

# 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  
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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>



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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.

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