

Homelessness in a Scandinavian Welfare State.

Experiences with Mainstreaming Housing First in the Danish Welfare System

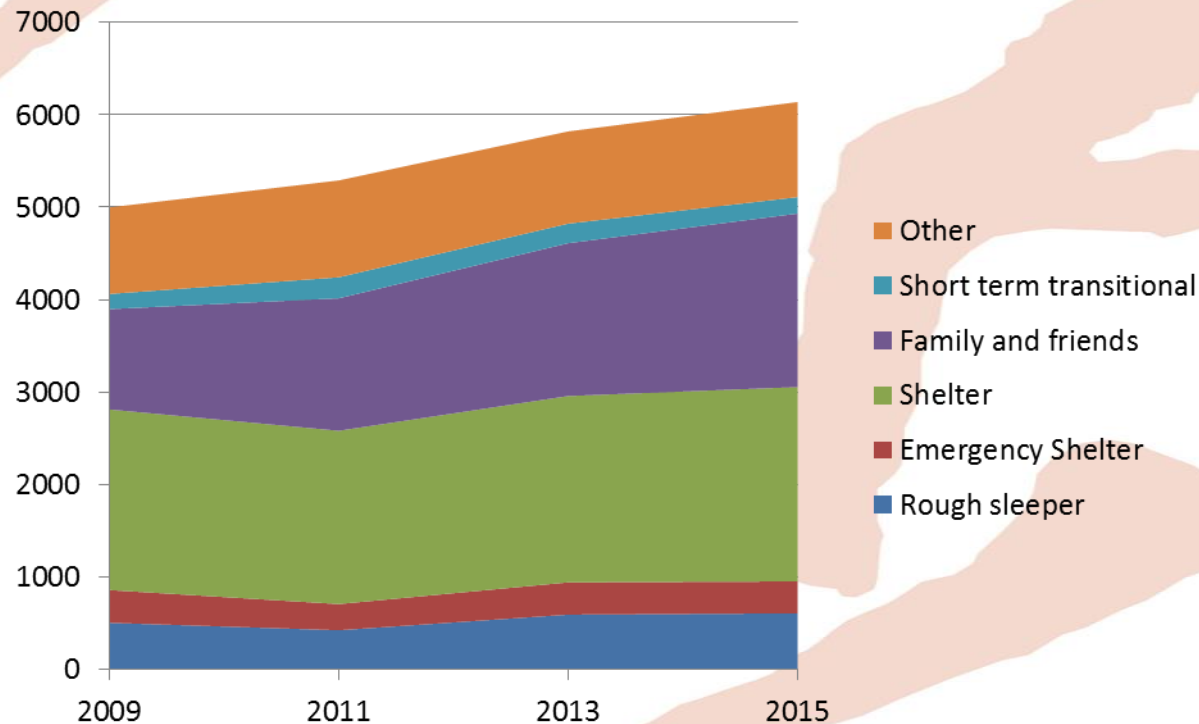
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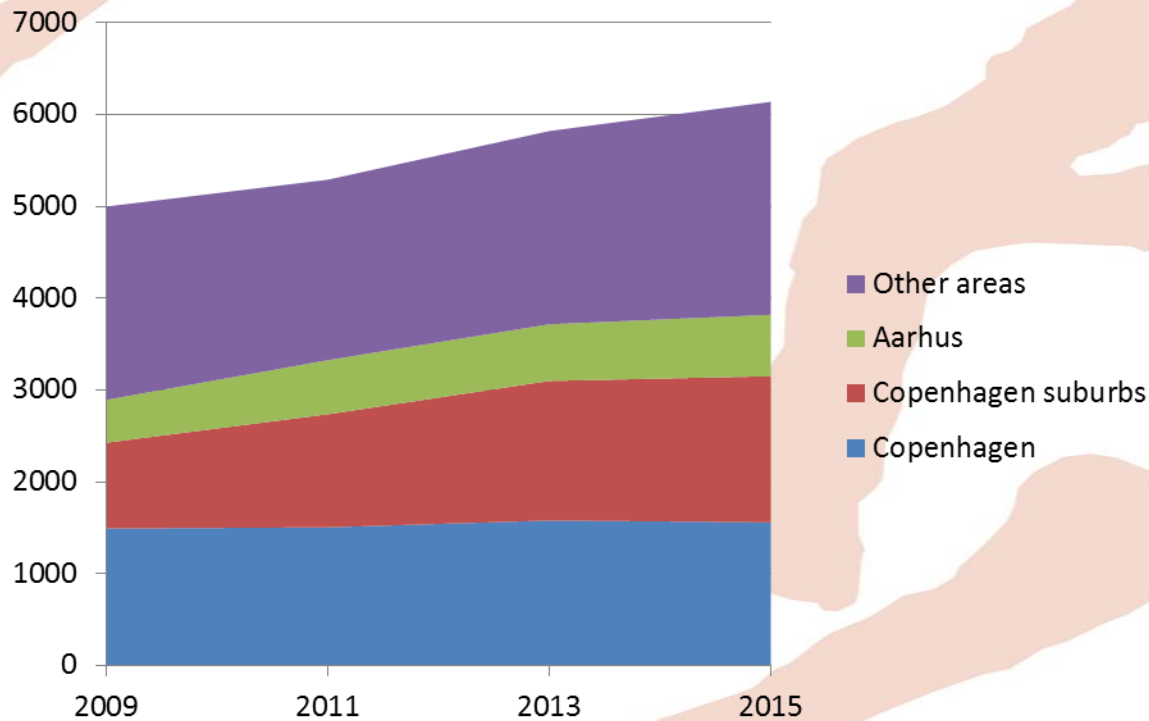
Disposition of presentation

- Trends of homelessness in Denmark
- Profiles and support needs
- Homelessness policies – experiences from the national homelessness strategy
- User survey in homeless shelters - what do shelter users prefer?
- Perspectives

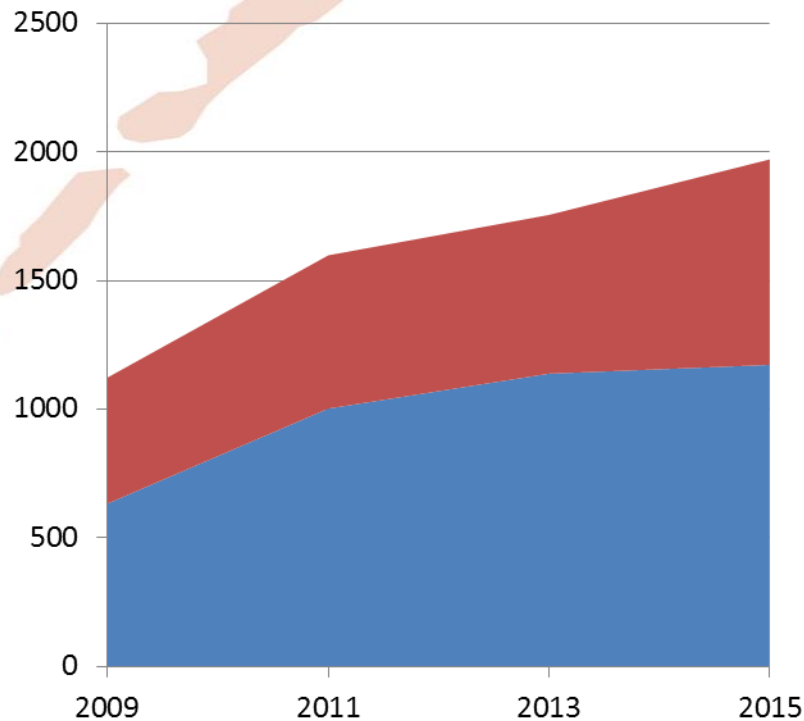
Increase in homelessness 2009-2015 National (week) counts



Increase in homelessness in larger cities



Increase in youth homelessness



- 18-24 year olds:
- 85 % increase
- 2009: 633
- 2015: 1,172
- 25-29 year olds:
- 63 % increase
- 2009: 490
- 2015: 799

Homelessness widely concentrated to people with complex support needs

- 80 % have substance abuse problems and/or mental illness
- 32% have both
- 47 % have mental illness (up from 37 % in 2009)
- 65 % have substance abuse problems
- 37 % alcohol, 37 % hashish, 19 % hard drugs

Profiles of shelter users in Denmark

10 year period N = 25,326	Chronical (very long stays)	Episodical (many repeated stays)	Transitional (few and short stays)
Percentage of clients	16 %	7 %	77 %
Percentage of client days	60 %	16 %	25 %
Average no. of episodes (stays)	4.6 stays	24.8 stays	2.2 stays
Average no. of days	802 days	483 days	68 days
Average days per episode	175 days	20 days	32 days
Mental illness (Pct.)	51 %	62 %	52 %
Substance abuse (alcohol or drugs) (Pct.)	73 %	95 %	74 %
Mental illness or substance abuse (Pct.)	81 %	96 %	83 %
Mental illness and Drugs (Pct.)	26 %	37 %	23 %

Danish homelessness strategy 2009-2013

- 65 mill. € from central government
- Housing First as overall principle
- Test whether Housing First works in a Danish context
- Develop and test evidence based floating support methods
 - Assertive Community Treatment, Intensive Case Management, Critical Time Intervention
- 17 municipalities (out of 98) participated in the 2009-2013 programme
- 25 municipalities in follow-up programme 2014-2016

Housing for the Housing First programme

- Public housing is 21 % of housing stock (½ million units in a population of 5.7 million)
- Public housing open for everybody regardless of income (general waiting lists)
- Municipalities have a right to use 25 % vacancies for people in acute housing need
- Public housing and the prioritised allocation system for the most vulnerable groups is a major explanation why the overall level of homelessness in Denmark is relatively low
- The priority access system can be seen as an institutionalised mechanism to allocate housing for Housing First programmes in municipalities



Housing First also works in Denmark

- Housing First works for most homeless people – 9 out of 10 who were housed in the programme maintained their housing (no control groups – no RCT)
- People whom we never thought could have been housed were housed and we cannot predict in advance who will fail
- Better experiences with independent scattered housing than with congregate housing

Challenges and barriers

- The mindshift to Housing First needs to be facilitated at many levels (service providers, shelters, municipalities, substance abuse treatment services etc.)
- Housing First is still debated – a continued struggle between different approaches
- Organisational structures needs to be adapted and integrated to facilitate Housing First
- Barriers for scaling up the intensive evidence-based floating support methods
- General shortage of affordable housing and public housing
- Social mix policies excluding socially vulnerable groups from housing
- Reduced welfare benefits for young people and other groups

Paradoxical results?

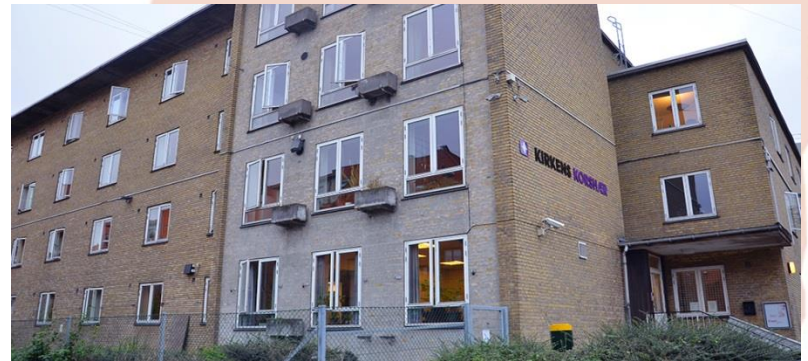
- Can a homelessness programme be regarded as successful when homelessness increases?
- Caution not to confuse results on individual and aggregate level
- Housing First works but cannot solve the housing affordability crisis or counteract consequences of welfare benefit reforms
- Negative/unintended consequences of general welfare reforms and housing policies are not sufficiently taken into account in the formation and rhetoric about homelessness programmes
- Decoupling of homelessness policies from general housing and welfare policies?

Housing preferences of shelter users (User survey in homeless shelters, 2015)

- 90 % would generally like to live in 'own housing'
(n= 179)

Specific preferences (multiple answers possible)

- 72 % prefer a flat in ordinary housing
- 8 % prefer a flat in congregate housing
- 7 % prefer 'skæve huse'
(alternative housing)
- 3 % prefer a place in a nursing home
- 8 % prefer to stay in the shelter
- 5 % prefer to stay in another shelter
- And 24 % stated various other places in open categories such as 'My own house', 'The countryside' etc....



User survey in homeless shelters

- 68 % has previously experienced an eviction
- (22 % multiple times)
- 60 % received *no* support the last time they were living in own housing
- 9 % received support for less than half a year
- 28 % received support for more than half a year



Perspectives/recommendations

- Continue efforts of mainstreaming Housing First into municipal social services
- Scale up evidence based floating support methods – ACT and ICM
- Increase supply of affordable public housing
- Increase targeted welfare/housing benefits for people with complex support needs
- Adjust social mix policies not to disadvantage vulnerable people in access to housing

Thanks for the attention

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