

# DENMARK

## KEY STATISTICS

Every second year The Danish Centre for Social Science Research (VIVE) conducts a national survey on homelessness. This biennial count has been carried out over a given week (week 6 of the year) since 2007. Danish data on homelessness are also informed by a national client registration system in homeless hostels run by local authorities under §110 in the Social Service Act. The registration system dates back to 1999. While the homelessness count provides a stock figure during the particular count week, the client registration system in homeless hostels gives both stock and flow figures published in annual statistics.

The national homelessness count covers eight different homelessness situations. According to the latest count from 2019, homeless citizens distribute as follows:

- People sleeping rough (ETHOS 1.1): 732
- People staying in emergency night shelters (ETHOS 2.1): 313
- People staying in homeless shelters/hostels (ETHOS 3.1): 2,290
- People staying in hotels due to homelessness: 191
- People staying with family and friends: 1,630
- People staying in short-term transitional housing: (ETHOS 8.1): 121
- People homeless following institutional release from prisons (ETHOS 6.1): 72
- People homeless following institutional release from hospitals/treatment facilities (ETHOS 6.2): 148
- Other: 380
- Not specified: 554

Total: 6,431

### KEY PULL-OUT STATISTICS

There are 6,431 people across 8 different categories experiencing some form of homelessness. Between 2017-2019, the total no. of people experiencing homelessness dropped by 3% (204 people).

## INCREASE/DECREASE IN NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

Between 2017 and 2019, the number of homeless people in Denmark decreased by 3% (equivalent to 204 people) according to the national homelessness count. This minor drop is not significant data-wise and must be interpreted in relation to a drop in the number of survey responses in the 2019 count.

Homelessness has been on the rise in Denmark since 2009 and only seems to have stabilised at the latest count in 2019.

## CHANGE IN PROFILE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE

The 2019 homelessness count shows a decrease in youth homelessness (18-24 years old). Between 2017 and 2019 the number fell from 1,278 to 1,023, which marks a break with the previous increase among this group. From 2009 to 2017 homelessness among young people rose by a staggering 102%. This recent change in figures is probably linked to a greater awareness and prioritisation of youth homelessness. Yet, young people in the age of 18-29 years old still make almost a third of the entire homeless population in Denmark.

In contrast to the trend among youth, the number of homeless middle-aged and elderly people is rising. Middle-aged and elderly homeless people constitute the majority in the groups of rough sleepers and users of homeless hostels and night shelters.

The national count from 2019 also reveals a high number of people with complex support needs among the homeless population in Denmark. More than four out of five homeless people in Denmark have either a mental illness, an issue around substance abuse or both. Nearly 60% struggle with mental illness (the numbers are higher for women than men), about two-thirds have a substance abuse problem (here the numbers are significantly higher among homeless men) and more than a third are both mentally ill and have a substance abuse problem.

## POLICIES & STRATEGIES

At present there is no national strategy addressing homelessness in Denmark.

An action plan with the aim of reducing homelessness during 2018-2021 was adopted in 2017. Part of this action plan was the preparation of a set of national guidelines for municipalities and other stakeholders to ensure a common ground in the efforts against homelessness. These national guidelines were submitted for consultation among actors in the homelessness sector in 2020.

We currently await the drafting and adoption of a new national strategy to combat homelessness in 2021.

### **Experiences from ‘the Homeless Strategy’, 2009–2013:**

#### **Scope**

Seventeen municipalities (out of a total of 98) were involved in the Homeless Strategy. The main focus was on eight municipalities which contained about half of the total homeless population in Denmark. This included the 3 largest cities: Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense. The majority of the strategy budget was allocated to these municipalities.

In the later ‘Implementation and Anchoring Project’ (2014-2016) additional eight municipalities were included.

The municipality of Odense did not participate in the Implementation and Anchoring Project but chose instead to continue the effort on its own based on the good results from the participation in the Homeless Strategy. A recent report highlights very good results of the efforts in Odense and the municipality has witnessed a marked decrease in the number of homeless citizens, which has been halved in the period of 2009-2019.

The Homeless Strategy was allocated 500 million DKK over four years.

#### **Objectives**

1. No citizens should live a life on the street;
2. Young people should not stay in homeless hostels, they must be offered alternative solutions;
3. The duration of stay in homeless hostels should not exceed three to four months for citizens who are prepared to move into their own homes with the necessary support;
4. A precondition of release from prison or discharge from treatment or hospital should be a housing solution.

The overall principle of the Homeless Strategy was Housing First. The strategy thus supported three floating support services: Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), Individual Case Management (ICM), or Critical Time Intervention (CTI).

The strategy also included a strengthening of outreach work, securing systematic and thorough needs assessment of people in homeless hostels as well as other local services and activities.

Furthermore, part of the funding was allocated to construction and reconstruction of housing for homeless citizens.

#### **Evaluation and Follow-Up**

The strategy was evaluated in September 2013. During the period of the strategy homelessness has increased. The increase was considerably lower in the municipalities that were part of the Strategy. Nonetheless, the four overall goals of the Strategy were generally not met.

However, Housing First and the floating support services proved to be very effective in terms of housing retention rates.

#### **Governance**

The Ministry of Social Affairs led the Homeless Strategy, which was adopted by the Danish Parliament. Municipalities signed implementation agreements with the Ministry and determined quantifiable local targets in line with the strategy objectives. These were based on detailed mapping of homelessness in each municipality. Municipalities developed monitoring processes to measure progress, while the Ministry of Social Affairs coordinated the overall monitoring at national level.

#### **Targeted Prevention**

The number of evictions in Denmark generally increased during the 2000s until a peak of 4,405 evictions in 2011. Then the number of evictions started falling from to 3,507 in 2013. A possible explanation is that a limit to cash benefits was abolished in 2011 along with other adjustments to the benefits system. Another possible explanation for the falling trend in evictions may be a positive impact from the floating support programme in the National Homelessness Strategy, reducing the risk of evictions for groups that would otherwise have a very high risk of being evicted after being rehoused.

The strategy included a specific strategic goal on reducing homelessness following release from prison and discharge from hospital or treatment facility. A model for the ‘Good

Release' and the 'Good Discharge' was developed, defining steps required all the way from admission to release/discharge. An important element was a roadmap to strengthen the cooperation between prisons, treatment centres, hospitals and municipalities in order to ensure coherence in the action taken during the transition from prison/treatment to settled housing. Critical Time Intervention was used to offer support during the transition into housing. Homelessness statistics in Denmark suggest that the programme has had a positive impact. The national homelessness count collects data on those in hospital and prison who are due to be discharged in one month and do not have a housing solution upon release or discharge. Over the period of the strategy, a considerable reduction was achieved in the number of individuals awaiting release from prisons or discharge from hospitals and without a housing solution. In total, the 6 municipalities that focused on this target reduced the number of people in this situation from 106 in 2009 to 65 in 2013 (missing the overall target of reaching 39 by 2012 but nonetheless making important progress).

### ***Housing-Led Approaches***

As explained above, the Danish homelessness strategy adopted a Housing-First approach. It focused on ensuring that homeless people are offered their own home as soon as possible and that they have the right sort of support to maintain it. Housing is most often provided through the municipal "right of assignment" of social housing. Part of the strategy funding was allocated to provide more housing for homeless people including the construction of new housing units.

The evaluation of the Strategy demonstrated that affordable housing is a key priority. The increase in homelessness over the strategy period is concentrated in Denmark's largest urban areas, and in particular in the suburban area of Copenhagen. Municipalities report an increasingly strained housing market in both Copenhagen and Aarhus, with a lack of affordable housing for socially vulnerable people. Qualitative findings from the evaluation of the strategy emphasise independent, scattered housing as the best housing solution for most individuals, and that with intensive floating support services, those individuals with complex support needs are capable of living on their own in independent, scattered housing. The findings also indicate that the termed 'category housing' in which people within the same category (such as people using drugs) live in the same building may have unintended negative consequences.

There are also some specific types of "adapted" housing such as 'skæve huse', which offer an alternative form of

permanent, independent housing for people who are not able to or do not wish to live in ordinary social housing.

## REMARKS ON KEY POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

### ***Positive***

There is growing political awareness of the importance of a long-term, national and cross-sectoral strategy based on Housing First approach in order to reduce homelessness.

### ***Negative***

#### Criminalisation:

In 2017 three pieces of legislation caused a de facto criminalisation of rough sleepers and other vulnerable people in Denmark. These laws concern homelessness camps, area bans and begging.

According to the Public Order it is now prohibited in public places to establish and stay in camps "which are capable of creating discomfort in the neighborhood". The Danish police can issue fines and area bans of 400-800 meters from the camps and even from the entire municipality to individuals staying or sleeping in the camps.

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. Beside punishment is now immediate (no prior warning) in cases where begging is committed in pedestrian streets, train stations, at supermarkets and in public transportation.

#### Dark design:

Urban public space is increasingly becoming an arena for social exclusion in Denmark. Barriers at heating grates, leaning benches and benches with armrests placed in the middle are examples of 'hostile architecture' or 'dark design', which seeks to promote a particular use of the city and to limit or reject another. People who are homeless thus find it harder to find a place to sleep at night. This is extremely stressful for rough sleepers, and their already vulnerable situation worsens as a result. Another consequence is that they are being pushed out of the city and to more secluded areas.

The Municipality of Copenhagen recognises the problem and has set a goal to clear the city of dark design.



