ČR do roku 2020*), which helped to identify problems, suggested goals and individual subjects who would be responsible for meeting them. However, at the ministerial level, it was decided that

there would not be a 2021 conception. Suddenly, there was no strategic plan approved by the government to fight homelessness. However, after negotiation in 2021, it was decided that some key topics, such as improving health and social care accessibility for homeless people, would be part of the Social inclusion strategy 2021-2030.

We can talk of two partial successes in terms of legal changes in the last year. After two years of lengthy negotiations, the amendment of Code of Enforcement of conduct was voted upon and approved. Although the result is not optimal, it is certainly an improvement that puts the debtors in the Czech Republic in a better position. Indebtedness and distraint are often the cause of people becoming homeless, and the difficulty in overcoming them hinders their way out of social exclusion. Another important achievement of 2021 was made by the Constitutional Court: the cancellation of geographical areas ineligible to claim housing benefit. Since 2017, this legal measure did not allow people living in certain areas to claim housing benefits. The measure affected poor people in socially excluding locations and represented an unequal approach to helping people in need. On the contrary, there has been no progress in two key areas: the amendment of social services law and the creation of social housing law. The social services law is crucial for fighting homelessness in the Czech Republic because

“Suddenly, there was no strategic plan approved by the government to fight homelessness.”

it legally defines social services and social work, determines relevant subjects and organisations, and the flow of financial resources. Most of the tools for helping people without a home are outlined by this law. Unfortunately, the law is from 2008 and it does need a number of revisions so that it can work more efficiently in the areas of prevention and support for people in need of housing; revisions could also improve the position of NGOs and support other helping professionals. The prepared amendment has been yet again postponed. Lastly, it needs to be highlighted that there is no law covering social housing. Last year, in Autumn, the Czech Parliament Elections brought political change with the election of a new government. It remains to be seen whether the new government will manage to prepare a law that would improve the access to housing for underprivileged people, help them find standard accommodation and provide professional support.

The most significant factor affecting the degree of support to people experiencing homelessness in 2021 was, without any doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic. Regions and cities were more or less intuitively establishing temporary housing facilities for homeless people, with empty hotels often being used. Similarly, some places successfully coordinated help with the pandemic such as testing, vaccinating, providing food, accommodating people from the street in new facilities, and isolating and treating ill individuals. Collective efforts prevented people experiencing homelessness from being among the most affected groups. It cannot be said that everything worked perfectly, but thanks to restrictions and the enormous personal commitment of many of the healthcare professionals, NGO workers, volunteers, and also cities and councils, the worst consequences were avoided.

A negative side effect of the pandemic is the discontinuation of work on new tools and developments to fight homelessness. This happened in our organisation, NADĚJE, as most of our resources had to be used to prevent and ease the impact of the pandemic. However, we - alongside other non-profit organisations and cities- began to work on a plan focusing on how to develop help for homeless people through the European Social Fund Operational Programme 'Employment'. We would like to focus on strengthening the role of our organisation in the field of social housing; we are considering three or four projects in different regions with specific attention to vulnerable groups (women, young people, families from socially excluded locations). In relation to the programs that are being prepared, we can also mention the initiative of the umbrella organisation *Sít aktérů pro domov* which has been, for the last year, working on the possible creation of a new systematic project to support professionals providing services to help people experiencing homelessness.

Unfortunately, 2021 was not a successful year for the fight against homelessness in the Czech Republic. Despite the indescribable commitment and effort of so many people, who have been going beyond their strength, most of the challenges and problematic areas remain unsolved. Let us hope for a better future, even if scepticism creeps into our minds.

Touching on a wide range of topics such as migration, homelessness prevention, housing, employment promotion and healthcare, BAG W offers a thorough breakdown of what the new German government's National Action Plan to Overcome Homelessness and Housing Exclusion by 2030 should focus on in order to meet its goals.

# OVERCOMING HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION: WHAT GERMANY'S NATIONAL ACTION PLAN SHOULD LOOK LIKE



By **Annika Maretzki**, BAG W Policy Advisor



## INTRODUCTION

Germany has set a goal to end homelessness and housing exclusion by 2030 and is launching a national action plan to achieve this (Coalition Treaty between SPD, Bündnis90/Die Grünen and FDP; 24.11.2021).<sup>1</sup>

With the coalition agreement of the new federal government, the long-standing demand of the National Federation for the Homeless in Germany (BAG W) for a “National Strategy to Overcome Homelessness and Poverty in Germany” is set as a task for the legislative period 2021-2025. The current estimates of the BAG W on the number of people experiencing homelessness in Germany for the year 2020 show that this is urgently needed: the total number of people experiencing homelessness has increased from 237,000 people in 2018 to 256,000 in 2020. If the number of recognised refugees living in homelessness is added, the total number of people experiencing homelessness in Germany is even around 417,000.<sup>2</sup>

Now the National Action Plan must be fleshed out with political measures. As early as 2013, the BAG W outlined the components of

- 1 Coalition Agreement 2021: MEHR FORTSCHRITT WAGEN - BÜNDNIS FÜR FREIHEIT, GERECHTIGKEIT UND NACHHALTIGKEIT. Retrieved from: [https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Koalitionsvertrag/Koalitionsvertrag\\_2021-2025.pdf](https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Koalitionsvertrag/Koalitionsvertrag_2021-2025.pdf)
- 2 BAG W (2021): Pressemitteilung Steigende Zahl Wohnungsloser im Wohnungslosensektor, Wohnungslosigkeit anerkannter Geflüchteter sinkt. Retrieved from: [https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/PRM/PRESSEMAPPE\\_BAG\\_W\\_Schaetzung.pdf](https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/PRM/PRESSEMAPPE_BAG_W_Schaetzung.pdf)

such a plan that it considers absolutely necessary in its “Call for a National Strategy to Combat Homelessness and Poverty in Germany.”<sup>3</sup>

In the following, we will first discuss the necessary framework of a National Action Plan from the point of view of the BAG W in order to then outline our concrete policy demands in key policy fields for the different levels - federal, state (“Länder”) and local - in the federal political system of Germany.

## ACTION PLAN(S) AGAINST HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION: BACKGROUND AND SCOPE

The National Action Plan should address all subgroups of homelessness and housing exclusion in their specific living situations.<sup>4</sup> This ranges from people who are currently homeless, to those who are at imminent risk of homelessness (e.g. termination or eviction is imminent), to people living in unacceptable housing conditions, such as overcrowding and escalating conflicts etc.

- 3 BAG W 2014: Aufruf zu einer Nationalen Strategie zur Überwindung von Wohnungsnot und Armut in Deutschland. Retrieved from: [https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/DOK/DOK\\_BAGW\\_Nationale\\_Strategie\\_Wohnungsnotfaelle.pdf.pdf](https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/DOK/DOK_BAGW_Nationale_Strategie_Wohnungsnotfaelle.pdf.pdf)
- 4 BAG Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V. (Eds.) (2010): Wohnungsnotfalldefinition der BAG Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V. Retrieved from: [https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/POS/POS\\_10\\_BAGW\\_Wohnungsnotfalldefintion.pdf](https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/POS/POS_10_BAGW_Wohnungsnotfalldefintion.pdf)



# For a National Action Plan to overcome homelessness and housing exclusion, housing policy solutions are necessary but not sufficient on their own.”

For a National Action Plan to overcome homelessness and housing exclusion, housing policy solutions are necessary but not sufficient on their own. The causes of homelessness and housing exclusion are manifold and range from housing policy developments, such as rising rents and the insufficient supply of affordable housing, to serious socio-political undesirable developments and the insufficient expansion of prevention services in the municipalities.

Moreover, the problem of homelessness and housing exclusion is usually linked to different dimensions of social exclusion (e.g. unemployment, education and skills, health, or social support networks).

This characterises the particularly precarious situation of people experiencing homelessness and necessitates interdepartmental action by the federal government.

Germany’s characteristic federal system makes political action to overcome homelessness and housing exclusion necessary at all political levels, i.e. the federal, *Länder*, and local level. We therefore call on all political levels to develop and implement so-called framework plans for housing emergencies (*Wohnungsnotfall-Rahmenpläne*).

## MAIN TASKS IN KEY POLICY AREAS

### Prevention

Prevention is better than cure. We therefore demand the nationwide expansion of a preventive system to stop the loss of housing. This includes the secured and long-term financing of central counselling centres throughout the country. Implementing a functioning prevention system is a political decision, made by each individual municipality and district. We, therefore, call for the establishment of a funding programme for the development of municipal specialised centres in cooperation with the services of the Free Welfare organisations, e.g. in outreach counselling for people who are acutely threatened with losing their homes. Among other things, we demand to amend tenancy law to the effect that so-called grace period payments (*Schonfristzahlungen*) by the tenant can prevent not only termination without notice, but also ordinary termination. Furthermore, an eviction may only be carried out if a reasonable alternative living space is available.

## Integrated Emergency Housing

Preventing the loss of housing should always have priority over accommodating people in a way that complies with German Public Order and Police Laws. People living in police-assigned shelters or emergency shelters are often in particularly desperate situations. They have usually fallen through the cracks of previous assistance programmes and may not even have received help according to §§ 67ff SGB XII.<sup>5</sup> However, because the loss of housing cannot always be prevented, we demand the following:

- **At federal and *Länder* level:** Accommodation under German Public and Police Law must be discussed with the aim of developing guidelines for housing people experiencing homelessness in ways which respect their human dignity.
- **At *Länder* level:** As the highest regulatory authorities, the Ministries of the Interior are responsible for ensuring that the local and district police authorities fulfil their legal obligation and provide decent accommodation for people experiencing homelessness or prevent homelessness altogether.
- Each **municipality or administrative district** shall:
  - develop an integrated emergency support package. In an emergency, people require not only accommodation from police authorities, but also access to a range of low-threshold social services to ensure their livelihoods.

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5 Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V. (2001): Kooperation und Arbeitsteilung zwischen freiverbandlicher Wohnungslosenhilfe und kommunaler Obdachlosenhilfe bei den Hilfen in Wohnungsnotfällen. Ein Positionspapier der BAG Wohnungslosenhilfe. Retrieved from: [https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/POS/POS\\_10\\_Kooperation\\_Obdachlosenhilfe\\_Wohnungslosenhilfe.pdf](https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/POS/POS_10_Kooperation_Obdachlosenhilfe_Wohnungslosenhilfe.pdf)

- provide an emergency support service which is geared towards finding proper housing or providing needs-based support quickly.
- set up special winter emergency programmes, thus preventing people experiencing homelessness from dying of cold.
- ensure that police-assigned accommodation is decent and does not violate human dignity as far as size, location, accessibility, security, hygiene, and staffing is concerned. Such accommodation shall also guarantee a certain amount of privacy and the greatest possible access to the broader social welfare system, which would have a lasting positive effect on homelessness.

## Housing Policy and the Provision Housing<sup>6</sup>

Rents and energy costs are rising in most cities and even in a lot of rural areas, while available housing is declining. Publicly subsidised social housing and thus affordable housing is decreasing due to the expiration of so-called occupancy bonds that guarantee low rents for several years or even decades after construction for apartment houses that were co-financed by the state.

Many municipalities and districts lack preventive measures to avoid the loss of housing. In addition, certain regulations in Code II of the Social Welfare Code (*SGB II*) make access to affordable housing more difficult for people with low incomes. For many welfare (*Arbeitslosengeld II*) recipients, rising rents are at the upper end of or above the defined housing allowance limit and after the first rent increase far above it.

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6 BAG Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V. (Ed.) (2007): Wohnungspolitik gegen Wohnungslosigkeit und soziale Ausgrenzung am Wohnungsmarkt. Wohnungspolitisches Programm der BAG Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V. Retrieved from: [https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/POS/POS\\_06\\_Wohnungspolitisches\\_Programm.pdf](https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/POS/POS_06_Wohnungspolitisches_Programm.pdf)

# The care and support given to young adults who are experiencing homelessness and social problems is often insufficient and not designed to overcome existing developmental deficits or particular social problems.”

They are seriously at risk of losing their homes. The benefit sanctions of SGB II have increased the risk of rent arrears. This further reduces the prospects of welfare recipients on the housing market. Therefore, we call for the inclusion of the following in the National Action Plan:

## At federal level

- Reinstating housing policy as a federal-level responsibility and continuing the centralised promotion of social housing.
- Establishing the logic of common good orientation in housing provision with long and even permanent social bonds (“*Neue Wohngemeinnützigkeit*”).
- Making a certain proportion of socially committed housing explicitly available for people experiencing homelessness.
- Embedding the option of paying for rent arrears in the form of welfare payments in the Social Welfare Code II in order to prevent housing loss.

- Installing flexible guidelines on the adequacy of the costs of accommodation (rents, heating, electricity, & other additional costs) that consider real local average costs (reference values instead of maximum values).<sup>7</sup>
- Administering effective rent controls that prevent rent increases above 10% of the local average rent.
- Promoting schemes which aim to offset the cost of energy-saving measures incurred by tenants in social housing. Promoting social housing construction programmes in areas with high numbers of cases of homelessness and housing exclusion. These schemes shall be financed by the *Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau* (KfW).
- Creating a support programme for the closure of municipal emergency shelters with the aim of moving the former residents into apartments with full housing rights.

<sup>7</sup> BAG W (2017): Position Bezahlbaren Wohnraum schaffen, Wohnraum für wohnungslose Menschen akquirieren. Retrieved from: [https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/POS/POS\\_17\\_Wohnraum\\_beschaffen.pdf](https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/POS/POS_17_Wohnraum_beschaffen.pdf)

### At *Länder* level

- Promoting a pro-active social housing construction policy to secure affordable housing for all.
- Setting up regional action plans which safeguard access to housing for low-income households.

### At municipal or administrative district level

- Developing a strategy for ensuring an adequate supply of housing at municipal level which considers not only the housing needs of middle and higher earners, but in particular the needs of lower earners and of those receiving benefits.
- Making active use of housing construction promotion programmes.
- Giving priority to social aspects in the sale of public land to private developers (not only selling to the highest bidders!).
- Applying concepts to protect tenants in areas with a tight housing market, e.g. through local bans on the deconstruction of housing, conversion of rental housing into condominiums or commercial units, or reinforcement of building inspection authorities.
- Establishing appropriate price ceilings for new and follow-up lets which are in line with a standard rents table (*Mietspiegel*) or with comparable rents.
- Maintaining and renewing occupancy agreements for people experiencing homelessness.
- Securing housing by setting up advice services at municipal level which specialise in the prevention of housing loss and by ensuring collaboration with non-governmental homelessness organisations. This requires funding programs at the *Länder*-level.

- Making special efforts to acquire housing for people experiencing homelessness, e.g. with so-called guarantee contracts, a general rental model, or binding contractual agreements between municipalities and the housing companies.
- Transforming very basic accommodation provided by police authorities into regular housing where possible.

### Health Care and Health Care Policy

People experiencing homelessness generally have serious health issues. As mentioned in the 2021 coalition agreement, people living in homelessness face significant barriers to accessing mainstream health care. These include problems with health insurance, co-payments for medications and other medical products, as well as prescription fees and increasing patient cost-sharing. Because of the special need for medical care for people experiencing homelessness, we demand the following:

#### At federal level

- Immediately stopping the imposition of new co-payments and surcharges and instead re-introducing exemption from charges for medication, remedies, and other medical products for those receiving welfare benefits.
- Considering exemption regulation for low earners to help with the costs of necessary medication for which a prescription is not required.
- Negotiating an agreement with the National Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians (*Kassenärztliche Bundesvereinigung*) regarding a guarantee to deliver statutory health services to all, including patients experiencing homelessness.

- Providing adequate financial support to projects that offer medical care to people living in homelessness. Towards this aim, Germany's statutory health insurance and the *Kassenärztliche Bundesvereinigung* shall create a joint fund at federal level which co-finances such projects.<sup>8</sup>

#### At *Länder* level

- Initiating proceedings in which the statutory health insurers, the *Kassenärztliche Bundesvereinigung* and the *Länder*, jointly define the health care delivery regions and ensure that the legally stipulated guarantee to deliver statutory health services is actually complied with.
- Promoting medical projects.

#### At municipal or administrative district level

- Including medical outreach schemes in all municipal emergency programmes.
- Setting up low-threshold support services in places where people experiencing homelessness find accessing support services difficult. At all times, the key objective shall be the clients' re-integration into standard health care.

<sup>8</sup> Rosenke, Werena (2004): Das Gesundheitsmodernisierungsgesetz und die Folgen für die Klientinnen und Klienten der Wohnungslosenhilfe. Blitzumfrage der BAG Wohnungslosenhilfe. In: *wohnungslos. Aktuelles aus Theorie und Praxis zur Armut und Wohnungslosigkeit*. Heft 1/2004.

## Employment Promotion and Labour Market Policy<sup>9</sup>

Of the people experiencing homelessness who are able to work, just under 12% are employed. Many of them have already been unemployed for more than a year (long-term unemployed)<sup>10</sup>. The instruments of the Social Welfare Code II often fail to reach people who are long-term unemployed in general and those experiencing homelessness while being long-term unemployed in particular. The employment promotion measures set out in the Social Welfare Code II and III do not consider the particular social problems of people experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion and are underfinanced.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, an inclusive social labor market is needed as a publicly supported sector for the integration of people who are long-term unemployed with high need for support. We call for the following actions:

#### At federal and *Länder* level

- Embedding social enterprise into the Social Welfare Code to provide a sound legal basis for a social labour market.
- Launching promotion programmes which provide start-up financing for social enterprises.

<sup>9</sup> BAG W (2013): Sozialer Arbeitsmarkt und Sozialunternehmen: Voraussetzungen und Anforderungen eines innovativen Förderinstruments für die vom Arbeitsmarkt ausgegrenzten Personen. Retrieved from: [https://www.bagw.de/de/publikationen/pos\\_pap/pos\\_arbeit.html](https://www.bagw.de/de/publikationen/pos_pap/pos_arbeit.html)

<sup>10</sup> BAG W (2019): Statistikbericht – Zu Lebenslagen wohnungsloser und von Wohnungslosigkeit bedrohter Menschen in Deutschland – Lebenslagenbericht. Retrieved from: [https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/DOK/BAGW\\_Statistikbericht\\_2019.pdf](https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/DOK/BAGW_Statistikbericht_2019.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> BAGW (2009): Beteiligung von Menschen in Wohnungsnot und in besonderen sozialen Schwierigkeiten am Arbeitsleben. Retrieved from: [https://www.bagw.de/de/publikationen/pos\\_pap/pos\\_arbeit.html](https://www.bagw.de/de/publikationen/pos_pap/pos_arbeit.html)

- Creating an operational programme within the European Social Fund that promotes employability skills and post-school qualifications for people who are at the very fringes of the labour market.

#### At municipal or administrative district level

- Backing social businesses with municipal resources.
- Developing projected targets for the jobcentres which place clear priority on people experiencing long-term unemployment.
- Clearly laying down the main promotion objective (i.e. employment support) in the Local Action Plan for Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.

### Young adults under 25 years of age (under 25s) and youth welfare policy<sup>12</sup>

The care and support given to young adults who are experiencing homelessness and social problems is often insufficient and not designed to overcome existing developmental deficits or particular social problems. A lack of interaction between governmental funding bodies and service providers often results in indiscriminate and unfair refusal of support services, particularly by municipal funding bodies, such as youth welfare offices. As a consequence, young adults remain trapped in precarious housing and living conditions. Therefore, we demand the following:

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<sup>12</sup> BAG W (2013): Rechtsansprüche junger Erwachsener in Wohnungsnot und sozialen Schwierigkeiten verwirklichen und fortentwickeln. Retrieved from: [https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/POS/POS\\_13\\_Rechtsansprueche\\_junger\\_Erwachsener.pdf](https://www.bagw.de/fileadmin/bagw/media/Doc/POS/POS_13_Rechtsansprueche_junger_Erwachsener.pdf)

#### At federal level

- Putting an end to denying young people free choice of housing, a practice which is currently enforced via the Social Welfare Code II.

#### At *Länder* level

- Having *Länder*-promotion programmes for people experiencing homelessness which target young adults under 25.
- Ensuring that any special offers are planned and coordinated at the supraregional level by governmental welfare funding bodies. This shall be done in close co-operation with local job centres and non-governmental funding bodies.

#### At municipal or administrative district level

- Developing a general strategy which focuses on young adults experiencing homelessness and social difficulties. This shall include directives specifying responsibility and finance.
- Creating the basis and structures required for interlinking networks working in close cooperation, in particular youth welfare offices, homelessness support services, and job centres.
- Ensuring that people between the ages of 18 and 21 receive youth care services. The funding bodies of homelessness support services and youth welfare are to agree on specific areas of responsibilities.
- Specifying, guaranteeing, and financing interim support schemes for providers of homelessness services until a decision has been reached regarding financial responsibility. The concept and content of such schemes should adequately reflect the particular situation of young adults.

## Migration<sup>13</sup>

The enlargement of the European Union and the resulting greater freedom of movement within the EU labour market has led to more citizens of the new Eastern European accession countries accessing homelessness organisations and service providers. Some of those people from Eastern Europe who arrive in search of employment find themselves unable to access the labour market for a variety of reasons and are, therefore, dependent on support services. In its coalition agreement, the current federal government has agreed to set up a federal state working group on homelessness among EU citizens.

Increasingly, providers of publicly-funded accommodation are reporting that their capacities are being stretched to the limit, particularly in urban areas. In addition, it is becoming increasingly difficult for recognised asylum seekers to find housing in order to be able to move out of asylum accommodation.

The housing situation of people without a residence permit or with an uncertain asylum status is highly characterised by insecurity and the fear of being caught by the authorities. People without legal papers are, therefore, more likely to seek help anonymously from low-threshold services provided by the homeless assistance system. That is why we request the following:

### At federal level

- Promoting and supporting municipalities in their efforts to provide services for migrants experiencing homelessness and housing

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<sup>13</sup> BAG W (2013): Hilfen für Migrantinnen und Migranten in Wohnungsnot und sozialen Schwierigkeiten. Grundsatzpositionen der BAG Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V. Retrieved from: [https://www.bagw.de/de/publikationen/pos\\_pap/pos\\_migration.html](https://www.bagw.de/de/publikationen/pos_pap/pos_migration.html)

exclusion. The federal government shall co-finance their emergency support services to enable them to adequately address the increase in demand brought about by increased migration.

- Assigning clear political responsibility. This is to be followed by the introduction of promotion programmes designed specifically to help migrants who are experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion.

### At *Länder* level

- Issuing legally binding guidelines to the support services provided for in Articles 67f of the Social Welfare Code XII.
- Setting up comprehensive support and financing structures which reflect the increase in demand.

### At municipal or administrative district level

- Ensuring that all migrants experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion have free access to emergency support services.
- Designing and setting up support services which include migrants at risk of housing loss.
- Developing and expanding social integration services for migrants living in unacceptable housing conditions.
- Expanding the offer of services designed to help migrants obtain employment and qualifications.
- Enhancing and strengthening the networking and co-operation between all advice and contact-point services.
- Ensuring medical care and access to the statutory health care system.
- Increasing low-threshold advice and support within social services for migrants.

## Protection from Violence and Displacement

In general, people experiencing homelessness need special protection from violence and displacement in public spaces. Preventive and aftercare concepts and measures aim to curb violence against people living in homelessness. Inhuman and right-wing extremist motives and backgrounds of violence are to be documented and scientifically and politically processed. Federal framework legislation must work to ensure that discrimination against people experiencing homelessness is counteracted by police and regulatory law and that the prevention and prosecution of violence against them is promoted under the rule of law. Police and regulatory law must be designed in such a way that people living in homelessness can access public space and public infrastructure without discrimination.

The BAG W will actively contribute its differentiated demands for a National Action Plan to overcome homelessness and housing exclusion by 2030 to the political process, which is being shaped under the auspices of the newly created Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building. Initial talks with the responsible federal minister Klara Geywitz have already taken place at the federal conference of the BAG W at the beginning of March 2022.

“The current estimates of the BAG W on the number of people experiencing homelessness in Germany for the year 2020 show that this [a National Strategy to Overcome Homelessness and Poverty in Germany] is urgently needed: the total number of people experiencing homelessness has increased from 237,000 people in 2018 to 256,000 in 2020.”

### Cover image by Raha Fara

RAHA FARA is a qualified midwife from Iran. She emigrated to UK in 2004, working for NHS for more than 10 years as Phlebotomist and as HCA in a nursing home. In 2016 after a road accident and fraudulent activities whilst trying to rent a flat she became homeless and lost her job.

Finding accommodation in a hostel, she found strength unknown for her whole life. Attending the Creative Space workshops, art became the most connection of her inner world, cementing her world. Art was her friend, family, therapy, medicine and future to help her to cope with huge traumas and troubles in past. It is her strength with which she faces daily obstacles, stress, anxiety and depression – a light for her dark future.

'I will always be thankful to Arlington house which was the most beautiful and calming place. A productive and priceless time working with other resident artists and beautiful staff and teachers which will never ever be forgotten.'

[The Creative Space at Arlington](#) is a year-round programme of creative workshops that supports people who have or are currently experiencing homelessness.

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