
The New Portuguese Homelessness Strategy: Recent Developments

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➤ **Abstract** *On 25 July 2017, the Portuguese government approved the new Homelessness Strategy – the Portuguese Strategy for the Integration of Homeless Persons 2017-2023 (ENIPSSA). It draws heavily on the first Homelessness strategy, which covered the period 2009-2015, although introducing new elements both regarding its objectives and operational structure. With an overall aim to reduce homelessness, “ensuring that no one has to end up on the streets by lack of alternatives”, the new strategy is based on three strategic objectives: a) promoting knowledge, information, awareness raising and education on the phenomenon; b) strengthening intervention aiming at promoting the integration of homeless persons; and c) strengthening coordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This paper reviews the main features of the new strategy and argues that this new initiative has the potential to realise the expectations, which had been introduced in the homelessness arena in 2009, by providing a consistent operational framework to develop an effective strategy to tackle homelessness in Portugal.*

➤ **Keywords** *Homelessness policy, developments, challenges, Portugal*

Introduction

The Portuguese Strategy for the Integration of Homeless Persons 2017-2023, hereafter 'the ENIPSSA', was approved by the Council of Ministers' Resolution 107/2017 in July 2017, aiming at restoring the State commitment towards strategically addressing homelessness. The renewed State interest for a strategic approach to homelessness resulted both from a push from civil society organisations and other non-governmental stakeholders involved in the first homelessness strategy process and from the emergence of a more "welcoming" political agenda.

This process – initiated in 2009 with the adoption of the First Homelessness Strategy (ENIPSA 2009-2015) (GIMAE, 2010a) – was however interrupted in 2013. Profound changes in the coordinating team and overall institutional (and ideological) changes following the shift in political power after the June 2011 elections directly affected the central structures of the ENIPSSA which ceased to work, namely failing to provide the expected support to the newly created local homelessness units (NPISA) (Baptista, 2013).

Early in 2016, the Portuguese Parliament issued a Resolution calling on the government to re-launch the former interinstitutional group (the GIMAE) – composed of public and private non-profit organisations – which had been responsible for monitoring the implementation of the 2009-2015 Homelessness Strategy and to present an assessment of the progress made. Overall, the evaluation report on the implementation of the ENIPSA 2009-2015 highlighted the potential for change, which had been introduced by this first strategic approach to homelessness, namely the dynamics created at the local level, but also the constraints encountered during the implementation stage (GIMAE, 2010b).

The GIMAE was formally reactivated in February 2017 and the preparation of the 2017-2023 homelessness strategy was initiated under the leadership of the Institute for Social Security (ISS).

The ENIPSSA is based on three strategic objectives, the first two of which were reiterated from the previous national strategy: a) promoting knowledge, information, awareness raising and education on the phenomenon; b) strengthening intervention aiming at promoting the integration of homeless persons; and c) strengthening coordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The implementation of the strategy is based on bi-annual action plans which are structured around the three strategic objectives mentioned above and operationalized by a set of measures and activities carried out at different levels and involving a wide range of institutional stakeholders. The action plan 2018-2019 was approved by the Inter-ministerial committee and validated by the Minister for Labour, Solidarity and Social Security at the end of November 2017.

The approval of the new strategy and the setting up of a new and strengthened governance structure is paving the way to consistent developments in the operationalization of the activities foreseen in the current action plan of the ENIPSSA.

This paper starts off by setting the adoption of the ENIPSSA in the context of the recent State (re)commitment towards strategically addressing homelessness in Portugal, highlighting the major steps leading to the approval of the new strategy. It moves on to a brief presentation of the strategy's main elements, emphasizing noticeable signs of continuity and innovation and ends up with a short description of the first initiatives implemented. The concluding chapter provides some insights into the ambition of the new strategy to meet lingering expectations of actually delivering change in strategically addressing homelessness in Portugal.

Finally, the paper argues that the potential for change in the homelessness arena introduced by the approval of a new policy instrument in 2009 – which was not fully realised – may now regain a new impetus. Positive and consistent development in the early stages of implementation of the ENIPSSA may prove crucial in meeting lingering expectations as regards fostering actual change in the planning and delivery of homelessness services in Portugal.

From 2009 to 2017 – Lessons from a Winding Trajectory

Policy development leading to the adoption of the first Portuguese homelessness strategy back in 2009 has been briefly described as innovative policy change within the southern European context (Baptista, 2009). Thus, the recent developments in the implementation of the ENIPSSA need to be framed within the context of the previous experience in implementing the 2009-2015 homelessness strategy.

On the one hand, the drive for change boosted by the 2009-2015 strategy, together with the ability and commitment of local stakeholders led to positive changes in reorganising local responses to homelessness in a coordinated and integrated way in several local territories (Baptista, 2013). On the other hand, several failures in its implementation (e.g. lack of political endorsement, lack of institutional drive, lack of transparency in resource allocation, weak horizontal coordination, failure to implement monitoring and evaluation procedures) actually jeopardised the foreseen attainment of most of its initial objectives.

Set within a difficult financial and social context marked by austerity and an ideological shift regarding the role of social policies, the implementation of the first homelessness strategy would fail to realise the announced policy change towards implementing an integrated and strategic approach that would promote social change and foster social inclusion. On the other hand, there was an explicit refocus

on the emergency side of service provision, the fading away of a housing exclusion focus (and not only a social exclusion) on addressing homelessness, and the weakening of the enabling role of the State in the mobilization of partnerships and in the provision of quality social services (Baptista, 2013).

The renewed State interest for a strategic approach to homelessness arising in early 2016 resulted from an intersection of elements and developments: the (re) emergence of a political agenda re-centred on the development of rights-based approaches towards social problems and on a more active role of the State with the framework for cooperation between the state and homelessness service providers; the recognition of important progresses made at the local level in the development of innovative and more efficient responses to homelessness; the continued push from civil society organisations and other non-governmental stakeholders involved in the drafting and (unachieved) implementation process of the first homelessness strategy; the direct involvement of the Portuguese Parliament and particularly of the President of the Republic in pushing forward the need for a new National Homelessness Strategy was also a key driver.

In early 2016, the Portuguese Parliament issued a resolution¹ recommending the Portuguese Government to: (i) carry out a participated assessment of the National Homelessness Strategy, including all partner organisations and homeless people themselves; (ii) build up a new national strategy on homelessness – based on that assessment – ensuring a comprehensive partnership amongst the different social policy areas, the relevant organisations and homeless people; and (iii) ensure that resources are committed to the implementation of such a strategy, in order to achieve the fulfilment of its goals.

Following these recommendations, the Institute for Social Security (ISS) – the state institute responsible for ensuring citizens' social protection and social inclusion within the national social security system – within its coordinating role of the National Homelessness Strategy made an internal assessment of the implementation of the 2009-2015 National Homelessness Strategy (ENIPSA) and promoted the re-activation of the interinstitutional group responsible for monitoring the implementation of the ENIPSA. The first meeting of the GIMAE was held in February 2017.

The initial assessment highlighted the important role played by the strategic orientations provided by the ENIPSA 2009-2015 in enhancing positive developments in the provision of homelessness services at the local level, in fostering innovative

¹ Resolution 45/2016 of the Portuguese Parliament. Available at: http://app.parlamento.pt/webutils/docs/doc.pdf?path=6148523063446f764c324679595842774f6a63334e7a637664326c75644756346447397a58324677636d393259575276637938794d4445324c314a42556c38304e5638794d4445324c6e426b5a673d3d&fich=RAR_45_2016.pdf&Inline=true

approaches to homelessness and in enhancing more effective cooperation structures to address homelessness. Additionally, the document recognized the crucial role of the participation of a wide range of public and private stakeholders during both the conception and the initial implementation stage of the 2009-2015 strategy.

The outcomes of the internal assessment were presented to and further enriched by the contributions of the entities participating in the GIMAE and by the local homelessness units (NPISA).

Overall, the evaluation report on the implementation of the ENIPSA 2009-2015 highlighted the potential for change, which had been introduced by this first strategic approach to homelessness, namely the dynamics created at the local level, but also the constraints encountered during the implementation stage. Several recommendations were made with regard to the need to preserve the vision and the strategic approach adopted by the ENIPSA 2009-2015.

The evaluation process also identified the need to address some major shortcomings that had contributed to major operationalization failures in the previous stage. Recommendations in this area included: ensuring the highest political endorsement of the national strategy and its translation into a legal act; the strengthening of the governance structure of the ENIPSA; a clear assignment of responsibilities and allocation of the necessary resources to ensure a consistent coordination of the overall strategy; the need to strengthen the existing national evidence base on homelessness, namely by promoting reliable data collection; and a clear identification of the financial resources to be allocated to the implementation of the measures proposed.

The final evaluation report was presented in Parliament by the Secretary of State for Social Security in March 2017 (ISS, 2017). In April 2017, the Parliament promoted a public debate session both for presenting the evaluation report of the implementation of the 2009-2015 National Homelessness Strategy and for engaging in an overall discussion on the new strategy with a wide range of public and private stakeholders. The session was actively participated and there was a public recognition by the government representatives to seriously engage in a national strategy to address homelessness and to learn both from the previous achievements and drawbacks in the implementation of the 2009-2015 ENIPSA.

The Portuguese Strategy for the Integration of Homeless Persons 2017-2023 was finally approved by the Government at the end of June 2017. It became a legal act through the Council of Ministers' Resolution 107/2017, which was published on the 25 July 2017 in the official gazette². From a formal perspective, this legal initiative not only restored the State's commitment towards strategically addressing home-

² Available at: <http://data.dre.pt/eli/resolconsmin/107/2017/07/25/p/dre/pt/html>

lessness which had been interrupted in 2013, as it finally responded to a long-standing claim from civil society organisations regarding the legal approval of the homelessness strategy.

The National Strategy for the Integration of People Experiencing Homelessness 2017-2023 (ENIPSSA)

From continuity to innovative elements

The new strategy's acronym incorporates a new "S" (from ENIPSA to ENIPSSA) as a result of an explicit intention by the GIMAE members to underline the homelessness situation rather than the homeless individual. This reinforcement of a societal understanding of the whole homelessness issue – already present in the first Portuguese strategy – is underpinned by the preservation of the 2009-2015 strategy's vision and main principles in the current ENIPSSA.

The importance of EU-driven dynamics around strategic approaches to homelessness which had been explicitly present in the drafting of the first Portuguese homelessness strategy (Baptista, 2009) are again noticeable in the contextual chapter of the new strategy, which recalls recent EU developments in this area, namely EU successive calls on member states to develop integrated approaches to homelessness.

The ENIPSSA's vision aims at the consolidation of a "strategic and holistic approach towards preventing and tackling homelessness, centred on the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness, so that no one has to stay on the street by lack of alternatives".

The ENIPSSA holds to the previous adopted definition of homelessness which remains a fairly narrow one: "A person experiencing homelessness is anyone who, regardless of nationality, ethnic or racial origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and mental and physical health, is roofless and living in a public space or insecure form of shelter or accommodated in an emergency shelter, or is houseless and living in temporary accommodation for homeless people". In spite of the persistence of a narrow definition of homelessness, the ENIPSSA upholds the commitment to incorporate both preventative measures and measures addressing homelessness once it has already occurred.

The strategy is based on a set of 13 principles that basically restate the former principles adopted in 2009. Some of these principles are clearly in line with the ten approaches developed by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), which incorporate the toolkit for developing an integrated strategy to tackle homelessness, namely as regards: the adoption of

a rights-based approach based on human rights and in the promotion of equality and non-discrimination, an evidence-based approach to sustain the development of policies and measures, the recognition of the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon and the need to develop multidimensional solutions, the need to enhance quality preventative, support and resettlement services, the needs of the individual as the starting point for policy development, the mobilization of a wide range of public and private stakeholders to achieve a consistent and integrated response in the provision of services, and the need to promote the active participation and capacity building of people experiencing homelessness.

The ENIPSSA is structured around three strategic axes, the first two of which were reiterated from the previous national strategy: a) promoting knowledge, information, awareness raising and education on the phenomenon; b) strengthening intervention aiming at promoting the integration of homeless persons; and c) strengthening coordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. These three areas are operationalized by 15 strategic objectives, which are then translated into targets.³

The strategy advocates the need to enhance the existing evidence-base on the phenomenon, namely by ensuring the use of the official homelessness definition and the use of commonly agreed indicators to characterize and monitor the phenomenon. It also envisages the development of communication and awareness raising activities that will foster an “updated knowledge on homelessness aiming at preventing and fighting discrimination”.

The second strategic area includes different objectives which aim at: improving the quality of existing support services (e.g. promoting specialized training to all the NPISA, developing quality assessment tools, fostering user participation mechanisms, enhancing evaluation and assessment of services); at supporting the development and mainstreaming of the case management approach introduced by some local homelessness units (Baptista, 2013) to ensure that an individual’s unique needs are addressed and long-term solutions found; and at providing a wide range of permanent accommodation solutions, including a direct link with the “New Generation of Housing Policies”⁴, for the financing of solutions aiming at preventing homelessness arising from institutional discharge, or severe housing need, and aiming at supporting Housing First or other housing led programmes. Although it is not possible to say that the ENIPSSA introduces a

³ The main intervention axes and strategic objectives are included in the Annex.

⁴ This new government strategy aims at re-orienting public policies in the field of housing by focusing on promoting universal access to adequate housing, mainly by responding to the main housing sector challenges, such as increasing the share of public supported housing and reduce pressure in the rental sector. Available at <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/download-ficheiros/ficheiro.aspx?v=95621259-fdd4-4099-82f3-2ff17c522882>

decisive shift into housing first/housing led “solutions” to homelessness, it is possible to observe a clear institutional – and financial – commitment from national public housing authorities towards enabling access to permanent housing solutions by the promotion of state programmes aimed at promoting access to permanent accommodation for homeless people. This is the first time that such initiative stems from central state authorities in the housing area. This area also advocates other actions aiming at supporting homeless people in achieving autonomy and full citizenship, such as the development of skills and access to training and employment, access to social protection, access to all levels of health care, and access to specialized support for migrants.

The inclusion of a third autonomous axis aiming at strengthening coordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms was considered essential during the drafting stage, given the complexity of the tasks involved and the lessons learnt from the hindrances experienced during the 2009-2015 implementation stage of the first National Strategy.

At this level, it is important to mention that the governance structure of the ENIPSSA has now been significantly strengthened. In fact, the new structure incorporates both “older” elements and new additions as regards the 2009-2015 National Strategy:

- the Interinstitutional Group composed of public and private non-profit organisations, known as the GIMAE will preserve the older composition and incorporate an important new element in its composition – representatives of the local homelessness units (NPISA) from different areas of the country; it will continue to operate on a dual level, i.e. through the executive group and the enlarged commission and will continue to be coordinated by the Institute for Social Security (ISS);
- the Interministerial Committee is a new governance structure, where all ministries are represented, which is responsible for ensuring that the definition, linkages and implementation of public policies in their respective area of government are aligned with the objectives and goals of the strategy in relation to homelessness; it is presided by the Minister for Labour, Solidarity and Social Security;
- the Consultative Committee which is an advisory board composed by entities or individuals with relevant experience and/or knowledge in the area, namely researchers and people with experience of homelessness.

The role of the Interministerial Committee may prove crucial in ensuring the actual implementation of measures in the ENIPSSA's action plans which cut across the different governmental areas. According to the Resolution of the Council of Ministers (2017), the Commission should “ensure the definition, articulation and operationalization of public policies, setting up in a convergent way the objectives, resources and strategies among the different entities which are responsible to implement policy and action measures addressing homelessness”.

The ENIPSSA will be implemented according to bi-annual action plans that are prepared by the GIMAE, submitted for the approval to the Interministerial Committee and validated by the Ministry for Labour, Solidarity and Social Security.

The first bi-annual action plan of the ENIPSSA covers 2017 and 2018. It was prepared by the GIMAE executive group following direct consultation to all the organisations integrating the enlarged GIMAE, and to all the local homelessness units. The 2017-2018 Action Plan was approved at the end of November 2017 (GIMAE, 2017).

It includes a total of 76 actions aiming at operationalizing the strategic objectives of the ENIPSSA according to the three intervention axes mentioned above. The Action Plan also includes a detailed map identifying the main outcomes for the period 2017-2018 according to the different strategic objectives and the budget for the two years, identifying the direct and indirect costs associated to the development of the foreseen activities. A total of €66 million is foreseen for the implementation of the ENIPSSA during the two-year period.⁵

One of the main hindrances identified in the first Portuguese homelessness strategy had been the lack of a clear allocation of resources and a vague commitment from public authorities regarding funding. Although progress has been made in the present process, the Action Plan document recognizes that such budgeting exercise was not possible in all areas, thus demanding further efforts as regards the need for future assessment and improvements.

First implementation steps

Following the re-activation of the GIMAE in early 2017 and the decision to prepare a new homelessness strategy, it was possible to observe successive positive developments which may be crucial to ensuring baseline conditions for a successful operationalisation of the strategy.

These developments include: a) the strengthening of the representation of the local homeless units within the governance structure of the GIMAE; b) the setting up and operation of several internal working groups directly focusing on specific

⁵ The €2,500 million allocated by the Institute for Housing and Urban Rehabilitation (IHRU) aiming at promoting access to permanent housing covers the 4-year period of the ENIPSSA.

areas of the strategy (e.g. communication, training, intervention, and monitoring and evaluation); c) the approval of the internal regulations of the strategy's governance structures; and d) the setting up and operation of the strategy's main governance structures.

The implementation of these first stages of the 2017-2018 Action Plan has been coordinated by the Institute for Social Security, which is the governmental body responsible for the overall coordination of the strategy and has involved the active participation of a wide range of public (e.g. ministries, public institutes, local authorities) and private (e.g. NGOs, research institutes) stakeholders.

There has been a wide range of initiatives devoted to ensuring effective participation of a different range of stakeholders (e.g. national, local, public and private) both for the drafting stage and for this initial implementation period. These included several meetings involving both the coordination of the ENIPSSA and the GIMAE, the local homelessness units (NPISA), the district departments of the Institute for Social Security, and local authorities.

Moreover, the Institute for Social Security has regained an activating and nurturing role in coordinating the operation of the overall strategy, which had been one of the success factors in the drafting process of the 2009-2015 strategy; conversely, the fading away of such responsibility strongly contributed to major failures registered in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages of the 2009-2015 strategy (Baptista, 2013).

The operationalization of several activities foreseen in the 2017-2018 Action Plan have been achieved through strong involvement and participation of those different level stakeholders, either through the regular functioning of the two structures of the GIMAE, through the regular activity of the four working groups devoted to different areas of the operationalization of the ENIPSSA, and through the direct consultation with other relevant stakeholders at the regional or local level.

By the end of March 2018, it was possible to identify some progress in the attainment of several activities that contribute to different strategic objectives under the three ENIPSSA major intervention axes. These include:

1. Knowledge, information and awareness-raising

- a. Preparation and launching of an on-line survey aimed at identifying the actual scope of the use of the homelessness definition by the local networks, the existence and characteristics of local information systems (e.g. type of data collected, collection system used, access to data, timing), and estimated number of homeless people registered by the local network according to the ETHOS typology;

- b. Elaboration and dissemination of an information leaflet on the ENIPSSA's official definition of homelessness;
 - c. Setting up, launching and regular updating of a dedicated ENIPSSA webpage⁶;
 - d. Raising awareness among local social networks of the importance of setting up local homelessness units; and
 - e. Preparation of the strategy's communication/dissemination plan.
2. Strengthening intervention planning and practices
- a. Definition of a training framework;
 - b. Identification of training and capacity-building needs among the local homelessness units;
 - c. Adaptation of the training framework aiming at the development of a training programme;
 - d. Setting-up of a trainers' database;
 - e. Organisation of the first national seminar of the local homelessness units (NPISA);
 - f. Supporting the strengthening of existing NPISA structures;
 - g. Defining the criteria for the establishment of NPISA at the local level, through direct consultation with the existing NPISA;
 - h. Organising regular meetings between the NPISA and the GIMAE; and
 - i. Meetings held between the ENIPSSA coordination and the Secretary of State for Housing, aiming at defining a protocol of collaboration for the funding of permanent housing solutions.
3. Coordination, monitoring and evaluation
- a. Preparing the ENIPSSA proposal and ensuring its approval as a legally binding document;
 - b. Proposing the creation of a new structure representing the different ministerial areas;
 - c. Preparing and ensuring the approval of the regulations of the different bodies which incorporate the ENIPSSA structures (e.g. GIMAE executive commission, enlarged GIMAE, Consultative Committee);

⁶ www.enipssa.pt/

- d. Direct consultation with the NPISA for the identification of potential constraints for the operationalization of the ENIPSSA's activities;
- e. Strengthening the representation of the NPISA within the GIMAE structures, based on a proposal by the existing NPISA representatives; and
- f. Preparation of the interim evaluation report of implementation of the 2017-2018 Action Plan.

Conclusion

In early 2009, the launch of the first homelessness strategy represented a breakthrough in the Southern European approach to talking homelessness. Yet, evidence from across Europe (Benjamin and Dyb, 2010; Sahlin, 2015; Baptista, 2016) had already shown that the potential for change created by the adoption of homelessness strategies was facing various complexities.

Eight years later, the Portuguese state re-engaged in providing a new impetus to a strategic approach to homelessness by mobilising and “refreshing” former participatory mechanisms that played a central role in pooling existing expertise and knowledge and capacity to critically assess the previous trajectory. Moreover, the mobilization of political support at the highest level has pushed the policy making process forward and ensured high public visibility of homelessness in the Portuguese society.

Lessons learnt from the implementation of the 2009-2015 National Strategy were an important starting point for the re-launching of the present policy making process, namely as regards the recognition of both positive features to build upon (e.g. local level progress in addressing homelessness, development of localized information systems, increasing support towards housing-led approaches, continued commitment of public and private stakeholders towards a strategic approach to homelessness), and persistent hindrances to overcome (e.g. a narrow understanding of homelessness, lack of consistent data and relative paucity of research on homelessness, little investment in the regular revision of policies based on independent evaluations, and difficulties in the allocation of adequate funding to sustain the implementation of foreseen measures).

The ENIPSSA 2017-2023 has the ambition to deliver on a wide range of areas that are key to achieve a sustainable strategy to address homelessness, where access to permanent housing has gained a strengthened role through the promotion of housing led and/or housing first initiatives. Moreover, the Strategy is now embedded in a legal framework, which is expected to enhance accountability in implementation of the foreseen measures. The three main axes of the ENIPSSA

cover strategic dimensions where progress is to be achieved, such as the strengthening of an evidence-based approach which will foster a better understanding of the phenomenon; the mobilization of all stakeholders, namely service providers, public authorities at the central, regional and local level in policy development, implementation and evaluation; the concretization of a multi-dimensional approach on preventing and tackling homelessness, integrating housing, health, education, training, employment and migration services; mainstreaming intervention methodologies (e.g. case management approach); promoting quality in the delivery of homelessness services; fostering the development of coordinated partnerships at the local level (NPISA), in a stronger position to tackling homelessness; and reinforcing responsibility and accountability in the multi-level governance structures of the ENIPSSA.

The fulfilment of the strategic objectives announced by the ENIPSSA – and in the short-term by the Action Plan 2017-2018 – is an ambitious task. Political and organizational developments appear to be clearly aligned with such ambition and progress has been achieved in recent implementation steps. However, it is vital that such commitment encounters the necessary conditions – namely in terms of human and financial resources – which will turn re-gained expectations into actual change in the delivery of homelessness policies in Portugal. The European Commission’s concern on the need to tackle homelessness voiced explicitly through the European Semester process (EC, 2017), which occurred concomitantly with some of these developments, may contribute to strengthen national ambition to deliver positively in this area.

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