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# The Drafting of the Portuguese Homeless Strategy : An Insight into the Process from a Governance-Oriented Perspective

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- › **Abstract\_** *Portugal's launch of its first national homeless strategy represents a breakthrough in the Southern European approach to tackling homelessness. This paper provides an insider's perspective into the process of drafting the strategy, focusing on the interplay between the emergence and operation of specific governance arrangements and the potential for new policy-making mechanisms in the homelessness arena. Rather than presenting a detailed description of the strategy, the paper focuses on the processes underpinning its drafting: identification of probable key-drivers, the emergence of the initiative, the main actors involved and their respective roles, the actual dynamics of the collaborative process and the challenges faced. Insights into governance issues and policy change gained through the drafting of Portugal's first national homeless strategy, along with the lessons learned throughout this process, can provide an opportunity for other countries to reflect on and analyse their national processes of framing and implementing new policy instruments.*
- › **Key Words\_** *Homeless strategy; process; governance challenges; policy change; Portugal.*

## Introduction

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The *National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People – Prevention, Intervention and Follow-Up, 2009–2015* was launched in Lisbon on 14 March 2009.<sup>1</sup> This document represents the first strategic approach to homelessness at a national level in Portugal, and its adoption is an important development in the state's role in the area of homelessness, particularly when one considers the relative immaturity of the Portuguese welfare regime in a comparative European context, and the fragmented nature of traditional approaches to issues of homelessness (Baptista and O'Sullivan, 2008).

As a background to the development of this initiative, this paper briefly presents relevant recent trends in designing and implementing policies that address specific population groups and social problems, both in the Portuguese context and in relation to other Southern European (SE) countries. It highlights the concomitant influence of the EU in an evolving understanding of homelessness and ways of tackling it, and the persistence of 'old' legacies in the actual provision of services. A brief discussion on the conceptual debate regarding the interplay between governance arrangements and the potential for policy change introduced by the emergence of a new policy instrument provides the theoretical framework of the paper.

The paper then explores in detail the nature and stages of the collaborative process involved in drafting the national homeless strategy, specifically focusing on the range and identity of stakeholders, the stages of their involvement and their various responsibilities in the process; the mechanisms behind the formation of the group; the working dynamics on which the drafting process was implemented; the communication strategies adopted; the decision-making processes; and the challenges arising from issues of representativeness, recognition and power, both inside and outside the core drafting group (of stakeholders).

The Portuguese initiative follows the path initiated by other European countries in setting up and implementing national strategic plans to address homelessness (Benjaminsen et al., 2009). The singularity of the Portuguese initiative within the context of this European trend – it is the first 'southern' strategy to be adopted – should, however, be highlighted. Portugal, together with Italy, Greece and Spain, is often characterised by the underdevelopment and low efficiency of its welfare regime, by the central role of the family as the main social provider, and by a weak and highly fragmented civil society. In considering the debate around the existence of one or several southern welfare regimes, and of different political and societal dynamics in the SE countries, it is true to say that the launching of a national

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<sup>1</sup> The original document in Portuguese is available online at: [www1.seg-social.pt/downloads/iss/ENIPSA.html](http://www1.seg-social.pt/downloads/iss/ENIPSA.html).

strategy on homelessness in Portugal represents an expectations rupture in countries where, in spite of a high degree of state centralisation (Ferreira, 2005), state intervention in specific societal spheres (such as education, housing, health) is selective and greatly dependent on the claims and power of different social groups (Mozzicafredo, 1997). Until now, the homeless sector in Portugal, as in other SE countries, was not one of those influential groups.

Moreover, in Portugal, as in other SE countries and some Scandinavian welfare states, homelessness has mainly been perceived in terms of social exclusion rather than housing exclusion. Measures to address homelessness have been fragmented, have centred on the emergency side of service provision, and have mostly depended on services delivered by the NGO sector and traditionally funded by the state, which until now played a very marginal role in policy orientation in this area. However, Portugal has undergone important economic, social and political changes since the mid-1970s, which have impacted on the characteristics of the prevailing social model and contributed to a gradual reshaping of the role of the state in relation to social policies.

The so-called new generation of social policies implemented in Portugal after 1996 brought about a new concept of social action, shaped by changes in the debate around social problems (such as poverty and social exclusion) and in the orientation of social policies (Pereirinha, 2006). This new social policy orientation was translated into the deepening of welfare mix solutions involving a wide range of stakeholders (public, private, NGOs), which gave priority to the territorial dimension of social policy making and implementation. Innovative forms of partnership at the local level, promoting active participation of the public and new forms of coordination, were designed and experimented with.

The adoption of a mobilising approach for eradicating poverty and exclusion led to the involvement of various bodies, including state services, local authorities, non-profit-making organisations, and groups of citizens in partnerships and networks, which represents an increased pooling of effort, will and responsibility. Several SE countries have been exposed to and have absorbed this imported EU discourse on the modernisation of policies to combat poverty and social exclusion by prioritising local partnerships and networking (Arapoglou, 2004).

The process of drafting the first Portuguese homelessness strategy reflects some of the above-mentioned developments and at the same time reveals some of the challenges arising from an evolving understanding of homelessness and from the confrontation between new forms of policy making and the persistence of 'old' legacies in the provision of services in this area. It also illustrates challenges from

existing and anticipated relationship patterns between different stakeholders (public and private), at different levels of responsibility (central and local) and in different organisational structures (NGOs and federations).

## **The Challenging Effects of Governance Networks in the Agenda- and Problem-Setting Conceptual Debate**

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Focusing on the process through which it was possible to draft the first Portuguese national strategy on homelessness leads us necessarily towards a brief discussion on the interplay between governance arrangements and the potential for policy change introduced by the emergence of a new policy instrument.

Is there a connection between the stakeholders in question, their interaction, and the possibility for change in an area not traditionally conceptualised as political? Are we witnessing a key moment in the process of governance in this field? Has the process of drafting the national strategy been able to bring the issue of homelessness to the policy agenda and – almost simultaneously – define how it may be tackled? The answers to these questions bring us directly to a broader conceptual discussion on governance, agenda setting and problem definition. Given the scope of the present paper and the abundance of literature on these issues we will focus strategically on the interconnection of these three conceptual contexts as they appear relevant for interpreting the drafting process of the Portuguese national strategy on homelessness.

Drawing on Klijn's (2008) summary of existing and varied interpretations of the word 'governance', it is particularly useful to focus on his fourth major definition, concerning network governance (self-steering or non-self-steering). :

In some parts of the governance literature, governance and the network concept are strongly related... Governance takes place within networks of public and non-public actors, and the interaction between these groups makes processes complex and difficult to manage. Consequently, different steering and management strategies are required compared to more classical approaches. The focus here is on the complex interaction process and negotiation in a network of governmental organizations and other organizations, both private and not-for-profit.

The diverse range of actors involved in the drafting process of the homeless strategy in Portugal was gradually transformed into an active and complex network of individual and institutional stakeholders, which required the adoption of different and evolving working strategies as well as active and nurturing process management techniques. It has been argued that the factors underpinning the emergence of governance networks are often linked to efficiency, resource dependency or the

need for a better integration of services. However, the nature of the issues at stake may also foster the need for a broad governance network; the multidimensional nature of homelessness goes beyond the boundaries of public responsibility and demands the engagement of various levels and areas of policy and service delivery. For this reason the emergence of governance networks in this specific domain should be analysed.

The composition of the governance network may also be an influential element in determining the position of an issue on the agenda. The debate on agenda setting will prove to be useful for the present analysis, albeit with some interesting variations. Widely acknowledged as a political process, agenda setting has often been connected with public recognition of a specific problem, which is then raised to the category of a public issue. Agenda setting has been described as the politics of selecting issues for active consideration (Cobb and Ross, 1997), as a process through which issues come to public attention (Weiss, 1989) and as a political and conflictual process through which an issue is legitimated to merit policy attention (Dearing and Rogers, 1996). This 'legitimising' element has been critically addressed by several authors (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Dery, 2000) who advise us to distinguish carefully between processes that allow some problems to attain agenda status, and processes that lead to actual policy changes.

The agenda-setting process may impact on the adoption of new policies and ultimately on bringing about social change, but it does not imply the development of an actual solution for the public issue now on the agenda. For some (Kingdom, 1984), the agenda-setting process may be envisaged as creating 'an opportunity for action', on which different interest groups (e.g. governments) may (or may not) decide to act, and may decide by which means to act. With regard to this fundamental distinction, Dery (2000 p.40) argues:

'Poverty', 'illegal immigration', 'crime', 'health insurance coverage', 'nuclear safety', are examples of suitable answers to the question: 'Which issues are on the agenda?', but such answers do not reveal the slightest hint on how these issues are defined. Problem definition answers a different question, concerning 'the decision to be made, the ends to be achieved, and the means which may be chosen'.

The context within which the Portuguese national strategy was drafted raises some additional challenges, particularly regarding the timing of these processes. Agenda setting is consistently presented as coming prior to the stage of problem definition, and is closely linked to the media exposure usually given to certain social problems. The fact that homelessness in Portugal enjoys only moderate public interest – strengthened through media coverage at certain times of the year – and that it has never truly reached the status of a recognised public or political issue, not being

present on the political agenda, adds a puzzling element to the conceptual framework described above. The drafting of the national strategy seems to have simultaneously achieved the demanding task of putting the issue of homelessness on the agenda, and that of enhancing an opportunity for action and thus the decision to introduce changes in the homelessness policy arena.

The composition of the governance network, its growing-up process and the surprise element in the constructive and ongoing collaboration of this group of different stakeholders may help to explain this unusual pattern of stage development in the policy process. Whether the opening of this policy window will be successful in bringing about actual change in the delivery of services in the homelessness field will necessarily depend not only on the success of the policy design process, which will be analysed in the paper, but also on the subsequent stages of policy implementation and evaluation.

## **The Portuguese National Strategy on Homelessness: An Overview**

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The first striking element of the Portuguese strategy is to be found in its preamble, where the drafting of a national strategy on homelessness is presented as a response to national and European agreements in both the housing and social inclusion domains. The importance given to the EU agreements (the European Social Charter, the European Parliament's Written Declaration to end street homelessness, the NAPs/inclusion) at the beginning of the document is a clear sign of the impact of EU policy orientation on national policy-making processes.

The document is largely made up of a set of general aims representing agreements by the different public and private entities, which are to be implemented at a local level based on specific homelessness plans. These plans will take into account the local needs that have been identified as well as specific intervention principles and methodological orientations.

The strategy is organised around two main axes:

- To gain more evidence-based knowledge on homelessness through the use and dissemination of an agreed definition of homelessness, and of a shared information and monitoring system.
- To promote quality in the provision of homelessness services and responses by eliminating the need to sleep rough, increasing the quality of temporary accommodation, ensuring the availability of accommodation and support upon discharge from institutions, reinforcing permanent housing solutions, improving access to social benefits, improving access to health care (namely to mental health care

services), promoting training and qualification opportunities for workers in this field, enhancing the drafting of local homelessness plans and promoting the adoption of specific methodological orientations in intervention practices.

These aims are translated into operational or strategic objectives, which in turn correspond to targets and specific activities. A table is provided where the two strategic axes are broken down into objectives, targets, indicators, activities, timelines and responsibilities.

One of the central elements of the strategy is the definition of homelessness, which is considered to be the 'operational basis for defining measures to address the phenomenon that are expected to have an impact both upstream and downstream'. The definition, which was approved by all the entities (public and private) represented in the inter-institutional group responsible for drafting the strategy, identifies the state of homelessness as including all situations where there is a lack of accommodation and those of people living in temporary accommodation for the homeless.<sup>2</sup> The adoption of this definition at a national level by all services and agencies working with homeless people is one of the objectives of the strategy.

The strategy defines three specific areas to be tackled by the different measures proposed under the two strategic axes:

- Preventive action in order to avoid situations of homelessness arising from eviction or discharge from an institution.
- Direct intervention in situations of homelessness focusing on the clarification of procedures and responsibilities within a specific intervention model, and also experimentation through innovative projects.
- Follow-up of situations to ensure continuity – when needed – of support after resettlement, which is to be achieved within the local partnership networks.

In the domain of prevention, the strategy defines several measures such as:

- Providing guidelines for the identification and inclusion of risk indicators for the homeless population in diagnoses issued by local social networks.
- Promoting sensitisation initiatives addressed at school and media environments in an effort to tackle the social stigmatisation of the homeless population.
- Establishing compulsory mechanisms for identifying and addressing situations involving a heightened risk of homelessness after discharge from penal, health or educational institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> The Portuguese definition of homelessness is based on the ETHOS typology developed by FEANTSA.

There is a special emphasis on enhancing qualified intervention practices in the domain of service provision for the homeless population, and the document defines different measures for:

- Promoting training initiatives addressed at workers.
- Enhancing the implementation of local homelessness units.
- Adopting local integrated intervention methodologies for addressing homelessness.

The document also establishes an organisational structure for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy, both at a national level (e.g. executive and consultation bodies) and at a local level (e.g. executive units, cooperation with local social networks).

There is a clear concern throughout the document with addressing the issue of stakeholder participation in implementing the strategy; indeed the need to involve different actors (public and private) is one of the guiding principles of the strategy. It is emphasised in the discussion of challenges to be met by the strategy; it was addressed in the discussion and adoption of the definition of homelessness; it is highlighted in the intervention model proposed; and the table of objectives and targets for implementing the strategy identifies the entities responsible for their fulfilment, and the other actors to be involved.

Although embedded in a social welfare model, where homelessness has mainly been approached from a social exclusion rather than from a housing exclusion perspective, the strategy directly addresses the issue of housing needs and the provision of housing solutions, involving both the state and the local authorities as major stakeholders in the implementation of policy measures in this area. This approach represents an important evolution in the definition of homelessness policies in Portugal, where housing has always been notably absent. However, the document does not represent a shift from defining homelessness as primarily a social issue to addressing it as a housing issue. A greater emphasis is put on the housing exclusion dimension, but the document highlights the various levels of problems and causes involved in homelessness situations and processes, directly addressing areas such as health, income, social benefits and employment.

In conjunction with the reinforcement in recent years of the role of local stakeholders, namely local authorities and social networks, in creating local strategies to tackle homelessness, the national strategy recognises local dynamics and provides guidelines for the implementation of local homelessness plans. These plans are to be defined and implemented within the local social networks in accordance with the strategy's orientation. The national Group for the Implementation,

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy is responsible for disseminating the guidelines and for providing support to the local networks and units responsible for designing those plans.

The underlying philosophy of the national strategy seeks to strengthen the evidence-based nature of homelessness practices and policy making, enhance interagency cooperation and mutual responsibility, strengthen the focus on housing needs and responses, ensure the continuity and diversity of support and shift the state's role towards more strategic control over the provision of services.

### **The Portuguese Homelessness Strategy: Focusing on the Process**

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In May 2007 the Institute of Social Security<sup>3</sup> organised the first meeting with a group of public and private non-profit entities – the so-called inter-institutional group (IG) – in order to initiate a process for the design of a national strategy on homelessness. The IG was composed of several ministerial representatives (housing, employment, immigration and ethnic minorities, drugs and drug addiction, equality and citizenship, prisons and social reintegration, health and social security, research), the institution responsible for social action in the city of Lisbon, civil society representatives (NGO federations and federations of confessional organisations), the local municipalities' representative (the national association of Portuguese municipalities) and the research centre which represents the European Observatory on Homelessness in Portugal.

#### ***An insider's perspective: the 'risky' approach***

The author of this paper was directly involved in the process of drafting the Portuguese strategy, and the decision to write a paper focusing precisely on this process therefore comes with some risk of a biased analysis. In fact the author was part of the IG on behalf of one of the non-profit entities invited to take part in the process – the research institute representing the European Observatory on Homelessness – and was present at all IG regular meetings, participating in the drafting process of the strategy as a member of the IG. Conscious of these ethical limitations, the author decided to adopt a methodological approach to minimise

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<sup>3</sup> The Institute of Social Security (ISS) is a public institute, created in 2001 under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity. Its mission is to manage social security regimes, to recognise the rights and obligations arising from social security regimes and to implement social action, as well as to ensure the application of international instruments of social security and social action. The ISS carries out its activities country-wide through its eighteen district centres, the National Pension Centre, and the National Centre for the Protection against Professional Risks. It also runs a network of 352 local centres.

these risks. This approach consisted of a thorough review of all the documents filed by the IG's coordinator, which included minutes and summaries of all the different meetings, presentations, initiatives, decisions taken and media coverage of the preparation of the strategy, as well as any other relevant material collected throughout the process. This review, which took place several months after the end of the author's last IG meeting, was performed with an explicit concern to review the whole process and closely analyse details of those parts of the process in which the author was not directly involved; and to re-assess and consider the whole evolution of the process from a more distant perspective and with the specific goal of critically analysing the process of drafting a homelessness strategy. The final stage of this process was to be the clarification of certain elements of the information reviewed in conjunction with the person responsible for coordinating the IG, who was fully aware of the author's new task.

These precautions considered, the author is nonetheless aware that it was precisely her personal involvement during the different stages and her direct contact with all the stakeholders which enabled her to access components of the process that would not have been available for an outside analysis, and which were vital in reflecting upon the drafting process.

### ***Launching a national strategy: continuities and changes in a collaborative process***

In order to understand the emergence in 2007 of a specific initiative for the drafting of the first national strategy on homelessness, and more specifically the formation of an inter-institutional group that would be responsible for carrying out the whole process, it is vital to recall some important key drivers:

- The first national survey on homelessness, promoted by the Institute for Social Security (ISS) in 2004, through the direct consultation with all municipalities, local social security services and homelessness service providers.
- The first national count of rough sleepers at the end of 2005 with the direct involvement and coordination of the Ministry for Labour and Social Solidarity and a strong local mobilisation of teams throughout the country.
- The evaluation by the Ministry for Labour and Social Solidarity of shelters for the homeless population and the recognition of flaws in the coordination of different services.
- A growing awareness of European approaches to tackling homelessness, namely by the direct involvement of the Ministry for Labour and Social Solidarity, through the ISS, in the FEANTSA working groups addressed at statutory entities.

The need to adopt a more strategic approach to homelessness in Portugal was one of the main recommendations of the 2005 study (the national count and survey), based on evidence showing a scattered pattern of service provision, a lack of strategic cooperation between agencies, a lack of information sharing and monitoring and an emerging local mobilisation to tackle homelessness strategically. The ISS took the initiative in May 2007 to invite a set of organisations to form an inter-institutional group (IG) for the preparation of a proposal for a national strategy on homelessness. The strategy notes that the composition of the IG sought to involve 'different sectors and areas of public and private activity which were considered key areas for intervening in this domain'. Table 1 presents the composition of the IG, signalling in **bold** those who were invited to form the core group from the beginning. The other members joined at a later stage when the process highlighted the need for the contribution of the areas they represented.

**Table 1: Composition of the inter-institutional group**

<b>Public Entities</b>	
ACS	High Commissioner for Health
<b>ACIDI, IP</b>	High Commissioner for Equality and the Inter-cultural Dialogue
<b>ANMP</b>	National Association of Portuguese Municipalities
<b>CIG</b>	Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality
<b>DGS</b>	General Directorate for Health
<b>DGSS</b>	General Directorate for Social Security
<b>IDT</b>	Institute for Drugs and Drug Addiction
<b>IEFP</b>	Institute for Employment and Professional Training
<b>IHRU</b>	Institute for Housing and Urban Rehabilitation
LNEC – NES	Social Ecology Unit of the National Laboratory of Civil Engineering (research institute)
<b>PSP</b>	Public Security Police
<b>GNR</b>	National Republican Guard
<b>SCML</b>	Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa (Social action representative for the city of Lisbon)
DGRS	General Directorate for Social Reinsertion
DGSP	General Directorate for Prison Services
ENSP	National School for Public Health
<b>ISS, IP</b>	Institute for Social Security
<b>Private Entities</b>	
<b>CNIS</b>	Confederation of Social Solidarity Institutions
<b>FNERDM</b>	National Federation of Entities for the Rehabilitation of Mentally Ill People
<b>CESIS</b>	Research centre, representing Portugal in the European Observatory on Homelessness (FEANTSA)
<b>REAPN</b>	European Anti-Poverty Network Portugal
<b>U-Mis</b>	Union of the Portuguese Misericórdias (not-for profit solidarity organisations)

The inclusion of those public and private stakeholders that would constitute the core group of the IG was, in addition, linked to previous key partnerships and other relevant cooperative processes that preceded the launch of the drafting process.

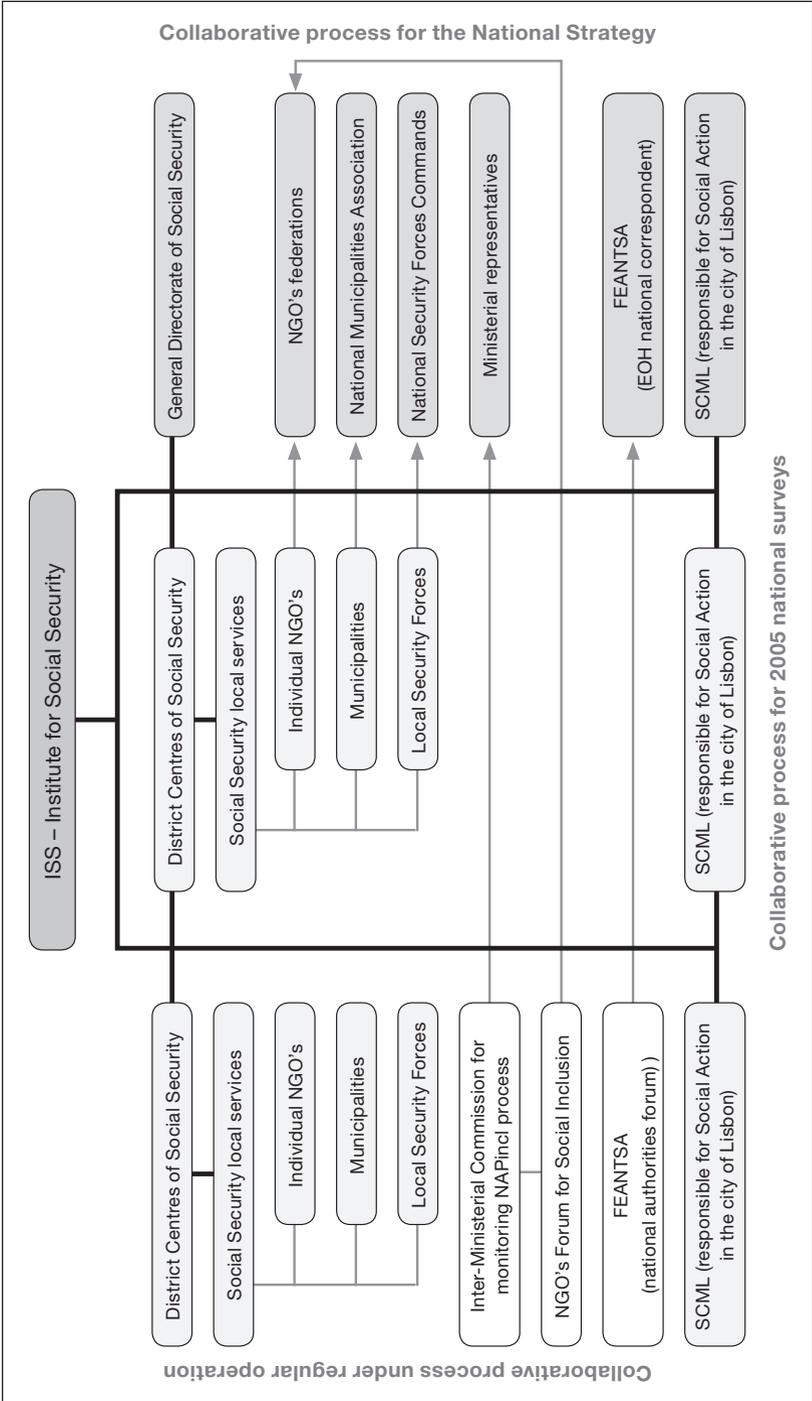
Figure 1 is an attempt to illustrate the different collaborative structures operating at different times (regular operation and key initiatives), from which it is possible to identify some links with the formation of the IG. It is particularly interesting that the partnership structure which enabled the implementation of the first national count of rough sleepers in 2005 was partly re-used in the national strategy, albeit with some additions. A notable element of the changes introduced in this structure is the increased participation of non-governmental bodies with responsibility for various public policy areas, which is a clear indication of the importance given to involving those sectors that are crucial in addressing issues directly related to the needs of the homeless population.

Another important element is the involvement of research units in the group, which reveals a concern to strengthen the links between policy and research from the very early stage of conceptualising the strategy within a cooperative philosophy rather than as a commissioned contribution. A further important shift is the replacement of local entities (municipalities, NGOs, security forces and local social security services) with their central counterparts (the national association of municipalities, national command of security forces, social security general directorate and NGO federations). Local engagement in the implementation of the national count of rough sleepers was replaced here by central decision making, or at least by representatives of national entities, which was a vital element in the drafting of a national strategy.

The collaboration of the ISS, NGO federations and other ministerial structures is also an important feature of the regular mode of operation in the framework of the Portuguese NAPs process, and it is continued in the partnership approach adopted for the drafting of the national strategy on homelessness. Finally, the pivotal role of the ISS in the two non-regular collaborative structures clearly illustrates the nature of the approach that has traditionally been taken in Portugal: homelessness viewed primarily as a social problem, the main responsibility for which lies in the area of social policy.

A closer look into the criteria that are not explicitly mentioned but which may underlie the composition of the IG reveals a concern with issues of representativeness and recognition. The express exclusion of local or individual organisations from the IG seems to illustrate the need for a nationally oriented partnership. As this arrangement corresponds to a formal requirement it becomes more difficult to ensure that each of the umbrella organisations does in fact represent its individual units. This is particularly complex in the case of NGOs in Portugal as there are no umbrella organisations in the area of homelessness, such that the

Figure 1 : Collaborative structures in the inter-institutional group



national federations involved in the drafting process of the strategy include agencies working with the homeless within their social intervention remit. Thus, recognition of the ability of these organisations to represent homelessness service providers may not be directly ensured.

The issue of public organisations, such as the municipalities or local services in different policy areas (e.g. social security and security forces), is less controversial. The national association of municipalities comprises and represents all Portuguese municipalities in spite of their diversity, and the formal and hierarchical structure of the local service organisations ensures that their central units are recognised as the correct stakeholders to represent their institution in preparing a nationally oriented policy document. One situation of a particularly hybrid nature is that of the institution responsible for social action in the city of Lisbon; although locally based, this public institution has replaced the public social action services in Lisbon with particularly strong action in the field of service provision for the homeless population, and is therefore an inevitable stakeholder.

The representatives of the organisations involved were mainly technical staff, i.e. workers who have technical responsibilities within their organisations (some changes were made during the process), although some private organisations were represented by workers who also had management and decision-making responsibilities in their organisations.

### *From sole to shared responsibility*

The process leading to the drafting of the first national strategy on homelessness began with a decision of the ISS to gather a group of entities and organisations and to present them with the idea of initiating a collaborative process structured around an inter-institutional group. This decision was grounded in the established goals of the ISS's 2007 action plan. The initial group, created in May 2007, was enlarged during the drafting process.

Once the group was created and the process activated, the ISS representative was concerned with moving from a position of sole responsibility (in the recruitment of additional stakeholders) to one of more shared responsibility in activating additional elements within the core group. It is possible to identify three stages in the engagement of different stakeholders throughout the process, which correspond to these evolving approaches:

- *Launching of the group*: The ISS invites a first group of public and private entities, proposing the activation of a process leading to the development of a national strategy.

- *Stabilisation of the core group*: The IG decides to invite other stakeholders to join due to their relevance and specificity of practice and knowledge around homelessness issues.
- *Occasional involvement of stakeholders*: Different members of the core group propose occasional contributions by specific stakeholders at different stages of the process and with different objectives (e.g. the Director of FEANTSA was invited to present and report on FEANTSA's initiative and experience with regard to the strategy toolkit; a presentation of good practices within the EQUAL initiative regarding the re-settlement of former prisoners was made to the whole group; local networks' projects and strategies on homelessness were presented).

This three-stage approach allowed for the gradual incorporation of various contributions and the mobilisation of stakeholders around core tasks and responsibilities throughout the process, complemented by occasional contributions from outside actors with relevant knowledge and experience. It is important to stress that this consultative methodology is not a common method of policy making in Portugal, particularly at national level where the participation and cooperation of different stakeholders is difficult to achieve across such a wide spectrum.

The relative stability of the core IG achieved during the process was an important factor in enhancing internal cohesion, even though there were clear imbalances in the involvement of stakeholders and their ability to be actively engaged in the dynamics of the process.

### ***Flexible management of the group's dynamics and levels of engagement***

The drafting of the national strategy demanded a clear commitment from the stakeholders, and while this was generally achieved, there were imbalances in their levels of involvement.

Throughout the process the ISS representative clearly played an 'activator' and 'nurturing' role (Klijn, 2008) in the work of the IG. On the one hand it was possible to observe a gradual investment of institutional resources in the process, despite some administrative limitations, and on the other there was strong personal engagement from the ISS representative, which was one of the crucial elements in managing the group's dynamics.

The pivotal role played by the coordinating element of the IG in the management of the network involved different activities and additional responsibilities such as the preparation for and participation in all meetings and working groups, the dissemination of information, and the preparation of formal information to be circulated between senior officials in the ISS and other public bodies.

An important aspect of the activator's role within the IG concerned the voluntary nature of the involvement of the other actors. The engagement of the IG members was conditioned by the need to conciliate work on the strategy with their own institutional needs. Within the group, the specific arrangements varied, from those who made a formal designation of and specific time allocation to the national strategy project, to those who simply added a non-resourced project to other resourced projects. The need to address these issues – put forward by different participants – also contributed to the adoption of agreed arrangements regarding differentiated working dynamics and flexible management of the different levels of involvement at different stages.

The working dynamics on which the drafting of the strategy was implemented involved cooperation between the stakeholders. At the first level of cooperation there was a balanced involvement of all actors, achieved through the implementation of a two-fold methodological approach:

- Monthly group meetings were held throughout the process and helped to structure the cooperation of the IG and the strategy's trajectory in terms of defining objectives, tasks and responsibilities and making decisions. These meetings were particularly important during the initial phase as they allowed for the sharing of knowledge and experience in the area of homelessness and for discussion and agreement on a definition of homelessness and on the founding principles of the national strategy.
- Enlarged meetings – given the essentially technical nature of the representatives in the IG, there was agreement that involving institutional representatives with decision-making capacity at key moments of the group's work was vital for the success of the process. These other institutional stakeholders were called upon to be present, together with the technical staff (from the IG), in enlarged meetings to approve final proposals from the group (e.g. on the definition of homelessness).

A second level of cooperation was based on the need to explore specific issues arising from developments within the regular operation of the group. These more restricted meetings only involved those directly related to the issues under discussion, and they basically followed two different working methods:

- Working group meetings were held (weekly or fortnightly) for specific purposes and were initiated following the initial phases of diagnosis and joint agreement on concepts, principles and structures of the strategy proposal. These restricted meetings were considered vital to ensure a more dynamic approach to specific tasks (e.g. working groups on prevention, intervention and resettlement; groups responsible for drafting different components of the final proposal).

- Sectoral meetings were held in the final stages on specific areas (health, employment etc.) in order to ensure that relevant contributions would be made by the public sector, where necessary, to achieve the set objectives.

Participation in the working groups or sectoral meetings was always discussed during the monthly meetings and was on a voluntary basis. It was usually based on the expertise, interest and knowledge of the participants, institutional relevance and strategic importance, and it took into account the need to accommodate the availability of different IG members and their respective institutional commitments.

### *Decision-making challenges*

The decision-making process within the national strategy drafting process was a complex one, not necessarily in its outward features, but in the context of its specific institutional structures and their ability to represent and mobilise individual organisations around discussions of strategy contents and decision making.

Decision making was mostly centred within the core group. Decisions on the contents of the strategy proposal were always taken within the context of regular IG meetings, following lengthy discussion and the drafting of different versions of the document contents. There was a specific concern throughout the process that each representative in the IG should be actively responsible for liaising with their senior officials on an ongoing basis in order to ensure institutional endorsement of the work that was being developed within the group. In cases where the scope and impact of the decision taken was seen as particularly challenging (e.g. the definition of homelessness), the methodology adopted was to gain formal institutional approval from all the entities represented in the group as soon as the group had reached a final consensus, and still within the process of drafting the strategy proposal.

Thus, following approval within the group, the process of gaining institutional (and political) approval from each member of the IG was initiated: the proposals approved by the group were brought back to the respective institutions in order to be presented at a higher decision-making level (directors, presidents, boards etc.). The IG discussed the amended versions and contributions, and an agreed new proposal was drafted that was in turn channelled through this legitimating path. In several sectors this process facilitated the introduction of homelessness-linked measures in respective plans or strategies.

This legitimating path was particularly challenging for the collective stakeholders within the IG, especially the NGO federations. All members were responsible for nurturing this communication process between the core group and the organisations they represent, which involved presenting the proposals issued by the IG to their members and bringing back their respective feedback. Some of the issues

that contributed to the complexity of this intermediate process include the different mobilisation capacities of federations, differing organisational cultures, the effectiveness of internal communication strategies, the extent of each organisations' skills and experience in policy making, and each federation's investment in promoting the participation of its associate organisations.

A closer look into the organisational philosophies, practices and structures of NGOs working with the homeless population – some of which are represented in NGO federations – will clarify some of the expected and actual difficulties in this collaborative process. One initial element regards the persistence of an individualistic approach to homelessness, and therefore a difficulty in understanding how the nature of the problem may be solved by a national strategy. Another element is a working tradition of providing for the poor within the limits of institutional capacity and funding that is difficult to adapt to the demands of actual participation and shared responsibilities that go beyond the particularities of individual situations. Finally, a large majority of homelessness service providers are still confronted with a lack of peer recognition within the field of social provision.

### ***Communicating – from inclusive strategies to disseminating needs and opportunities***

The approach to communication adopted during the drafting of the strategy served dual goals; one more immediate and operational, and one based on longer-term capacity building. With regard to the former, there was a concern with establishing efficient and inclusive communication channels adapted to the nature and objectives of the tasks to be carried out:

- Meetings were crucial for the sharing of information (e.g. on progress achieved in the working groups, on links with external stakeholders), the discussion of ideas regarding the development of work and defining tasks and responsibilities throughout the process. They were also occasions for decision making at the technical level. Minutes of the monthly meetings were drawn up, circulated and improved upon by all members of the IG, who were rotationally responsible for their preparation; it was not possible to ensure the same degree of detailed record keeping regarding the smaller and more frequent working groups. Particularly challenging was the process of providing feedback to the larger group regarding the progress and achievements of the different working groups, and the level of reporting was inconsistent in this more specific communication channel.

- E-mailing was the most commonly used communication tool throughout the process; comments on draft documents (including minutes) were circulated among members of the group (*reply to all* principle was agreed on from the beginning), who thus had simultaneous access to the comments and suggestions made by each participant, although they were centralised by the ISS representative.

With regard to longer-term capacity building, the strategy adopted (although not explicitly formulated as such) was based on recognition of the importance of access to a pool of information and knowledge on issues directly relevant to addressing homelessness challenges. Thus, participants of the IG were encouraged to share information on the development of relevant initiatives (e.g. seminars, conferences, training, projects) and documentation (e.g. studies, policy documents, statistics at local, national or international levels). This sharing and mutual engagement fuelled the content-related interest of a diverse network of stakeholders around homelessness, providing opportunities for upgrading and updating knowledge.

Another relevant feature of the communication process, which involved not only a mutual learning component but also the opportunity for gradual dissemination of the strategy's goals and relevance, was the establishment of a set of initiatives linking the IG's work with wider society. During the process several organisational members of the IG participated in activities with stakeholders that were not directly involved in the strategy. The activities were mainly promoted by outside entities, organisations and working groups, and included projects implemented at different levels (national and local); <sup>4</sup> for example, local networks addressing the issue of homelessness were invited to present their projects, and on-site visits to specific projects were organised. These activities generated relevant experience for the drafting of the national strategy.

The gradual dissemination of the strategy was also enhanced by the active participation of IG members in homeless-related initiatives, where they presented the progress and development of the drafting of the national strategy; such presentations were made at Lisbon's social network activities, to the Lisbon think-tank on homelessness and to the social security district delegations among others.

Other more strategic dissemination initiatives, which aimed at grasping opportunities to establish and sustain various links (and networks), included the working meeting held with the national coordinator of the proposal for a national housing strategy (under preparation), and meetings with the National Housing Institute to discuss the impact of adopting a definition of homelessness within the strategy, specifically the possibility of including some categories from the homeless definition in the 2011 census.

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<sup>4</sup> In Portugal there is no such thing as a regional level of policy making.

This sustained outside link was important in creating opportunities for cooperation and interaction, and also for gradually increasing recognition of the importance of the upcoming first national homelessness strategy. Successfully opening these communication channels may be an important contribution to the expected outcome of the implementation stage.

## Conclusion

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The drafting of the first national strategy on homelessness represents a shift in the traditional role of the Portuguese state in this area and may be seen as a unique initiative within the context of Southern European approaches to tackling homelessness. Focusing on the process leading to the conception of this new policy instrument, this paper highlighted the potential and the challenges arising from the mobilisation of a wide range of different stakeholders (public and private), organisational structures (individual organisations and their national representatives) and agenda priorities for policy change.

Despite the complexity of the process and the still unknown future outcome of the national strategy's implementation, there is evidence that governance arrangements in the drafting process contributed to absorbing the time gap between agenda setting and problem definition, and to opening up an opportunity for change in the homelessness policy arena. It is also evident that the multidimensional nature of the issue at stake fostered the need for the diversified and multidimensional character of the partnership structure in drafting the strategy. Nonetheless, it was possible to identify elements of continuity in this collaborative structure from previous partnership arrangements, both in the regular operation of the institutions involved and in key occasional opportunities for collaboration. These elements of continuity were further enhanced by the addition of new stakeholders, most of whom had direct or indirect links with the preceding collaborative structures.

The evolution of the partnership approach adopted by the national strategy inter-institutional group, the evolving nature of individual and shared responsibilities, the flexible management of the working dynamics, the activating and nurturing nature of the group's coordination, the adaptable levels of institutional involvement and the consultative methodology adopted were crucial elements in the group's operational performance.

This policy-making framework – unusual in the Portuguese context, particularly at a national level – was confronted with inevitable challenges. There is still a perception of homelessness as a phenomenon with complex individual components that must be tackled on a case-by-case basis. This perception does not lend itself to the notion of needing an overall national strategy, such that institutional tensions

emerged around, for example, the need to consolidate available resources for a new project in areas where other, already consolidated, national plans or strategies were being prepared. In such cases a key element was the personal involvement and persistence of the IG's members.

Moreover, conflicting perceptions of policy-making processes also made it difficult for some entities to move away from their own policy-making procedures towards a new way of working in which proposals were drafted by an inter-institutional group and presented as the output of a group of partners. A key element in this challenging context was the ability of collective organisations (e.g. NGO federations) to represent and mobilise their individual members around a discussion of the strategy contents and in the decision-making process. The organisational philosophies, practices and structures of NGOs working with the homeless population were some of the components responsible for the complexity of this intermediate communication and legitimating process.

The drafting of the Portuguese strategy challenged the traditional positioning and power balance of different institutional stakeholders within the framework of social policy making. It involved experiments within public entities in new communication and decision-making mechanisms and the introduction by public entities and not-for-profit organisations of horizontal modes of cooperation for the purpose of policy formulation. It highlighted the frailties of representativeness, trust and recognition among not-for-profit organisations; issues that are vital for actual participation in national policy-making processes.

While the opening of this policy window in a Southern European country represents a breakthrough in the well-identified trend of a strategic approach to managing homelessness in liberal and social democratic European regimes (Benjaminsen et al., 2009), the success of the Portuguese strategy in bringing about actual change in the delivery of homelessness services will necessarily depend on the policy implementation and evaluation stages that follow the design process. But actual policy change will also depend on the ability of the stakeholders to deepen – or at least sustain – the re-designed power balance built during the process of drafting the strategy.

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