CHAPTER 1
ZERO HOMELESSNESS IN EUROPE
HOW DO WE GET THERE?
Reducing the number of people who are homeless and, in time, eradicating homelessness completely, is a public policy issue. A strategy that involves setting quantified targets and coordinated implementation is therefore indispensable. The ultimate objective of eradicating homelessness may seem overly ambitious, particularly in the current context of significant increases in homelessness in many countries, and it is still much debated, even within the voluntary sector. However, this ambition is vital in reaffirming the importance of moving away from systems of simply managing homelessness, i.e. in a reactive and short-term manner, with disparate and one-off actions, to systems for resolving and preventing homelessness in the long term with continuous and integrated initiatives. There is consensus among European and international bodies, including the UN’s Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing and its Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, as well as the European Commission, on the fact that integrated strategies must be put in place in order to eradicate homelessness.

What is an integrated strategy in the fight against homelessness?

The concept of “integrated strategies” has been much used in recent years, not only by FEANTSA but also by the European Commission, political leaders and various stakeholders in housing policy. FEANTSA and the Abbé Pierre Foundation use this concept to define an appropriate public policy on homelessness, including, as a minimum, quantified targets for reducing homelessness with a view to eradicating it completely, and a realistic action plan. This plan must be based on housing and support and on interdisciplinary work carried out on a partnership basis that brings together all stakeholders. Finally, it must be endowed with the necessary resources to reach the objective and allow for a rigorous evaluation mechanism.

Recent experiences in North America demonstrate the effectiveness of such strategies. In 2000, the National Alliance to End Homelessness (United States) published a report calling for radical revision of the methods of fighting homelessness. The report (A Plan, Not a Dream: How to End Homelessness in Ten Years?) details a bottom-up framework based on examples of groundbreaking local experiences, that transformed the goal of simply managing the homelessness problem into a goal of eradicating the problem within 10 years.

According to this document, the four steps to be implemented simultaneously are plan for outcomes, based on quality local data collection and a planning process focusing on the objective of eradicating homelessness:
"Close the front door", i.e. invest in measures to prevent homelessness across all social services in order to see more responsibility towards the most vulnerable people; "Open the back door", i.e. sustainably rehouse every homeless person, as quickly as possible, (the Housing First model is at play here); housing must be the first step towards reintegration, and cannot be dependent on resolving individual social difficulties. Finally, build the infrastructure, i.e. make eradicating homelessness part of a wider fight against the systemic problems that cause extreme poverty by creating affordable housing, ensuring adequate income for a decent life, and developing services adapted to users’ needs.

Six years later, in 2006, local efforts to end homelessness were flourishing. This widespread adoption of the plan over the last ten years represents a collective commitment, at national level, to eradicate homelessness; that has given rise to several follow-up studies. 214 ten-year plans were thus initiated at the beginning of the 2000s; all across the United States (38 were city or county plans, 25 were state-wide plans and 54 were regional plans). In order to evaluate implementation, the Alliance identified four essential factors for successfully implementing a plan: identifying a body responsible for implementation, setting quantifiable outcomes, identifying a funding source, and setting a clear implementation timeframe. Plans based on the same model were also established in Canada: the results, upon evaluation, are quite encouraging. In cases where they are not – the progress made in such a strategy is influenced by a wide variety of factors – it is at least evidence of effort being made to break the existing ineffective system and lay the foundations for a better methodology.

In Europe, more than half of EU Member States have announced a strategy to fight homelessness over the last twenty years, making a significant improvement. Nonetheless, a majority of these policies were incomplete and "non-integrated", due to either their short-term nature, a lack of coordinated and multifaceted planning and implementation, inefficient management, budgets that were too low or poorly allocated, ignorance of the target public and the realities on the ground, or skipping of the evaluation process. They therefore did not have the intended effect. The various statistics showing an increase and a worsening of homeless situations everywhere in Europe are evidence of these failures. These alarms bell are being noted by stakeholders in the social sector but also increasingly by independent bodies responsible for monitoring public spending and issue warnings on inefficient and ineffective strategies.*

The European Union can support measures taken by Member States, thanks largely to funding from the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). The Commission provided guidance on confronting homelessness ([http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/energy_en/topics/energy_efficiency/energy_efficiency_in_public_buildings指引)] within the framework of its Social Investment Package. This describes trends in homelessness, good practices by Member States and core elements of integrated homelessness strategies, highlighting the support role of the EU. It is within the framework of the National Reform Programmes of the European Semester and the Social Open Method of Coordination (Social OMC) that the majority of Member States register their progress in/towards establishing a strategy to fight homelessness.

More recently, the European Pillar of Social Rights laid down twenty key principles for delivering stronger protection of social rights for citizens. The 19th principle is focussed on the right to housing and assistance for the homeless as follows:

a) Access to social housing or high-quality housing assistance shall be provided for those in need
b) Vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction
c) Adequate shelter and services shall be provided to the homeless to promote their social inclusion.
Housing First is a model to end homelessness among people with high support needs that has been successfully applied in the United States, Canada and in several European countries. Originally devised for people who require significant support, the strategy targets, in the majority of cases, people who are long-term homeless or repeatedly homeless and/or who have psychological problems; severe mental illness; drug or alcohol addiction; are in poor physical health and/or are disabled.

Within this approach, housing is seen as the departure point rather than the final goal. A Housing First service is first and foremost concerned with providing housing immediately or very quickly, combined with support that is adapted to the individual. Within this framework, immediate focus is put on enabling the person to live in their own home. The approach is also centred on improving the health and well-being, as well as (re)creating social connections for the supported person. As an approach, it is very different to the more traditional assistance services in which there is an attempt to render the person “ready for housing” before allowing them to access housing. In these approaches, service users are expected to be sober, to follow their treatment regularly and to be housing comes last.

In the United States, Canada and Europe, research has shown that the Housing First model put an end to homelessness for at least eight people out of every ten. In some EU countries such as Finland and Denmark, large-scale implementation of Housing First policies (at national level in Finland and in the large Danish cities) represented a cornerstone on which to base strategies for reducing and eradicating homelessness.

Overview of the differences between the Housing First model and the “staircase” model.

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cross the European Union, an increasing number of local/regional authorities and national governments are developing strategies to fight homelessness. A few years ago, FEANTSA created a toolbox to develop such strategies (the ten key approaches are detailed in the 2015 edition of this report). Along with the FEANTSA toolkit for developing an integrated strategy to fight homelessness, the transition from a system based on emergency response and one based on reducing (and, in time, eradicating) homelessness is embedded in its own policy approach, its own funding, its own governance, its own implementation as well as its own successes and failures. We are calling on political decision-makers to take note of the main elements to retain and those to be avoided at all costs, when developing an integrated strategy for the reduction and eradication of homelessness. We are also calling on EU institutions to actively support this transition, by more effectively using the existing policy instruments, by supporting homeless people across all relevant sectors, by monitoring progress made with regard to homelessness and housing exclusion at Member State level, by defending the rights of homeless people and by investing more EU funds into eradicating homelessness.


The needs and the rights of the individual should be the starting point for any strategy to fight homelessness. A needs-based assessment is first conducted via quality data collection: the definition of homelessness must be broad, based on the European typology on housing*, to cover all the situations that cause housing deprivation. Specific groups with their own issues (young people, families, people with mental health issues, long-term homeless people, those who are coming out of institutions, etc.) must be identified within the data collection process so that they can be targeted, and suitable solutions can be created within the action plan. Data and qualitative documentation must be produced on a regular basis: changes in the number of homeless people and the comparison over time (of the specific issues highlighted at the start of the strategy) should be the true test of the strategy’s effectiveness at a local, regional and/or national level.

The involvement of all stakeholders in policy implementation is essential to the functioning of any strategy for fighting homelessness. The needs-based approach must therefore also intersect with a participatory approach. According to analysis from a British think-tank on the reform of public services in the United Kingdom, “[by] focusing entirely on people’s needs – rather than what they can contribute – services have tended to disempower their users and have done little to prevent needs arising in the first place. [...] Services largely ignore people’s abilities, their continuing need has often become their only asset in their battle for help.” The participation of those who have experienced homelessness should therefore serve to improve the quality of services delivered and of policies. In practice, participation consists of: recognizing that those affected by homelessness have the right to have their opinions and points of view heard; creating structures whereby those points of view can be heard; acting on the information shared; and giving feedback to people on the impact of their contribution. FEANTSA’s participation toolkit details what it means to empower people and offers practical tools for making use of these methods. In Denmark, the Law on social services stipulates that local authorities must guarantee the participation of users. Users’ committees have been set up within these shelters. Since 2001, a local committee of service users, SAND, has been operational. It plays an active role in the development of public policies.

A homeless person has, above all, rights. Access to a stable and decent home is indispensable for exercising the majority of their fundamental rights, among which the right to health, the right to dignity, the right to a private and family life. International treaties protecting the right to housing must be the starting point for the development of any strategy to fight homelessness, and emphasis must be put on how the right to housing is applied to ensure that this right can be exercised. Housing, as an enforceable right...
A strategy which only produces results if it is adequately financed.

The expansion of Housing First in Scotland. In 2009, within the Social Housing Development Programmes, new housing and service measures in central Scotland were being tested and evaluated. This programme was agreed upon between the Housing Bank and some local authorities with these local authorities setting up co-constructed solutions and developing special programmes to provide affordable housing, create mechanisms for residents to stay in their homes and thereby increasing tenants’ solvency. Instead of being calculated based on average local rent, housing allowances are now calculated based on a reference rent that is lower than market rates. These solutions are helping to moderate housing costs and support activities for young people with housing needs.

While homelessness is a just a housing issue, it is also a result of systemic failure and social problems. The right to social support that people in housing have is enshrined in law, and a national strategy based on the core principles of Housing First has been most significantly driven by the number of homeless people in Norway has decreased by over 30% since 2015. This reduction was achieved by the implementation of Housing First, which focuses on housing, allowing for an intervention model that can provide affordable housing as a means to ‘socialise’ the general rental market. The Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) has shown that the number of homeless people has been most significantly reduced in Trondheim, Molde and Steinkjer. These areas are characterized by a high concentration of young people and families with children. The number of homeless people in these areas has decreased by over 50% since 2015.

The construction of affordable housing is therefore fundamental to planning this type of policy. In Norway, the concept of Housing First has been successfully applied by public authorities to provide affordable housing for vulnerable people who are not in employment or training, refugees, former prisoners, disabled people, and people with addiction problems and/or mental health issues. Major construction programmes for social housing are being partially funded by public authorities. The institutional roots of the Housing Bank, which is the principle coordinator and funding source for the Housing First programme, have been established by the government. The Housing Bank has increased its spending on temporary accommodation, thereby increasing the amount of being spent more than $1 billion on the issue. More specifically, to ensure mobility and guarantee personal support to vulnerable households, the Social Housing Development Programmes, the concept of not returning any person housed in municipal rental housing, and to guarantee support services that are available at any time to any homeless person is crucial. The Municipality of Trondheim has, among other measures, used loan and grant programmes to provide affordable housing, create mechanisms for residents to stay in their homes and thereby increasing tenants’ solvency. Instead of being calculated based on average local rent, housing allowances are now calculated based on a reference rent that is lower than market rates. These solutions are helping to moderate housing costs and support activities for young people with housing needs.
Vital to move from a scenario of under-investment in homelessness. The plan includes allocating €2.5 billion across the EU’s two permanent policy programmes: 1) a €200 million investment in permanent housing programmes and 2) an additional €2.3 billion investment in various emergency accommodation and support services. The programme is expected to provide for the construction of new permanent housing units for people who are homeless and to enable the development of new service models in the field of homelessness prevention and interventions. The programme will be implemented in a number of programmes, including housing, health, and social services. The projects will be selected based on their potential to reduce homelessness and to address the needs of those receiving support.

Despite convincing results from (2012-2015) programmes, about 2,500 new housing units were built or renovated for people who are homeless and to become permanent housing for people who are homeless or have recently become homeless. The programme also seeks to support the development of new service models in the field of homelessness prevention, coordinated by the ARA (the Agency for the Prevention of Homelessness). The Finnish Health Care Fund is being used to bolster the assistance services for homeless people in various social and health settings. The programme is expected to provide for the construction of new permanent housing units for people who are homeless and to enable the development of new service models in the field of homelessness prevention and interventions. The programme will be implemented in a number of programmes, including housing, health, and social services. The projects will be selected based on their potential to reduce homelessness and to address the needs of those receiving support.

In Finland, the housing allowance was the only EU Member State to have the link between rental rates and housing allowance. The programme was shared between the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (HAKI), the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Housing and the conversion of emergency accommodation into supported housing units with independent living. The measures proposed aim to reinvigorate the housing referral services and the open access to the social services. In particular, the programme provides for the construction of new permanent housing units for people who are homeless and to become permanent housing for people who are homeless or have recently become homeless. The programme also seeks to support the development of new service models in the field of homelessness prevention, coordinated by the ARA (the Agency for the Prevention of Homelessness). The Finnish Health Care Fund is being used to bolster the assistance services for homeless people in various social and health settings. The programme is expected to provide for the construction of new permanent housing units for people who are homeless and to enable the development of new service models in the field of homelessness prevention and interventions. The programme will be implemented in a number of programmes, including housing, health, and social services. The projects will be selected based on their potential to reduce homelessness and to address the needs of those receiving support.

The new Act plans to focus on prevention to be adopted in 2016, resorting to different EU funds enabled the programme's goals to be reached, it did not mean it was the ultimate goal – the eradication of homelessness. All levels of government, including central, regional, and local authorities, committed to work programmes on homelessness prevention, coordinated by the ARA (the Agency for the Prevention of Homelessness). The Finnish Slot Machine Association's revenue is entirely on charitable activity, social protection and health. The programme provides for the construction of new permanent housing units for people who are homeless and to become permanent housing for people who are homeless or have recently become homeless. The programme also seeks to support the development of new service models in the field of homelessness prevention, coordinated by the ARA (the Agency for the Prevention of Homelessness). The Finnish Health Care Fund is being used to bolster the assistance services for homeless people in various social and health settings. The programme is expected to provide for the construction of new permanent housing units for people who are homeless and to enable the development of new service models in the field of homelessness prevention and interventions. The programme will be implemented in a number of programmes, including housing, health, and social services. The projects will be selected based on their potential to reduce homelessness and to address the needs of those receiving support.
and Health, the Ministry of Justice, the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA), the Finnish Slot Machine Association (FS), the Italian Federation of Organisations of Homeless People, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Environment and the Housing and Preventing Homelessness to Regional or Local Authorities. Some of these authorities have implemented different strategies that are adapted to their own territorial context. Multi-level governance is thus not implemented in the same way in all EU countries.

The Ministry launched a call for innovative projects under the headline "Zero" campaign, which aims to reduce homelessness, including Housing First programmes. The national strategy to combat poverty, the Ministry against homelessness and introduced various strategies due to the existing competencies on housing allowances in the United Kingdom, Belgium, Austria, and Italy which can sometimes lead to housing insecurity.

Another example of multi-level governance, this time written into legislation, can be seen in the United Kingdom. Wales is the only region in Europe where local authorities are legally obliged to prevent homelessness, by supporting housing options and must be able to secure the situation before, or immediately after, becoming a homelessness

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy encouraged the roles of coordinator and of catalyst must be planned and restricted by legislation. Depending on the institutional structure of each country, the competency for housing issues varies from country to country. In the United Kingdom, responsibilities are divided among different entities at various levels of government, including local, regional, and national levels. The national and regional governments are responsible for setting national and regional policies, while local authorities are responsible for implementing these policies and providing services to homeless people. In some countries, the national government provides funding and guidance, while local authorities are responsible for spending this funding in a way that is consistent with national policy goals.

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The EU funds – the FEAD (Fund for Social Inclusion Investment Priority) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) – are used to support projects aimed at reducing homelessness. The National Strategy to Combat Poverty established the means of protecting the rights of homeless people and explains the Housing First methods as well as housing-led strategies to reduce homelessness.

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2. FOUR PITFALLS TO AVOID WHEN IMPLEMENTING AN INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR REDUCING AND ERADICATING HOMELESSNESS

The pitfalls threatening the effectiveness and the impact of policies for reducing homelessness must be identified and highlighted as it is easy to rush in. While certain strategies previously mentioned have shown themselves to be driving forces for change, others fall into the category of “paper strategies”, being inadequately driven by the governance structure, the legal framework, the resources or the system of responsibilities. Some strategies adopt a reactive approach to homelessness and fail to grasp the complex realities of the issue, which has a direct impact on the provision of prevention, emergency and reintegration services. Others have expired, have fallen from the political agenda or have been revised downwards in terms of resources or scope. These difficulties have been exacerbated given the context of austerity policies that have followed the recession.

We want to create here a list of the most common pitfalls based on the experience of FEANTSa members. This is by no means an exhaustive list and the examples mentioned are certainly not the only ones that took a wrong turn when establishing a strategy.

LIGHT-TOUCH POLICY: SCALING DOWN GOALS, RESOURCES, CONTINUITY AND STAKEHOLDER RESPONSIBILITY

National governments often go overboard when delegating responsibility for combating homelessness to regional or local authorities. This is a refusal, implicit or otherwise, to take on the coordination and facilitation role that is ultimately their responsibility as the institutional structure guaranteeing management of public policies on their national territory. While the implementation of a strategy must in effect be rolled out at local level to ensure that it meets the specific needs and characteristics of a given territory and population, local authorities cannot be the only level of governance with responsibility for the strategy. Issues of resources, political will, evaluation and responsibilities must be shared in order to avoid deepening social and territorial inequality.

In the United Kingdom, and particularly in England, a significant contract has been noted between an interventionist approach to homelessness in the 2000s, that showed proven success at the time, and a “light-touch” approach, in place since 2010. In its 2017 report on homelessness, the National Audit Office (NAO) criticized the Department for Communities and Local Government, responsible for homelessness, for having adopted this light-touch approach. It highlighted in particular the fact that the Department requires each local authority to develop a strategy to combat homelessness, while shifting responsibility for evaluating the content or progress of these strategies. Given the reduction in the number of social housing units and the reduction in the number of private landlords agreeing to work with local authorities to house homeless people, the NAO stated that local authorities’ ability to address the increase in homelessness is hampered by the limited housing options available for homeless people. The NAO also noted the absence of an interministerial strategy for preventing and combating homelessness in England. Despite the existence of guiding principles for homelessness prevention and intervention, specific programmes with local authorities and working jointly with other government departments (Health, Justice, Work and Pensions, Home Office), the NAO believes that with the absence of an interministerial strategy, it is not possible to evaluate the efficiency of resources used by the Department to combat homelessness.

The light-touch approach was also, according to the NAO, characterized by the absence of any evaluation by the UK government on what is causing the increase in all types of homelessness since 2011. Between 2011 and 2017, households living in temporary accommodation increased by 50% (77,240 households in temporary accommodation in March 2017 – of which 120,640 were children, an increase of 79% from 2011-2017), 88,410 households applied for homelessness assistance in 2016-2017, 105,040 households under threat of homelessness were helped to stay in their homes by local authorities in 2016-2017 (i.e., an increase of 65% compared to 2009-2010). The number of people sleeping rough increased by 154% from an autumn in 2010 to an autumn in 2016, despite the growing gap between the explosion in house prices and income stagnation, and despite the impoverishment of the most vulnerable people. The UK government has not evaluated the impact of its reforms on these worrying trends. Among other effects, the 2011 reform to housing allowances has, according to the NAO, contributed to the increase in homelessness by making renting housing costs even more unaffordable to those on benefit. According to the same report, “it is difficult to understand why the Department persisted with its light touch approach in the face of such a visibly growing problem. Its recent performance in reducing homelessness therefore cannot be considered valuable for money.”

Continuity of homelessness reduction policies can be jeopardized by various factors such as a change in the political agenda, a lack of monitoring and simultaneous lack of funding. Strategies that do not appear from the agenda during or after the specific time period they cover have little chance of yielding any significant change, as was the case in Sweden where they had a national programme of action from 2007 to 2009, without any subsequent programme.

PAPER POLICIES: DEVELOPING A STRATEGY AND NOT ACTING ON IT

“Paper policies” have good intentions but the lack of evidence, resources, political engagement, or a legal framework can sabotage implementation. In recent years, Member States have published numerous commitments that do not specify in concrete terms the resources allocated for their implementation. These strategies are “a good example of how things could be done, but because of a lack of political will, are not done” as was the case in Portugal during their first national strategy.

Portugal was the first Mediterranean country to adopt a strategic approach to homelessness. However, the National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People 2009-2015 received a lot of criticism. Despite moving in a positive direction and mobilising local stakeholders to reorganize responses to homelessness in a more integrated way across different territories, there were many failures in its implementation. The lack of political backing, institutional steering, transparency in funding allocation as well as weaknesses in horizontal coordination and follow-up evaluation mechanisms all seriously compromised the strategy’s actual impact. However, a new action framework for 2017-2023 that is entering a more favourable political agenda – the President of the
Portuguese Republic had already favoured renewal of the strategy — has already seen noteworthy advances in its operational methods including strengthening the internal workings of the inter-institutional group (the GIMAS), which is responsible for coordinating strategic implementation.

In Spain, the first Comprehensive National Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020 was adopted by the Spanish government on 6 November 2015. It came about because of a spike in homelessness in Spain, with numbers rising from 21,950 in 2005 to 36,000 in 2012. According to Spain’s National Statistics Institute, the increase in homelessness between 2005 and 2012 was mainly due to mortgage defaults (38%) and to unemployment (36%). The Spanish strategy (CNH) aims to reduce the homelessness population from 23,000 in 2015 (estimate from the government based on data from the Statistics Institute) to 20,000 by 2018 and 18,000 by 2023. The five stated goals relate to prevention, awareness raising, rehousing, reintegration into society, and improving information on public services. A mid-stream evaluation is planned for 2019 with a final evaluation in 2021. This new strategy was adopted as a result of consensus being reached between the different ministries concerned as well as charitable organizations and the Autonomous Communities. It includes innovative approaches to housing (with measures including Housing First) and is focused on individual and coordinated support between homeless people. However, these potential advances are not seeing the light of day in the absence of any dedicated budget for implementation or additional budgets for prevention activities, social innovation, research or continuous evaluation. Furthermore, the implementation of comprehensive reform requires a vertical system of coordination (between national and regional administrations) and a horizontal system of coordination (between different areas of social intervention) which does not currently exist in Spain with regard to housing.

**DEVELOPING AN AMBITIOUS POLICY AND SABOTAGING THE OUTCOMES IN PRACTICE BY CRIMINALISING HOMELESS PEOPLE**

Within the context of austerity, it is worrying to see the growing gap between the discourse on homelessness and the local policies being implemented that limit homeless people’s access to services. The commitments expressed within the framework of the integrated strategies may be undermined by measures that punish or criminalise homeless people.

In the Netherlands, the strategic approach to combat homelessness, in place between 2006 and 2014, was first set up in the four main cities then extended to 43 municipalities. It focused on three main objectives: fighting homelessness through prevention, creating a user-centred approach in order to improve housing conditions and living conditions for homeless people, and reducing ‘public nuisance’ incidents caused by people living rough. The motivations behind this policy were thus quite unfocused: it was about ‘reducing public nuisance’ caused by homeless people while at the same time eliminating the structural causes of homelessness. The positive results observed after the first phase of the action plan’s implementation — particularly with regard to preventive and curative measures — show that the structural approach was dominant. On the other hand, the grey area around the reduction of public nuisance had a significant effect on how local service providers implemented the measures. This led in parallel to local policies that penalized homeless people and restricted their access to services. One of the changes was a tightening of the residency criteria as well as the criteria for being considered ‘locally based’. These criteria were then used to refuse access to accommodation by allowing local authorities to set their own rules in these matters, and through this, ignore the right of each and every individual to social assistance. To access a place in emergency accommodation, homeless people have to provide documents proving that they have been resident in the region for a minimum period of 2 or 3 years. These practices have since been challenged in two European Committee of Social Rights decisions, following complaints lodged by FEANTSA in 2017, which cited non-respect of the Revised European Social Charter, particularly with regard to the rights of homeless people without proof of registration with the local authorities, recovering addicts trying to cut ties with their former circles, newly arrived immigrants, Roma populations and other marginalised groups that do not have formal proof of identity.

In December 2017, two circulars issued by the French Government introduced a mechanism allowing mobile teams to enter emergency accommodation to verify the administrative status of migrants, and to conduct with deportation procedures if lack of legal residency is proven. Social services providers in France unanimously condemned the government initiative and have referred the matter to the Défenseur des Droits [France’s rights protection body], for contravening the values and mission of the homeless assistance services, and for not respecting the principle of unconditional reception of people into emergency accommodation centres, which is a fundamental principle of public policy. This led to condemnation from the Défenseur des Droits and a demand that the circulars in question be retracted. In the United Kingdom, a guide published by the Home Office in February 2017 considered sleeping rough to be an abuse of the right of residence and thus adequate basis for deportation. This interpretation of European law, criminalising people who are already hugely vulnerable, has since been revised following proceedings being brought at national and European levels.

As is clear, integrated strategies to combat homelessness can be undermined by local, regional or national policies penalising all or some categories of homeless people.

**POLICY SILOS: THE RISK OF HAVING A HOMELESS STRATEGY SEPARATE FROM AN EFFICIENT POLICY ON DECENT AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ALL**

Whether or not the goals set at national level as part of a strategy for combating homelessness are reached is determined by the complex interplay of responsibilities, resources, organisations and practices at local level, and this also includes the structural context of affordable housing that is available. All relevant branches of public policy must be included in an integrated approach: the housing sector, health, migration, education, employment, social isolation, town and country planning, justice, etc. It is particularly complex to establish a strategy, no matter how integrated it is, in contexts where the private rental market is more and more burdensome and increasingly volatile, and where affordable public housing either does not exist or is being hollowed out.

In Ireland, despite the ambitious, concrete and measurable design of the national strategy to fight homelessness coupled with a strategy for building affordable housing, the results have not materialised. This is partly due to the property market situation in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, when construction, particularly of social housing, was almost entirely halted. At the same time, emergency management of the homelessness crisis, which affects families with children in particular, spurred political decision-makers to take short-term initiatives such as the creation of family hubs. These are former hotels that have been transformed into temporary accommodation for...
Homeless families, and have caused controversy within Ireland’s voluntary sector. While improvements in accommodation for homeless families is always welcome, there has been criticism of the absence of long-term solutions and a targeted strategy to get families out of homelessness in the long term. Without these, the short-term interventions alone risk normalising what are very high numbers of homeless families.

In England, the end of private rental contracts has become the primary cause of statutory homelessness. The number of households registering as homeless following the end of an assured short hold tenancy has tripled since 2010-2011. The proportion of those households (out of the total number of households registered as homeless by local authorities) has increased from 11% in 2009-2011 to 32% in 2010-2017. In London, this proportion has risen from 10% to 39% in the same period. In England, the end of a private short-term contract represents 74% of the increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation since 2009-2010.

Formerly, the main causes of homelessness were different family breakdown, impoverished parents who could or would no longer house their children, etc. According to the 2017 report from the National Audit Office, housing affordability is an increasing factor contributing to homelessness in England. Since 2010, the cost of private rental accommodation has increased three times faster than income, and eight times faster in London where private rents increased by 24% and average incomes by 3%.

The number of homeless people is higher in places where private rental costs increased the most since 2010-2011. In parallel to this, the reduction in housing allowances and the social welfare reforms have strongly impacted households’ capacity to pay their rent. The erosion of policies that provide a housing security net can undoubtedly lead to increased homelessness.

In France, some recent decisions cast doubt on the political will of the French government to implement an integrated policy to fight housing exclusion: the reduction in housing assistance, which has led to social housing bodies facing penury and thus a predictable inability to renovate or build housing, calls to mind the measures taken in England in 2011, which were singled out in the NAO’s 2017 report as being one of the causes of increased homelessness.
In the eyes of EU citizens, the social dimension of the European project has lost credibility over the last few years. In the context of a global recession, macroeconomic imperatives have been prioritised over social imperatives. This has been very clearly demonstrated to citizens in the area of housing with banks being bailed out at the same time as families were being evicted. EU institutions are now endeavouring to correct this imbalance and to strengthen the social dimension of the European Union. The macroeconomic and socialised and greater emphasis has been put on social cohesion. The European Semester is the annual cycle for coordinating economic policies. It aims to ensure that Member States avoid and correct excessive deficits and macroeconomic imbalances, develop structural reforms and make progress towards fulfilling the European Union’s social objectives. In 2017, the European Union was in the process of preparing its next long-term budget (the multiannual financial framework 2021-2027). During this period, the issues of housing exclusion and homelessness were seriously dealt with in the analysis of several countries’ social situation. The Annual Growth Survey, which lays down priorities for the year ahead, covered the issue of homelessness in Europe. It is now time to move beyond articles in EU documents to a basis on which to proceed for the European Union to have a budget that reflects the issue of homelessness for the first time in 2018. This may be a starting point from which the European Union will rigorously track the issues of housing exclusion and homelessness within Member States and make recommendations on measures that need to be taken if necessary.

Adoption by the EU and Member States of the UN’s Sustainable Development Programme is a results-based commitment to reach the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Objective 11, the complete eradication of extreme poverty in the world and Objective 11, which ensures access for all to housing and adequate, safe basic services, access to affordable prices, and commits to cleaning up slums, all of which requires rapid progress on the issue of homelessness in Europe.

P
oliticians at national, regional and local level should therefore take every opportunity to develop, in partnership with users, stakeholders in the field and other partners, strategies that will bring about, in a tangible manner, the right to housing for all. But what role can Europe play in the process?

The European Union does not have exclusive or specific competency with regard to housing, and the aim of organisations fighting housing exclusion is certainly not to challenge the principle of subsidiarity. However, several EU-led policies, such as those related to social inclusion, cohesion, energy migration, financial regulation, competition, health and human rights already affect – to a greater or lesser extent – the issue of housing exclusion in our countries. The European Union has a role to play in terms of coordination, follow-up and support of Member States in bringing about the right to housing for all. To address growing needs, this role must be strengthened, and this requires courage and commitment at decision-making level. In this regard, the political context is favourable so all that is left to do is seize the opportunity.
Against this backdrop, FEANTSA has already developed roadmaps for the EU institutions, setting out key priorities in order to promote quality training and housing solutions to prevent homelessness and encourage people to find houses as quickly as possible.

**Migration and asylum policies**

Migration and asylum policies require a significant amount of administrative resources, and the allocation of necessary resources must be closely monitored. Access to basic services, such as food, healthcare, and accommodation, should be available to all people regardless of their situation. In its role as a mediator, FEANTSA should ensure safe exit for people and cross the necessary protection hurdles. The political developments mentioned above show that structural restraints, including inadequate reception facilities, cannot be neglected, and the EU must respond to the housing needs that are rendered completely invisible within EU statistics on income and living conditions.

**Policies aimed at young people**

One of the aims of this report is to contribute to the improvement of how homelessness and housing exclusion are monitored at European level. The EU’s efforts to promote quality training and housing solutions to prevent homelessness and encourage people to find houses as quickly as possible must be supported with targeted measures to ensure the credibility of the European Union and where it stands on the ground to put an end to housing exclusion in Europe.

**Conclusion**

This document urges Member States to work with national stakeholder on the ground to put an end to housing exclusion in Europe. The European Commission should take measures to guarantee access to basic services for all, regardless of their situation. This could be put into effect by committing to make sure that structural reforms in Member States do not push young people into homelessness, for example by ensuring that the Young European Union’s current efforts to systematise use of the Youth Guarantee with a “follow-up Guarantee” to ensure quality support for young people and monitor the extent to which this initiative is addressing homelessness among young people and preparing the European Union for its role in the Sustainable Development Goals. This could be achieved by committing to make sure that structural reforms in Member States do not push young people into homelessness.

However, the European Union’s current efforts to systematise use of the Youth Guarantee with a “follow-up Guarantee” to ensure quality support for young people and monitor the extent to which this initiative is addressing homelessness among young people and preparing the European Union for its role in the Sustainable Development Goals must be complemented by measures to ensure that structural reforms in Member States do not push young people into homelessness. This could be achieved by committing to make sure that structural reforms in Member States do not push young people into homelessness.
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INVEST EU FUNDS INTO ERadicating Homelessness

CONCLUSION

The EU has the competencies for taking measures to ensure that all European citizens, social and economic rights included, participate actively and meaningfully in the process of providing decent and affordable housing. The EU should play a full role in ensuring and supporting the implementation of the United Nations’ Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing. The EU should ensure that the rights-based approach to housing is applied in all Member States and that it is implemented in practice.

Homelessness is a clear violation of human rights, which despite everything is chronic and widespread in Europe. The EU has the competencies and opportunities to eradicate homelessness and to promote inclusive, sustainable and affordable housing for all. The EU should use its instruments to eradicate homelessness and to promote inclusive, sustainable and affordable housing for all.

References:

existing barriers. The administrative complexity and financial insecurity that NGOs in the sector face when using these funds are a serious barrier to progress. Advances in simplifying the process must be made alongside measures preventing any 'creaming effects' that negatively impact the most vulnerable people. The new multiannual financial framework should guarantee adequate flexibility to enable complex social interventions. It should include measures protecting beneficiaries, particularly homeless people, from excessive financial risks. Finally, it should make it possible for Member States to use a multi-fund approach by combining, for example, ESF and ERDF for socially supported housing. Thus far, this possibility has proven highly complex and needs to be made more accessible going forward.

Ensure the EU's Investment Plan benefits all citizens, including the most vulnerable. When focusing on the combination of financial instruments, measures to stimulate investment in housing solutions for homeless people (as social infrastructure) should be included. Thus far, only 4% of EU funds for Strategic Investment were allocated to social infrastructure. Europe could be much more efficient than it has been so far with regard to investing in solutions to the homelessness and housing exclusion problems.

In conclusion, it is of the utmost urgency that Europe focus its energy on uniting to consider the other Europe; the one where people are experiencing homelessness or housing exclusion, whose numbers have been growing for years and who have diversified to the point where they represent the entire population. The establishment of integrated strategies for reducing and eradicating homelessness by local authorities, regions and Member States, encouraged and closely monitored by the European Union’s Institutions, is a social imperative. Efficient integrated strategies have demonstrated the feasibility of our ambition. The lessons to be learned and the pitfalls to be avoided when establishing such strategies have been shared. As a result, innovative actions that provide decent and affordable housing and support for the most vulnerable have flourished throughout Europe. Political will is now key: Europe and its Member States must pull together to finally ensure the right to housing for all.