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# The First Portuguese Homelessness Strategy: Progress and Obstacles

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› **Abstract** \_ *On March 2009 the Portuguese Government officially launched The National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People – Prevention, Intervention and Follow-Up, 2009–2015 (ENIPSA), the first Portuguese National Strategy on Homelessness. This paper focuses on the implementation of ENIPSA since its adoption four years ago; it presents and discusses the main achievements and unaccomplished outcomes of the implementation stage of ENIPSA between 2009 and the end of 2012. The paper discusses the dissonance between the initial policy and the institutional chances provided for in the national strategy, the first of its kind in Southern Europe and also details the challenges encountered during the implementation stage. The paper provides a critical review of the different implementation phases of the ENIPSA, highlighting both overall policy and political challenges encountered and the concrete outcomes achieved at the local level. The expectations raised by the adoption of the first Southern European national strategy on homelessness is brought back to the reality of actual political, economic, institutional, and organisational challenges. The first three sections set the scene regarding the overall context in which the Strategy was launched, both regarding welfare related challenges and the development of homelessness in Portugal. The following sections highlight specific dimensions of the Strategy's implementation outcomes: Governance arrangements; <sup>1</sup> data collection developments; local implementation dynamics; challenges relating to intervention practices; quality frameworks' design; and funding arrangements. The discussion section presents the main conclusions and lessons learnt from the implementation challenges faced by Portugal's first strategic policy approach towards homelessness, and hopes to contribute to the overall EU debate on the importance of strategically addressing homelessness in different national contexts.*

› **Keywords** \_ *Homeless strategy, Portugal, policy change, evaluation, outcomes*

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<sup>1</sup> The author is directly involved in one of the accompanying structures of the ENIPSA.

## Introduction

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The Ministry for Labour and Social Solidarity had overall responsibility for *The National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People* (ENIPSA), which was launched in March 2009; ENIPSA was the first strategic approach to homelessness at a national level in Portugal. The drafting and approval of ENIPSA was embedded within a policy trajectory that was characterised both by changes in the debate around social issues (Pereirinha, 2006), and also by the persistence of “old” forms of service provision and entrenched patterns of engagement between different stakeholders (Baptista, 2009). The approval of the National Strategy created the potential for change within the homelessness sector which benefited from the implementation of new forms of local public policies to tackle the phenomena of poverty and social exclusion (Guerra, 2002) and by the development of innovative forms of partnership at the local level (Baptista and O’Sullivan, 2008). Mounting evidence from within the EU regarding the importance of developing integrated strategies to tackle homelessness was the external key driver for the recognition of the relevance of a national strategic approach towards homelessness.

Yet, the implementation of ENIPSA and its success in bringing about actual change in the delivery of homelessness services also depended on its ability to overcome some structural constraints, some of which had already been identified during the drafting stage (Baptista, 2009). The homelessness sector in Portugal has traditionally been characterised by fragmentation, a lack of common guidelines and an absence of cooperative initiatives. In recent years, there has been a clear evolution in the homelessness sector; there is greater diversification in the type of services provided, a growing involvement on the part of local municipalities and increased participation in local networks. However, the diverse – and even conflicting – organisational philosophies, practices and structures of NGOs working with the homeless population, the nature of their relationships with the funding entities, particularly with the State, the continuity of funding mechanisms that do not enhance, but rather curtail interagency work, and the persistence of a very restricted and often individualised conceptualisation of homelessness raise important challenges to the implementation of an integrated and strategic approach to homelessness.

Moreover, the promised policy change introduced by the approval of the first Southern European strategy on homelessness also depended on the ability of different institutional stakeholders to deepen – or at least sustain – a challenging redefined power balance (Baptista, 2009) within the framework of social policy making, and on the ability to redefine the allocation of resources towards a “new” state project competing with other – already existing – state projects (Baptista and O’Sullivan, 2008).

A new political orientation introduced in mid-2011, following the resignation of the Government, and the resulting shift in power from the Socialist Party to a coalition of the liberal conservative Social Democratic Party and the right-wing conservative People's Party, increased the challenges in implementing ENIPSA. The most emblematic of this shift was the Social Emergency Plan (PES) launched by the Ministry of Solidarity and Social Security, which seemed to stem from an ideological shift regarding the role of social policies, their understanding of poverty and social exclusion and the model of cooperation between the State and social providers (namely NGOs). Its focus on the reinforcement of the emergency side of service provision, its ethical perspective on the poor and their "debt to society" and the new paradigm of the relationship between the State and NGOs are clearly not compatible with integrated rights-based strategies aimed at promoting social change and fostering social inclusion, especially among the most vulnerable populations.

It is of particular relevance that the approach taken by the PES announced a new type of relationship between the State and the NGOs: "Social institutions are there to help others and now the time has come for the Government, humbly, to ask for their help".<sup>2</sup> This perspective introduces a model of cooperation which is not compatible with promoting a framework for cooperation between the State and the NGO sector based on the definition of aims, of mutual responsibilities, on the establishment of quality standards, and on the need for increased monitoring and assessment of the services provided. This kind of "blank check" - welcomed by many NGOs - also represents a withdrawal of the State's responsibilities in strategically addressing social inclusion challenges. The fact that ENIPSA disappeared from both the 2012 and the 2013 National Reform Programmes<sup>3</sup> illustrates the "new directions" of on-going reforms of social welfare policies.

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<sup>2</sup> Minister for Solidarity and Social Security's speech in the presentation of the Social Emergency Plan (PES)[August 2011].

<sup>3</sup> The National Reform Programmes are the annual plans with the reforms and measures to make progress towards smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, in areas such as employment, research, innovation, energy or social inclusion submitted by each Member State to the EC.

## **Social Welfare Policies, Social Inclusion and the Crisis: Where “Old” Challenges Meet “New” Trends**

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The Portuguese welfare regime is often characterised as underdeveloped compared with the core European countries and sharing characteristics with other southern welfare models, which include the centrality of family solidarity networks; the inefficiency of welfare-state institutions (Karamessini, 2008); the relatively weak mainstream welfare safety nets (Stephens *et al.*, 2010); the high level of state centralisation and the highly fragmented civil society (Ferreira, 2005). In addition, Mozzicafredo (1997) argues that the structuring of the welfare state in Portugal has been a disjointed and fragmented process, both as a result of different power pressures and imbalances coming from social groups as well as available public resources.

Portugal has one of the highest levels of income poverty among EU15 member states. The most recent statistical data show that the poverty rate remained almost unchanged between 2009 and 2011. However, the poverty threshold was lowered in 2010, thus, given the decline in the overall median income in Portugal, people with the same income have now exited poverty, without any actual improvement in their living conditions. The Portuguese National Statistical Institute released the poverty rates for the same years, using a poverty threshold anchored in time (2009) in order to counter balance the effects of the lowering national median income. The figures show an increase in the poverty rate from 17.9 percent in 2009 to 19.6 percent in 2010 and a further increase to 21.3 percent in 2011. Such poverty rates had not been registered since the mid 1990's. On the other hand, the impact of social transfers in reducing the risk of poverty is decreasing.

The social impacts of the economic crisis in Portugal have been exacerbated by the implementation of successive austerity packages. The successive cuts and restrictions imposed on social benefits, the reduction of salaries, the freezing of pensions, and increased taxation are just some of the factors that are contributing to the erosion of the fragile gains that were achieved in reducing poverty and inequality in the last two decades. The renewed deepening of 'old structural trends' which had previously been partially addressed (e.g. in-work poverty, child poverty, inequality) is occurring whilst a continuing inability to learn from failures and to anticipate or even assess the impacts of policy measures continues to be deeply rooted in the Portuguese policy making process (Baptista and Perista, 2013).

## Access to Housing in Portugal and Homelessness

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According to the Portuguese Constitution: “All have the right to have, for themselves and their family, a house of an adequate size, with comfort and hygienic conditions and which allows the preservation of individual life and family privacy” (Article 65° of the Portuguese Constitution). Although the right to housing exists in Portugal, it is not an enforceable right. In common with other Mediterranean regimes, the Portuguese housing system is characterised by a high rate of home ownership and high levels of unencumbered ownership, a small social rented sector and a low reliance on housing allowances.

In allocating of social housing in Portugal, priority is given to people living in shanties, living in very low quality housing as well as to economically vulnerable people. Major rehousing programmes launched in the mid 1990’s managed to reduce the number of shanties from 16 105 units in 1991 to 2 052 in 2011. Social housing represents a marginal share of the total housing sector: In 2011 the social housing sector represented 2 percent of the total housing units, but it accounted for 14.3 percent of the total rented sector. The limitations on the supply side of the rental market and the promotion of owner-occupied housing through a means-tested, subsidised mortgage credit system, together with cultural factors, have curtailed the actual range of alternative routes to access housing.

The homeless population – as defined by the National Strategy – has not been a priority group when it comes to the allocation of social housing. The national legislation determines that social housing addresses the needs of households defined as “living in a situation of serious housing disadvantage.”<sup>4</sup> The definition of housing disadvantage was not conceived with the concern to address homelessness. Given the scarcity of social housing in Portugal and the focus of public housing policies and programmes on the situation of households living in very degraded accommodation (e.g. shanties), the ETHOS categories included in the homelessness official definition have not been given the necessary attention. On the other hand, in Portugal, homelessness has been understood as an issue to be tackled primarily by social services, rather than housing services. Until now, homelessness has not yet been addressed by substantive measures in terms of housing policy.

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<sup>4</sup> Households living in a situation of serious housing disadvantage means those households “which are permanently living in dwellings or parts of dwellings or other building structures which are temporary, characterised by serious conditions of security, hygiene or overcrowding, as well as those situations of households who urgently – either temporarily or permanently – have no place to live due to the total or partial destruction of their dwellings or because of the demolition of the temporary structures they were inhabiting.” Decree-Law 54/2007 of March 12th 2007.

Three main barriers have prevented homeless people from accessing housing in Portugal: 1) the not recognising that houseless and roofless people need permanent accommodation, in addition to social services; 2) the focus of social housing efforts in the rehousing of families living in insecure (from a physical perspective) accommodation; 3) the scarcity of social housing. In addition, the emergency and provisional nature of many institutional responses, the lack of support aimed at resettlement, and the absence of prevention-oriented interventions have directly contributed to the persistence of homelessness.

## **The Portuguese National Strategy on Homelessness**

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The Portuguese strategy is largely made up of a set of general aims that are to be implemented at the local level. Its two main aims are:

- To enhance the evidence base on homelessness through the adoption of an agreed definition and a shared information and monitoring system;
- To promote quality in homelessness services and responses.

These aims are translated into operational or strategic objectives, which in turn correspond to targets and specific activities. Specific areas of action include: (i) prevention of homelessness arising from evictions or discharge from institutions; (ii) direct intervention in situations of homelessness, focusing on the clarification of procedures and responsibilities and also on innovative approaches; (iii) follow-up support after resettlement, which is to be achieved through the local social networks; (iv) staff training, as a way of improving services to homeless people.

The Strategy is based on a fairly narrow definition of homelessness: “A homeless person is considered to be an individual who, regardless of nationality, age, sex, socio-economic status and mental and physical health, is roofless and living in a public space or insecure form of shelter or accommodated in an emergency shelter, or is houseless and living in temporary accommodation for homeless people” (GIMAE, 2010b, p.18).

Local action is strongly promoted by the Strategy. Guidelines for local assessment of homelessness and for local plans to tackle the issue are disseminated at a national level. These plans are to be defined and implemented within the local social networks in accordance with the Strategy’s directions. The local units (NPISA) are closely involved in preventive and remedial action, as well as in information gathering. Specific targets are agreed at the local level. The Strategy 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).

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A dedicated budget of €75m for the implementation of the Strategy was announced when the Strategy was launched. However, there is no evidence of how (and if) this budget has in fact been allocated to the implementation of ENIPSA. No information regarding the allocations of funds has ever been included in the Strategy's annual action plans since the first action plan. The National Strategy document itself did not include any reference to the budgeting of the activities foreseen for the several implementation stages. This gap has previously been identified as a major shortcoming of the Strategy (Baptista, 2009). This lack of information regarding budget allocation has not been found in other national homelessness strategies, for example in Denmark or in the Netherlands (Benjaminsen, 2013; Hermans, 2012).

## **Implementation of the Strategy**

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A key feature of the first Portuguese National Strategy on Homelessness was the establishment and the consolidation of a strong partnership approach initiated at the drafting stage (Baptista, 2009), which was considered an important asset for the implementation stage. Therefore, the review of the implementation of the Portuguese Strategy will start by presenting and discussing the development of such governance arrangements in order to better understand the successes and failures of the Strategy from the second quarter of 2009 onwards.

### ***The governance structure through the implementation stage: a missed opportunity for policy change?***

“The Portuguese National Strategy on Homelessness was suggested as a subject for Peer Review mainly because of the comprehensive and participative approach developed in all phases of strategic development – design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.(...) There is a clear concern throughout the Strategy to address the issue of the participation of different stakeholders in implementation, and this is one of its guiding principles.”(Fitzpatrick, 2011, p.15)

The ENIPSA governance structure, which was designed during the drafting of the Strategy, was meant to be redesigned during the implementation stage, reinforcing the continuity of the collaborative partnership arrangements. The nurturing role of the Strategy's coordination was considered to be crucial to ensuring the success of the Portuguese National Strategy on Homelessness (Baptista, 2009).

The Strategy foresaw the redesign of the core Inter-Institutional Group (GIMAE), which was responsible for devising the Strategy. At the central level, the GIMAE was split into two structures: The executive unit composed by organisations directly involved in the development of the activities foreseen in the action plans; and an extended committee with a consultative nature. A consultative body should also have

been created but it never materialised. Eight smaller working groups were also created, including researchers, experts and different organisations oriented towards the key strategic objectives. These smaller groups were established with the aim to assist the work of the executive unit. No additional financial resources were allocated for the operation of any of these structures. All entities – public or private – provided their human resources on a voluntary basis. At the local level it was envisaged that there would be the gradual establishment of Local Homelessness Planning and Intervention Units (NPISA), responsible for coordinating the local provision of homelessness services, in line with the Strategy's guidelines. These focal points are also the local homelessness counterparts of the national executive unit.

It is possible to identify two different stages (see Table 1) regarding the operation of these governance structures – particularly at the central level – during the implementation stage that lasted from mid-2009 to the end of the first quarter 2013.

**Table 1: ENIPSA Central Level Government Structures During Implementation Stage**

Mid 2009-Beginning 2011		Mid 2011-Mid 2013	
Structures planned	Operational Status	Structures Planned	Operational Status
Executive Unit	Fully operational (Monthly meetings and active support to local units)	Executive Unit	Partially operational (Irregular meetings; support to local units ceased)
Enlarged Commission	Fully operational (Bi-annual meetings)	Enlarged Commission	Not operational (Meetings ceased) (1)
Consultative Committee	Not assigned	Consultative Committee	Not assigned
Working Groups	Fully operational (Meetings variable according to tasks)	Working Groups	Not operational (Working groups dismantled) (2)

(1) Enlarged Commission started to operate again in the second quarter of 2013.

(2) New Working Groups set up in the second quarter of 2013 and operated until July 2012. Presently the Working Groups are at a halt.

The first phase covered a period of one and half year (mid 2009-beginning of 2011). During this stage, the executive unit and the extended committee were set up and met regularly (on a monthly and on a quarterly basis, respectively). The activating and nurturing (Baptista, 2009) role of the coordinating entity<sup>5</sup> was kept throughout this whole period.

During this period both national level structures were reinforced by new partners who joined in, given their strategic importance for the development of the activities foreseen in the annual action plans. Such is the case, for example, of the National

<sup>5</sup> The Institute for Social Security under the responsibility of the Ministry for Solidarity and Social Security.



Statistics Institute on the use and dissemination of the homelessness definition, the information system to be developed and also the 2011 census operation. The eight working groups were set up and actively operating until the end of the second quarter of 2010. Most of the outcomes regarding some of the activities mentioned before – e.g. training modules for professionals, initial drafts for risk indicators – were prepared by those groups.

The coordination of the ENIPSA – supported by the executive unit – was responsible for preparing the 2009 activity report of the implementation of the activities. The 2010 report was not finalised, although in early 2011, a summary of the activities implemented until November 2010 among the members of the ENIPSA structures was circulated. The second phase of the implementation period initiated in the second quarter of 2011 was characterised by profound changes in the coordinating team and by the overall institutional changes that followed the shift in political power, which took place after the June 2011 elections. During this second stage, the central structures almost ceased to work: the executive unit still met a couple of times over the two years, but the activities of the enlarged consultative body ceased. The working groups were also dismantled and their activities ceased. No annual reports on the implementation of the strategy were circulated during this stage. In March 2013 the new coordinators of the ENIPSA circulated an executive summary with an overview of the implementation of the activities from 2009 to 2012.

In short, the expected continuity in the collaborative operating mode of the central governance structures of the National Strategy was not achieved. The level of cooperation and communication achieved between the different entities and the different participants during the policy design stage did not withstand the organisational (and individual) changes and, most of all, the institutional setback of the coordinating agency for the implementation of the first Portuguese Homelessness Strategy.

At the local level, the scenario is somewhat different in spite of the impacts of these two contradictory stages within the development of the national governance structures. As referred to before there has been a gradual implementation of local homelessness units – mostly led by the local authorities but also by local social security services and in some cases by NGOs – in different municipalities since the launching of the National Strategy. The main difference regarding the operation of the local units is the level of support that was given by the central structure of the ENIPSA during the two stages of implementation. The evaluation of the Homelessness Strategy had foreseen the involvement of external agencies both in its initial stage and in its latter stage. The former step regarded the diagnosis of the situation in 2009 and the latter, an outcome evaluation using the 2009 base line in order to assess the effectiveness of the interventions carried out during the first years. This evaluation was never carried out due to budgetary constraints and to

the disturbances occurred in the coordination of the ENIPSA. In March 2013, a new coordinating team was established within the Institute for Social Security and the two central structures of the ENIPSA were given a new impetus. New working groups have been established and have started to operate. Budgetary constraints remain within the overall context of public spending cuts.

Finally, it is important to refer that – contrary to other national strategies or plans (e.g. the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities or the Plan for the Integration of Immigrants) – the ENIPSA was never established on a statutory basis. Since the approval of the Strategy in 2009, several efforts and concrete proposals for a Resolution were presented by the Inter-Institutional Group with the agreement of all the statutory and non-statutory entities involved. This proposal of Resolution never succeeded to get through to the Council of Ministers, the approval of which is necessary to turn the ENIPSA into a legally binding document. At the present moment, a new attempt is under preparation following the apparent new impetus given by the Ministry of Solidarity and Social Security to the implementation of the National Strategy.

### ***Enhancing knowledge and improving evidence base for policy development***

The Portuguese National Strategy on Homelessness is organised around two main axes, one of which directly relates to enhancing evidence-based knowledge on homelessness through the use and dissemination of an agreed definition of homelessness, and of a shared information and monitoring system. In Portugal, there has been a lack of reliable data on homelessness. The first national survey (one night count) was launched in 2005 under the responsibility of the Institute for Social Security (ISS) and aimed at identifying and characterising “all the people who were sleeping rough, in the city head of the municipality in inland<sup>6</sup> Portugal, during a fixed period of time.”(ISS, 2005). A total of 467 people sleeping rough were identified and characterised. In 2009, the ISS launched a second national survey addressed at all inland municipalities. A total of 2 133 people in a homelessness situation – corresponding to the official definition of homelessness included in the National Strategy<sup>7</sup> – were identified across the responding 53 municipalities (out of the 308). The most part of the situations (63 percent) were identified in Lisbon and Porto. In 2011 the Census recorded a total of 696 homelessness situations in Portugal, which cover only conceptual categories 1.1. and 1.2. (roofless) of the ETHOS typology.

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<sup>6</sup> The survey did not cover municipalities in the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira.

<sup>7</sup> The definition includes both homeless and houseless people, where the former corresponds to all the situations on the street overnight accommodation and unconventional (car, abandoned building...) and the second to situations of emergency accommodation, temporary accommodation or pension or rented room which is paid for by social security services.

Several criticisms have been voiced – primarily by NGO service providers – noting the lack of scope of the national counts undertaken and the fact that they only capture a minor portion of the total homeless population, namely since it excludes all houseless situations. On the other hand, the statistics on clients regularly provided by NGOs are collected in the most diverse ways and their purpose is essentially for the internal use of each service provider, aiming at the management of service provision. Each organisation decides on the type of methodology to be used and the quality of the information produced varies a lot.

The National Strategy on Homelessness set the objective of establishing and disseminating an official definition of homelessness which would be used as a common reference for data collection exercises and to build a monitoring and information system on homelessness based on the development of a client record system and of a service provider's data base. The information system was expected to be finalised by the end of 2010. The dissemination of the official definition of homelessness was initiated following the approval of the ENIPSA, both through the institutional bodies represented in the GIMAE and by a wider dissemination towards the local level, namely through the gradual establishment of the local homelessness units.

According to ENIPSA internal reports (GIMAE, 2010a and b; ENIPSA, 2013a) it was possible to undertake several activities aiming at the dissemination of the official definition – namely during the first implementation stage – although several difficulties were identified during this process (e.g. lengthy and bureaucratic intra-institutional communication channels; little availability of the members of the GIMAE group to participate in dissemination activities, particularly outside Lisbon; some resistance from service providers working in this field). A questionnaire sent to all municipalities during 2012 (ENIPSA, 2013b) in order to update the situation at the local level, showed that 35 out of 58 municipalities<sup>8</sup> knows and uses the ENIPSA definition of homelessness; 32 out of 60 municipalities confirmed that they knew about the existence of the National Strategy.

As regards the building up of the monitoring and information system on homelessness, the building up of a monitoring and information system on homelessness has not proceeded as planned. By the end of 2010, and contrary to the originally proposal included in the ENIPSA, it had become impossible to proceed with the building up of a specific database and information system on homelessness. Aside from the growing financial constraints, internal difficulties of harmonisation and “ownership” within the different social security services and respective information systems were raising insurmountable obstacles to the original idea. Instead, the

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<sup>8</sup> The questionnaires were sent to all municipalities in inland Portugal (278) and a total of 132 responses were received. The response rate varies according to the different questions included in the questionnaire, which explains the total of 58 and 60 municipalities referred to in the text.

ISS proposed the inclusion of the variables recommended at European level (MPHASIS project<sup>9</sup>) in the social security system. Additionally, the ISS launched a national survey – in 2009 and in 2011 – “to allow a local and national diagnosis of the profile of the homeless population in Portugal.” (ENIPSA, 2013a, p.7) However, the much-reduced number of responses collected in the 2011 survey prevented the utilisation of the data collected.

In brief, the National Strategy failed to meet the main objectives proposed regarding the enhancement of evidence-based knowledge on homelessness. The initiatives undertaken at the national level, so far, have added little to the persisting lack of reliable and robust data on homelessness. The lack of support from the central level during the second stage of implementation of the National Strategy together with the inexistence of any legal obligation to comply to the Strategy’s guidelines and with the lack of any additional funding to implement the measures foreseen have contributed to this mismatch between objectives foreseen and achievements attained. However, it is important to refer that the adoption of the official definition of homelessness at the local level by several municipalities (namely those registering the highest homelessness figures) has created a common reference basis that may be crucial for future developments in the field of data collection on homelessness.

### ***Implementing the National Strategy on Homelessness – from central provisions to local tailoring***

The ENIPSA is composed mostly of a set of general aims which are to be implemented at a local level based on specific homelessness plans and under the guidance of local homelessness networks or key focal points of the local social networks (depending on the size of the phenomenon and existing local network). The Strategy proposes the drafting of local plans, which will be set up following a diagnosis of local needs, and provides specific intervention principles and methodological orientations. Although there is no legal obligation or the provision of any additional funding for the creation and operation of the local homelessness networks, a total of 14 local networks (NPISA) were created since 2009. These 14 local units correspond to major urban areas, mostly located in coastal areas where most of the Portuguese population lives and where homelessness is more extensive. Most of these local units were created during the first implementation stage. Some of the major difficulties identified (GIMAE, 2010a and b) as regards the implementation and operation of these units relate, namely to: the lack of participation of some

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<sup>9</sup> The MPHASIS project was funded by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities PROGRESS Programme and its main objective was to improve the capacity for monitoring information on homelessness and housing exclusion in the EU. More info on the Project available at: <http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/>

key stakeholders; insufficient human resources allocated to carry out the tasks set out in the Strategy as regards the role of the local units; insufficient budget allocation for implementation.

One of the innovative features of the implementation of the ENIPSA at the local level lies precisely in the dynamics created following the approval of the strategy. Several existing local networks – usually coordinated by local authorities – managed to set up specific units for addressing homelessness using the existing local human and financial resources, in order to respond to the objectives and the guidelines set in the National Strategy. The issue was brought to the local public agenda, a diagnosis on homelessness was either made or updated, resources were re-organised and intervention practices re-examined and adapted to the identified needs.

The effort put in involving major local authorities (e.g. Lisbon and Oporto) and the national association of municipalities during the preparatory stage of the ENIPSA and in the first stage of implementation has, in our opinion, given an important contribution to this local “buy-in”.

One of the priority areas explicitly included in the ENIPSA was that a case management approach for homeless individuals be developed and mainstreamed to ensure that an individual’s unique needs would be addressed and long-term solutions found. The introduction of such an approach was to be developed by the local homelessness networks and actively supported by the central ENIPSA team. By the end of the first quarter 2011 a total of 14 local homelessness networks had been created. Eleven NPISA had completed their local diagnosis; five had established their local action plan and three had started to work according to the National Strategy’s proposed approach, and six were discussing and preparing the introduction of the case management approach within the local network.

The monitoring – by the GIMAE – of the implementation of the Strategy’s activities during its first stage (from mid-2009 to the beginning of 2011) showed that the work of the local homelessness networks encountered both facilitating features and obstacles. Among the former it is important to highlight the local stakeholders’ motivation regarding the involvement in the local homelessness units and the ability to develop joint local homelessness diagnoses. As regards the case management approach it was possible to identify difficulties to operationalize some of the solutions identified, namely as regards the lack of non-temporary housing solutions<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, difficulties were also felt regarding identified solutions for the

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to recall that owner-occupation remains the main housing tenure in Portugal. According to the 2011 Census the owner occupation rate was 73.2 percent.

restructuring of existing accommodation alternatives and the postponing of the announced funding Programme to support homelessness projects (PLASA) within the context of the National Strategy.

According to the latest ENIPSA internal report (ENIPSA, 2013b) by the end of 2012, the number of local homelessness networks had remained the same (14). However, a total of 26 local units (29 municipalities identified homelessness as a relevant issue) reported they were developing activities addressing the homeless population, within the context of the National Strategy's policy orientations. The intervention model proposed by the ENIPSA is being implemented in 16 local municipalities and 13 have already engaged in developing a case management approach (compared to three by the end of 2010). Most of the local homelessness networks are being coordinated by the local authority (6 out of 13), followed by NGOs (3) and the local social security unit (2).

No systematic information is available regarding the achievements and obstacles felt by these local homelessness networks in implementing the intervention model proposed by the National Strategy. However, information collected through interviews with several responsible officials from local homelessness units highlights difficulties regarding namely: the sharing of responsibilities among local partners and changes in existing organisational working models (particularly in bigger territorial units involving a high number of organisations and strong power relationships); the lack of funding support to enable the operation of a model which is staff demanding; the lack of affordable housing and housing support mechanisms to sustain resettlement projects; lack of expertise and resources for the management and treatment of the information collected; overall challenges arising from cuts in benefits and a shift towards emergency services and supports. Several positive developments have also been registered as a consequence of the establishment of these local homelessness networks, namely: the opportunity to bring the homelessness issue to local policy agendas; positive engagement of "new" stakeholders (e.g. the police forces) in a supportive role in addressing homelessness; increased collaboration among local service providers; development of pilot experiences in the area of housing-led approaches to tackling homelessness (e.g. housing first projects) and homelessness prevention (e.g. protocols between statutory prison services and local homelessness units regarding joint working to prevent homelessness following institutional release).

Overall, the local implementation of the National Strategy's guidelines and recommendations has shown considerable drive taking into consideration the overarching policy context, e.g., the lack of any enforceable duty to engage in the activities

proposed by the ENIPSA; the halt registered in the central level support (human and financial) foreseen; and the lack of an actual and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy's objectives and corresponding activities.

***Developing effective intervention approaches:  
the difficult road towards practice change***

The adoption of consistent intervention methodologies, namely the introduction and development of a case management approach by local homelessness networks aimed at responding effectively to the multiple needs of homeless clients is imperative. Evidence and experience in international literature has shown the potential of case management approaches in responding to the increasing complexity of clients' support needs. Changing intervention practices was an audacious objective and one that needed continuity, sustainability and support. The National Strategy on Homelessness included training and information programmes for the local homelessness networks' staff, as well as the development of specific training resources. These initiatives aimed at supporting the difficult road towards change involved in the implementation of the Strategy's proposed working methodology.

It is important to recall that although some NGOs federations had been involved in the drafting of the ENIPSA and continued to participate in the following implementation stages, their actual capacity to represent the whole homelessness sector cannot be taken for granted. In fact, the Portuguese homelessness sector of service providers is characterised by a wide dispersion of organisations, operating in very different ways and based on diverse organisational philosophies. Changing working practices within the sector was therefore a difficult task.

The training and other support activities foreseen for the initial stage of the ENIPSA implementation might have been a potential drive for achieving those changes. However, although the structuring of the training activities – namely the building up of a training programme to support practitioners – was achieved during the first implementation stage, no follow up took place, i.e. no training was provided to the support services' staff.

The recognition that promoting the use of effective, supportive interventions with people experiencing homelessness involved change in existing practices was one of the major concerns of the strategic approach introduced in the homelessness arena by the approval of the first National Strategy on Homelessness. One of the two major axis of the ENIPSA aims at enhancing the quality of intervention. Thus, the emphasis that was put on the development of resources that would support the proposed introduction of an integrated model for the provision of homelessness services based on the development of a case management approach. The training programme is currently ready but has not received approval for implementation

given “the lack of financial resources allocated to the ENIPSA” (ENIPSA, 2013a: 18). The local homelessness units’ staff of the two major cities should have received specific training by the end of 2012, a target that was not met.

As referred to in the previous section a total of 13 local homelessness units have engaged in implementing a case management approach. However, there is no information on whether those teams received any kind of information and training support previous to – and during –the introduction of this new working methodology. At the central level, the GIMAE was responsible for enabling the necessary support mechanisms for promoting changes towards more effective interventions and for monitoring the results of this process. This target has not been achieved either.

Finally, it is important to refer that the ENIPSA included the implementation – as a pilot project – of a housing first project, which would be monitored and evaluated within the framework of the National Strategy and eventually disseminated following the experimental stage. This experimental project was launched in September 2009 but both its approval and its monitoring followed a path that rather than being integrated into the operational framework of the ENIPSA ran in parallel, through bi-lateral arrangements between the funding entity and the implementing organisation.

### ***Quality frameworks for homelessness services and structures – from intentions to practice***

The Portuguese National Strategy on Homelessness identified the need to ensure that homeless people receive quality services and adequate support to meet their needs. The need for developing quality frameworks for homelessness services and structures was one of the recommendations of an evaluation carried out by the Ministry of Solidarity and Social Security in 2007 on the operation of homelessness services – namely emergency accommodation structures – in three major cities (Lisbon, Porto and Setúbal). The evidence produced showed the existence of “severe deficiencies in the operation of the structures and the ineffectiveness of the intervention as regards the insertion and the promotion of autonomy among homeless people” (ENIPSA, 2013a: 20).

One of the objectives of the ENIPSA aimed at responding to this gap by setting up several targets as regards the quality improvement of existing structures and services. These targets included: a) the regulation of the existing social responses by defining a set of minimum operational criteria; b) the recognition of “reference services” within the homelessness sector, and c) the evaluation of the existing structures and services. None of these targets was achieved.

A first proposal for the regulation of existing social responses in this area was prepared and presented but, once again, it still awaits “superior approval”. The activities developed by the group in charge of coordinating this area within the



ENIPSA encountered strong resistance from the very beginning. In fact, the regulation of the homelessness sector remains non-existent. Services and structures operating in this field are designated as “atypical responses”. Introducing specific operational criteria and creating new designations for this type of structures and services within the social security area was particularly difficult. The primary obstacle regarded the “intrusion” of a “collaborative” way of working among statutory and non-statutory bodies linked by a relationship framework usually characterised by multiple dependences (funding, regulation and monitoring), rather than by horizontal partnership.

The objective of developing quality frameworks for homelessness related services is at present on a standby situation and it is unclear how this work will progress within the context of the new impetus that appears to emerge. The lack of a legislative and regulatory context regarding the ENIPSA will certainly continue to hinder any intentions or initiatives in such a sensitive area.

## Discussion

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The implementation stage of the first National Strategy on Homelessness in Portugal reveals the fragile nature of such initiatives. The lessons learnt throughout the process of implementing the ENIPSA may present an important opportunity for other countries – particularly in southern Europe – to discuss and reflect upon the conditions and challenges that follow the initial stage of any strategic approach to homelessness. The potential for policy change within the homelessness sector created by the approval of the National Strategy was confronted with multiple barriers that evolved across the period of implementation.

In addition, the potential of the ENIPSA for enhancing a strategic development within the state’s role regarding homelessness has been severely affected by the political developments that took place in mid-2011. Social policies are moving away from a policy trajectory supportive of overall strategic approaches, towards piecemeal solutions to social issues. Moreover, the philosophy underlying the social policy trajectory which is now underway, rather than enhancing the mobilisation of partnerships and strengthening the enabling role of the State, is retreating to a model that reinforces existing individualised relationship between those “who fund” and those “who deliver”.

The lack of any clear and transparent allocation of resources to the implementation of the ENIPSA – which was identified at the drafting stage – is one of the key weaknesses that impacted directly on the achievement of the objectives of the Strategy. Conversely, the resistance to the introduction of a model of financing

that would privilege the attainment of specific goals – in line with the Strategy's priorities and guidelines – continues to hinder the move towards actual change in the delivery of services.

The absence of umbrella organisations of homelessness service providers, the strong dependence of NGOs from State funds for their operation and the existing competition between services were additional obstacles to achieving strategic changes in the homelessness sector working practices. Nevertheless, and in spite of the above mentioned constraints and obstacles, the developments that followed the approval of the ENIPSA, also highlighted the potential for change in the homelessness sector at a local level, and the ability of a diverse range of stakeholders to reorganise intervention practices in a coordinated and sustainable way.

The move towards an evidence-based approach in shaping homelessness policies was a crucial step in the implementation of the National Strategy. In spite of the efforts made at the local level – such as the introduction of mechanisms to regularly produce data on homelessness, and the use of a common definition – the results fell short of the intended objectives of the ENIPSA. In fact, strategically addressing the lack of evidence base on homelessness at the national level was a major challenge, which will not be achieved if the changes produced remain limited to the – unsupported – efforts that are being made by the local homelessness units in some municipalities. Once again, local dynamics have proven to be crucial to the implementation of the Strategy. Their potential, however, needs to be supported. In addition, the failure to place the Strategy on a statutory basis hindered the legitimacy of the Strategy within the political process, although it should be noted that in many other countries, their homeless strategies are not placed on a statutory basis. It is of note that in despite this lack of political endorsement of the ENIPSA by central government, in all the municipalities where the new local homelessness units were formed, this development had to go through a legitimating process by local government which have been important key drivers in most of these processes.

The Portuguese strategy was presented as a response to national and European agreements in both the housing and social inclusion domains. However, in the housing domain there is no information on the achievement of any of the objectives set regarding the use of public housing or existing public programmes to facilitate the resettlement of homeless individuals or families. There is, however, evidence that some municipalities have introduced prioritisation criteria in the social housing allocation for homeless people following the set-up of local homelessness strategies as a response to the ENIPSA guidelines. The Housing First pilot project developed in Lisbon, and included as one of the targets of the Strategy was the only initiative achieved with the direct financial support of the Ministry for Solidarity

and Social Security – the ENIPSA coordinating entity. Other Housing First Projects were initiated in other municipalities by the initiative of local authorities but with no support from central state.

At its inception stage, the Homelessness Strategy directly addressed the issue of housing needs and the provision of housing solutions, introducing an important progress in the definition of homelessness policies in Portugal, where housing has always been notably absent. If the approval of the ENIPSA opened a window of opportunity for stressing *housing exclusion* into a strategic approach to ending homelessness, the implementation stage placed the focus of the Strategy back to the original (and sole) *social exclusion* perspective on tackling homelessness in Portugal.

Overall, the implementation of the Portuguese National Strategy on Homelessness provides important lessons for other EU member states. If expectations regarding the role of central government during this stage did not match the involvement and the achievements experienced in the drafting stage of the ENIPSA, the potential for change it created at the local level seems to persist and progress is being made in dealing with change and developing innovative responses to addressing homelessness within a difficult overall context.

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