

A close-up, high-contrast portrait of a man's face, focusing on his eyes and forehead. The lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows and bright highlights, creating a somber and intense expression. The background is dark, making the subject's features stand out.

CHAP. 1

HOMELESSNESS IN EUROPE

THE LEGACY OF
A DECADE-LONG
SOCIAL EMERGENCY
AND A YEAR-LONG
PANDEMIC

HOMELESSNESS IN EUROPE

THE LEGACY OF A DECADE-LONG SOCIAL EMERGENCY AND A YEAR-LONG PANDEMIC

Previous editions of this report highlighted the dramatic increase in homelessness over the preceding decade as well as how the profile of people excluded from housing markets has diversified. In 2019, FEANTSA and the Abbé Pierre Foundation estimated the minimum number of homeless people sleeping rough or in temporary/emergency accommodation on any given night in the European Union at 700,000. This amounts to a 70% increase in the space of ten years.¹ In 2020 and 2021, the disruption caused by the pandemic was the final nail in the coffin for social protection, accommodation and reception systems that had already been weakened over the preceding decade. While it is too early for comparable global data,² the experiences of service providers fulfilling basic needs speak for themselves: the health crisis, successive lockdowns and the abrupt end to various industries, (hospitality, culture, tourism, etc.), have plunged millions of people into poverty, particularly unemployed people, those in insecure or seasonal work, young people and students, older people, those no longer eligible for benefits and failed asylum seekers.

As in previous years, coming to a true picture of homelessness³ in Europe, in the absence of regularly updated data and comparable methodologies, was a significant challenge. The most recent national and local data confirm a worsening of the general situation in some countries and a stabilisation – usually a levelling off at a very high rate – of homelessness overall in others. A general trend in emergency and temporary accommodation numbers increasing and becoming long-term solutions has been observed in the majority of countries.

Homelessness is not a static phenomenon. It is related to the lived experience of each individual and can arise at different stages of life as a result of different life trajectories. The understanding of these trajectories is still rudimentary at European level. In 2018, a partial and ad-hoc study was carried out by Eurostat to give an overview of the magnitude of homelessness, through looking at how 'housing difficulties' are experienced by the entire European population.⁴ As this module was optional for Member States, only 12 countries participated: Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, as well as the United Kingdom, Albania and Switzerland. Whether the lack of responses from other countries be a result of national statistics systems being unable to adapt to the study or a lack of interest in these issues, it shows that there is a long road ahead if we are to collectively reach a better understanding of housing exclusion.

According to this study, **4 out of every 100 people in Europe – in a sample of 12 countries – report that they have been homeless at least once in their lives** (ranging from 1 in every 100 in Hungary to 10 in every 100 in Denmark). For every 100 people, 3 have had to live with relatives temporarily and 1 person in every 100 reports having slept rough or lived in emergency or temporary accommodation or in a place not intended as a home. For the

majority of people surveyed (76.2%), the duration of their most recent housing-related difficulties was less than 12 months. **Almost a quarter of people surveyed reported that this period had lasted more than 12 months:** for 11.5%, it lasted between 12 and 24 months and for 12.2%, it lasted more than 24 months. This long experience of housing difficulties is particularly significant and predominant in Bulgaria, Slovakia and Spain. A third of those surveyed, reported that **family and/or relationship problems** were the main cause of housing difficulties particularly in Hungary and the United Kingdom, where this affects more than 45% of people surveyed. 26.8% cite **unemployment, insufficient resources or financial problems** and 17% cite **the end of a rental contract or the dwelling not being fit for habitation**. Finally, while more than one third of those surveyed do not explain how they exited their housing difficulties, 22% cite **rebuilding or renewing family or social relationships**, 18% cite **re-employment** and 14% cite **moving into social housing or subsidised private housing**.

1.

A CEMENTING OF THE WORSENING TRENDS IN HOMELESSNESS THAT WE HAVE WITNESSED OVER THE PAST DECADE

THE NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE IS STILL GROWING

If we consider homelessness according to the broad definition provided in the ETHOS typology, the majority of homeless people in Europe live with shelter but without a home, in inadequate, temporary, or emergency accommodation or with third parties/other people. In **France**, according to estimates from the Abbé Pierre Foundation, 1.06 million people are deprived of their own home, of whom 300,000 are of no fixed abode (a number that has tripled since 2001 and doubled since 2012), 25,000 are living in hotel rooms that they pay for, 100,000 are in makeshift shelters and 643,000 are forced to stay with third parties/other people.⁵ In **Poland**, 80% of the 30,330 people counted on a given night in 2019 were living in temporary or emergency accommodation, with 6,007 people still sleeping rough. In **Sweden**, 18% of the 33,269 homeless people counted were experiencing a severe form of homelessness,⁶ of whom 647 were sleeping rough. In **Finland**, 64% of homeless people in 2020 were living temporarily with relatives/friends.⁷ In **Portugal** however, of the 6,044 homeless people counted on 31 December 2018, 40% (2,428 people) were without shelter – either sleeping rough or in night shelters.⁸

CITIES UNDER PRESSURE

The number of homeless people living in extreme conditions that are contrary to the most fundamental human rights reached unprecedented

levels in several European cities, evidence of the overwhelmed accommodation systems across Europe:

- In **Brussels**, Belgium, 5,313 homeless people, including 933 minors, were counted on the night of 9 November 2020⁹ (an increase of 28% on 2018). 719 people were sleeping rough and 1,928 were staying in crisis or emergency accommodation (an increase of 48% on 2018).
- In **Barcelona**, Spain, 1,286 homeless people were counted on the night of 15 May 2019 (an increase of 40% on 2011) of whom 1,027 were sleeping rough and 259 were in night shelters.
- In **Vienna**, Austria, 12,590 people used homeless services in 2019, a steady increase of 67% on 2009 figures. In Salzburg, 1,451 people were counted as homeless (of whom 21% were without shelter) in a given month in 2019 (0.26 % of the local population).
- In **Prague**, Czech Republic, 2,100 homeless people were counted over one week in 2019.¹⁰
- In **Paris**, France, 3,601 people were counted as sleeping rough, including 74 children, on the night of 30 January 2020,¹¹ while 24,900 people were in emergency accommodation the same night as part of the cold weather plans (in night shelters, temporary winter accommodation or hotels), figures similar to those of 2019.
- In **Lisbon**, Portugal, the number of homeless people stood at 2,328 in 2018, an increase of 173% on 2013: the number of people sleeping in night shelters has increased four-fold in this period (to 1,967 people in 2018), while the

number of people sleeping rough fell by 23% (to 361 people) in 2018.¹² In Porto, the 2019 municipal report counted 420 people in temporary accommodation and 140 people sleeping rough on one night.

EMERGENCY SPENDING AND EMERGENCY MEASURES ARE CONSTANTLY INCREASING

The increase in these different forms of housing exclusion has gone hand-in-hand with the creation of more and more places in temporary and emergency accommodation, and with these places becoming long term. In **Germany**, in the North-Rhine-Westphalia region, 32,623 people were staying in local authority emergency accommodation on 30 June 2019, up 180% on 2016. In **Czech Republic**, over the year 2017, 50,638 people used emergency shelters; nine times more than in 2008.¹³ In **France**, between 2010 and 2019, the number of places in CHUs (emergency accommodation centres) increased 207% and places in hotels increased by 265%.¹⁴ In **Slovenia**, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs has financed a growing number of services since 1996, and 3,972 homeless people benefited from these support services in 2019, e.g. night shelters, day centres, rehousing, etc., up 46% on 2013.¹⁵ In **Lithuania**, stays in emergency accommodation lasted the longest: in 2019, three in every four people in emergency accommodation had been there more than six months (up 15% on 2018). In **Poland**, 21,067 people were placed in emergency accommodation by the authorities in 2019, an increase of 130% since 1999. More than half of homeless people in Poland (54.6%) have been so for more than five years.

In parallel, budgets for managing the emergency have also increased significantly over the last number of years. In **Dublin, Ireland**, the budget allocated to emergency accommodation services

almost tripled between 2014 and 2018, with EUR 118 million being allocated in 2018 to temporary and emergency accommodation, hotel rooms and emergency reception centres for families.¹⁶ In **Bratislava, Slovakia**, while the total amount of financing allocated by the municipality to homeless services has barely increased (up just 2.5%) between 2016 and 2018, the proportion spent on night shelters has increased by 65%.¹⁷ In **England**, between April 2018 and March 2019, local authorities spent GBP 1.1 billion on temporary accommodation, an increase of 78% in five years; 30% of this (GBP 344 million) was spent on hotel and B&B accommodation, an increase of 111% in five years.¹⁸ In **France**, expenditure on emergency accommodation – outside CHRS (accommodation and social rehabilitation centres) – has almost quadrupled in 11 years, from EUR 228 million in 2008 to EUR 934 million in 2019.¹⁹

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, WOMEN, OLD PEOPLE: DIVERSIFYING PROFILES

Despite the over-representation – shared by all European countries – of adult men among homeless people, the profiles continue to diversify. In **Ireland**, 2,452 children were living in emergency accommodation in July 2020, an increase of 250% on July 2014; one homeless person in three is a child there.²⁰ In **Hungary**, the annual survey carried out in several municipalities counted 7,604 homeless people on 3 February 2020. This statistic has been relatively stable over time, but it disguises an increase in the number of people sleeping rough, an increase in the proportion of old people (who in 2020 represented 40% of the homeless population compared to 11% in 1999), and an increase in the number of women (who represented 25% of homeless people in 2020, compared to 20% in 1999). Still in the Hungarian survey, 32% of homeless people are from the Roma community up from 19% in 2004. The pro-

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portion of Roma people among the homeless population is five times higher than among the general population. The homeless population is ageing in **Hungary** and also in **Poland** where the biannual survey carried out on a night in February 2019 showed that 33% of homeless people are over 60 years old, compared to 21.7% in 2013. The data available also show that there is a growing number of people under 30²¹ as well as expatriates, citizens from other EU countries and from non-EU countries among the homeless population.²²

LONG-TERM POLICIES THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Signs of a reduction or stabilisation in homelessness have nonetheless been observed in some countries and local areas. These positive developments, when observed over the long term, are systematically connected to the adop-

tion of ambitious and ongoing strategies that implement access to decent and affordable housing, doing away with short-term policies based on emergencies and the weather.²³ In **Denmark**, the general trend is stabilising or reducing in big cities. In Copenhagen, where 25% of Denmark's homeless people live, 1,442 people were counted as homeless during one week in 2019 (a drop of 3% on the 2017 figures). In Odense, the Housing First policy, in cooperation with social housing landlords, has been very successful and the number of homeless people has fallen 40% in ten years. However, an increase in homelessness has been observed in rural areas and medium-sized cities, e.g. Horsens and Slagelse. In **Finland**, the steady decrease in homelessness that started in 2008 has been ongoing. On 15 November 2020, 4,341 single homeless people were counted, a fall of 6% compared to the previous year, as well as 201 families, a fall of 24% on 2019.²⁴

2. VERY WORRYING PROSPECTS IN THE WAKE OF THE PANDEMIC AND BALLOONING POVERTY LEVELS IN EUROPE

At the beginning of 2021, there was still very little up-to-date official data on recent developments in homelessness across different European countries. Successive lockdowns have hampered data collection as regular surveys could not take place. However, various indicators are sounding the alarm on a potential explosion ahead in the number of people at risk of extreme poverty and housing exclusion. **The steep rise in the number of people in extreme poverty in a number of European countries** is a portent. In **Spain**, where the poverty rate was already among the highest in Europe before the pandemic, the impact of the pandemic could lead to 'unprecedented levels' of poverty according to Oxfam, leaving a further one million people below the poverty threshold, to reach 10.9 million – of whom half will be living in extreme poverty on the equivalent of less than EUR 16 per day.²⁵ In Madrid, the municipality estimates that one in three households have been impoverished as a result of the pandemic: more than one quarter of the 75,000 households applying for financial support during lockdown had never relied on welfare benefits before, highlighting the 'new poverty' produced by the crisis.²⁶ In **Italy**, during the first phase of the pandemic (March-May 2020), 445,585 people requested material assistance from Caritas Italiana, an increase of 129% on the previous year – and notably a 105% increase in people requesting support for the first time. In addition to demonstrating how many people are at risk of extreme poverty and homelessness, these figures show the magnitude of the social emergency currently being felt in European

countries. The rise in rent and mortgage arrears, alongside the explosion in unemployment and financial insecurity, plays a significant role in causing this poverty and raises the spectre of large-scale evictions in the near future. In **England**, between March and August 2020, 5% of tenants on the private market were in arrears, twice the level of the previous year.²⁷ In **Spain**, the huge wave of evictions that took place after the 2008 financial crisis combined with the lack of a functional, diversified supply of affordable housing were what caused the increase in the homeless population.²⁸ While moratoria on evictions were extended several times in the majority of Member States, hundreds of thousands of people are at risk of eviction once the moratoria end.²⁹

According to several studies, economic recessions and in particular the reductions in public expenditure on welfare benefits that follow, are associated with significant increases in the number of homeless people. In **England**, during 2004-2012, with every 10% reduction in economic activity came a 0.45 rise in the number of homelessness applications³⁰ per 1,000 households and each 10% reduction in local authority expenditure was associated with a rise of 0.83 in the number of homelessness applications per 1,000 households.³¹ While prior to 2011 the end of an assured shorthold tenancy accounted for 15% of applications by statutory homeless people, this percentage exploded after 2013 reaching 39% in 2017, making the end of a rental contract the number one cause of homelessness in England.³²

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Young people are on the front line of this increase in poverty, which seems to be creating a lost generation. This is the unfortunate legacy of years of budget cuts, which started before Covid-19 – and young people have been further abandoned throughout the pandemic. In **France**, 20% of young people aged 18-24 years have resorted to food aid and 35% fear being unable to pay their housing costs in 2021.³³ In **the United Kingdom**, one in three employees aged 18-24 lost their job or were dismissed due to the pandemic, compared to one in six adult employees (over 24 years).³⁴

Without preventive policies that can address the issues and the scale of people involved, a new cohort of people being pushed into poverty by the pandemic will increase pressure on the existing accommodation and reception systems for homeless people – systems that have been overwhelmed for several years already. The numbers of homeless people sleeping rough will therefore increase, with dramatic consequences on people's life course and health, particularly those who are already very vulnerable, including children, young people and older people.

3. POLICIES TO FIGHT HOMELESSNESS IN EUROPE: WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic in 2020 highlighted the experiences of Europe's most vulnerable citizens, but it also shone a light on failings in our solidarity systems: access to healthcare, undignified living conditions, the importance of prevention, etc. Public authorities had to deal quickly with a lot of issues at once.

- **Homeless people are among the most vulnerable to the virus and must therefore be a priority group for vaccination.** Despite the unprecedented collective effort and the adoption of robust health measures in many homeless support services, homeless people remain particularly exposed to the virus because of their lack of individual housing – used as the primary lockdown measure in preventing spread of the virus – and over-crowded living

conditions. In a seroprevalence study by MSF in the Paris region among people using MSF services, 40% of homeless people surveyed had been infected by Covid-19 by the end of June 2020, compared with 12% of the general population in Ile-de-France.³⁵

- **It is possible to rapidly implement accommodation policies on a massive scale that respect fundamental human rights and that aim for 'nobody sleeping rough'.** This is what public authorities and charities have been able to test all across Europe since the first wave of the pandemic by freeing up a massive number of accommodation places and by using vacant buildings, hotels closed during lockdowns as well as tourist accommodation, etc. This shows that with political will and adequate financing,

the fundamental right to shelter is within the reach of European countries. In **England**, from March 2020, the 'Everyone In' plan enabled 33,000 homeless people to be temporarily sheltered in individual accommodation, hotels, and hostels between March and November 2020. According to a medical article, these measures are reported to have prevented 21,000 infections and 266 deaths.³⁶ 70% of those accommodated thanks to these measures (23,273 people) received support towards improving their living conditions, either through permanent housing solutions in private, social or supported housing while 30% (9,866 people) had to stay in hotels and other forms of temporary accommodation.³⁷ However, the government is struggling to maintain these efforts as time goes on and the number of people sleeping rough recently increased again.

- **It is possible to establish ambitious policies to prevent homelessness in Europe.** Courageous measures, which had been attacked and deemed unworkable pre-pandemic were put in place by public authorities in the majority of EU countries, e.g. temporary bans on rental evictions, extensions of the winter eviction suspension (where it exists), freezing or adjus-

ting rents and arrears, moratoria on mortgage payments and bans on cutting off gas/electricity supplies, creation of exceptional financial support and supplementary benefits to counter the effects of ballooning unemployment and poverty, etc. In France, while 2019 saw a sad historic high of 16,700 rental evictions with police cooperation – up 54% on 2006 – the moratorium on evictions limited this number to 3,500 in 2020 with an extension of the winter suspension until 1 June 2021.

- **Some European countries' statistical tools are not up to the task when it comes to housing exclusion.** In the European Union, official national statistics surveys on homelessness are mostly too outdated (2012 for France, 2014 for Italy, 2011 for the Czech Republic) or are questionable regarding methodologies and definitions used (Poland, United Kingdom) or are even non-existent (Germany, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Hungary, Belgium, and Greece). The pandemic became another barrier to collecting data on homelessness, with some local authorities deciding not to carry out their local or national surveys in 2020 given the circumstances (Belgium and Poland, for example).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduced in autumn 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights³⁸ aims to define a common framework for the social rights of European citizens. It was supplemented by the publication of an Action Plan by the European Commission on 4 March 2021. This 'new social regulation' sets three major political objectives for the period up to 2030, including reducing the number of people exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion by 15 million, as well as sub-goals and a concrete list of actions to help Member States implement the 20 principles. **In order to ensure that principle 19 on housing and assistance for the homeless is implemented, the European Commission announced the launch of a European Platform on Combating Homelessness in the third quarter of 2021.** A conference organised by the Portuguese EU Presidency for 21 June 2021, will launch the initiative and give ministers the opportunity to sign a political declaration on fighting homelessness.

FEANTSA and the Abbé Pierre Foundation warmly welcome this new initiative, which will enable greater cooperation at European Union level to help Member States effectively fight homelessness in all its forms. As long-standing organisations in the fight against housing exclusion and homelessness, we are committed to contributing to the Platform's work and to mobilising our networks and our expertise in order to help meet the objectives. With this in mind, we are putting forward the following recommendations:

Seize the current unprecedented European momentum with ambition and pragmatism to put an end to homelessness and effectively fight housing exclusion in all its forms

Integrate the aims of reducing and ending homelessness by 2030 into the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals

A commitment to ending homelessness by 2030 at the Social Summit in Porto in May 2021, would send a strong political signal, as a mark of credibility for the European Union. It could be integrated into the European Platform on Combating Homelessness via the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, as a sub-section of the objective to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 15 million by 2030. FEANTSA, the Abbé Pierre Foundation and the European Parliament have called for the adoption of a European objective like this on several occasions. It will formalise the commitment, in the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals, to 'leave nobody behind', including the poorest and the most vulnerable. The previous objective (2008-2020) to fight poverty was not up to the task of addressing the social consequences of the 2008 financial crisis and was thus not reached. This objective did not take into account all the realities related to extreme poverty that are seen in Europe, particularly those of homelessness and housing exclusion.

What do we understand by 'ending homelessness'?

- Nobody should be sleeping rough, living in a tent or in their car.
- Nobody should be staying in emergency accommodation when the emergency period is over.
- Nobody should be staying in transitional accommodation longer than necessary.
- When we can predict homelessness, we can prevent it: nobody should leave their home, or be forced to leave their home or institution (prison, hospital, care setting, etc.) without housing options in place.
- No young person should end up homeless as a result of transitioning to an independent life.

Eradicating homelessness is not a utopian dream, rather it requires a strategy that is adapted to local conditions. A European incentive, with an exact, fixed and ambitious deadline, in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Programme, would encourage Member States to commit to this path more rapidly.

Use European tools as leverage for transforming the system and changing the paradigm

The emergency management that has been dominant thus far in the European Union involves expenditure that is increasingly costly and short-termist – both in human and financial terms. Time-limited measures that are adopted when the weather turns cold or when there is a social crisis systematically end with the mass return of vulnerable people to the streets, creating an inhumane and ineffective cycle that endlessly repeats itself. European tools, whether subsidies and investment funds, legal tools or strategic/policy tools must support Member States in implementing the necessary structural investments for systemic transformation into integrated long-term strategies based on fundamental rights, including access to adequate, affordable, and long-term housing.

The 'NextGenerationEU' Recovery Plan and European Cohesion Funds must serve as leverage for systemic and structural transformation, and must not solely support individual projects which – although they bring real added value – are limited by being short-term and localised. The European Commission's Structural Reform Support Fund (Technical Support Instrument) must, for example, encourage Member States to finance larger-scale homelessness-reduction policies through housing. France's Inter-Ministerial Delegation for Accommodation and Access to Housing (DIHAL), for example, used this technical assistance to implement its national Housing First plan. Investment needs are myriad and include the transformation/creation of infrastructure for long-term housing of homeless people, improvement and adaptation of short-term accommodation facilities, training for support workers based on the needs and rights of people through continuous educational supports, and creation of jobs adapted to structural changes. The European Platform on Combating Homelessness, as a tool for strengthened cooperation, should ensure that efficient, integrated and long-term approaches based on fundamental rights are identified, shared, promoted, extended and implemented.

Furthermore, the political agreement issued on 28 January 2021 between the European Commission, Parliament and Council on the future of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) represents real progress in the use of European funds as leverage in the fight against housing exclusion and homelessness.³⁹ Each Member State will have to invest at least 25% of its ESF+ resources in social inclusion and will be able to launch strategic political reforms to eliminate homelessness. The fight against material deprivation (formerly FEAD) will be included under ESF+ and must represent at least 3% of the resources invested. For the first time, a part of

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the fund is earmarked for the fight against child poverty. In keeping with the adoption of the 'Child Guarantee', Member States whose rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion is higher than the EU average for 2017-2019 (23.4%), will have to spend at least 5% of their ESF+ resources on actions promoting equitable access for children to free healthcare, to decent housing and to adequate nutrition. The remaining Member States must also allocate an appropriate portion of funds to this end. Homeless children are further identified by the European Commission as one of the five priority groups in the Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee. Young people are also a priority within these funds: all Member States must allocate 'an appropriate amount' to implementing the Youth Guarantee; and for Member States where the number of NEETs (not in employment, education or training) is higher than the EU average for 2017-2019, 12.5% of resources must be allocated to measures supporting youth employment. The new Council Recommendation on the Youth Guarantee was adopted in October 2020. While it does not refer to homeless young people, it prioritises young people with multifaceted problems and cooperation with housing providers to enable and encourage their access to employment, education and training. Finally, resources must also be allocated to boosting capacity among social partners and civil society, including training, e.g. when a country receives a specific recommendation on this matter, it must spend 0.25% of the funds to this end. With such tools at their disposal, Member States are now responsible for planning investment to tackle the fight against homelessness and housing exclusion.

A massive and strategic investment in the fight against homelessness and housing exclusion would bring essential human, social and financial benefits, at a time when the pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis are hitting the

poorest households hard, and dangerously impoverishing a large section of Europe's population. In 2016, the total annual cost of housing exclusion in Europe was estimated at EUR 194 billion by Eurofound. The transformation of inadequate housing, or at least the improvement of substandard units to an acceptable level would cost about EUR 295 billion (in 2011 prices). If all improvements were made immediately, the cost to European economies would be repaid within 18 months through the estimated savings (health care gains and positive societal knock-on effects). In other words, for every three euros invested, two euros would be recovered within one year⁴⁰. According to a 2019 report by the World Health Organisation,⁴¹ increasing public spending on housing by 1% would reduce health inequalities by 2%.

Furthermore, adequate tools should be allocated to the European Platform on Combating Homelessness in order to ensure a marked impact on public policies. Three elements are vital to making the Platform a success: a specific budget (at least EUR 1 million per year), a solid governance structure, and an action plan.

Learning from the pandemic and the concrete gains achieved for homeless people

Looking to the end of the pandemic: no-one returning to the streets post-Covid

Across all of Europe, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to changes – some of which are radical – in the responses to homelessness. A very large majority of Member States have introduced ambitious – but temporary – measures in order to bolster social protection in these unprecedented times (moratoria on evictions, freezes on rent and mortgage payments, adjustments to working time and annual leave, etc.). Major action was taken by some public authorities to shelter people sleeping rough, through the creation of temporary and emergency accommodation places and using hotels, tourist accommodation, public buildings, etc.

As these actions were temporary, clear and concrete strategies must be adopted and implemented by Member States to prevent the human tragedy of returning people en masse to the streets at the end of the pandemic and when the measures come to an end. These strategies can take inspiration from the imagination, innovation and dedication shown by accommodation services, which continued operating in very difficult circumstances. They should also seize the opportunity to orient strategies towards systems based on access to permanent housing and Housing First, which have proven successful throughout the pandemic by enabling self-isolation and requiring a lot less planning to prevent the spread of the virus. Using social housing, vacant private stock, and rental intermediation, securing payment of rent and arrears through housing solidarity funds – all available tools to increase the supply of affordable housing must

be leveraged in these strategies so that no person is returned to the streets without an adequate rehousing solution post-pandemic.

Once and for all, put an end to emergency shelters that are only open at night and guarantee improvements to the living conditions and accommodation in the relevant services

Among the measures introduced during the pandemic to avoid the spread of the virus in often-overcrowded shared accommodation, a large number of night shelters were transformed into emergency accommodation, open 24/7, in order to ensure the safety and ability to self-isolate of occupants. In addition, these services integrated sanitation measures and social distancing, by reducing for example the number of beds, which in some instances made the accommodation conditions more conducive to well-being, good health and safeguarding people's privacy. Where they have been put in place, these measures were made possible by opening other emergency shelters in order to meet the full range of accommodation needs. The action of enabling homeless people to sleep in their own space, and not in shared dormitories, not only facilitates containment of the virus but also helps improve the living conditions and quality of accommodation in the relevant services.

There has therefore been concrete progress which the public authorities must duly note to avoid regression in terms of the quality of accommodation services. Night shelters that are not accessible 24 hours, as well as overcrowded emergency accommodation that are overwhelmed and cannot respect privacy, no longer have any place in Europe.

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Broaden the European fight against homelessness across sectors**Integrate the fight against homelessness into the policies and mandates of EU Institutions and agencies in a cross-cutting manner**

Housing is not an island. Homelessness is the result of failures in various public policies that do not protect their target populations from losing their homes. In order to be consistent with putting the fight against homelessness on the agenda at European level, the EU must take note of the impact of European competencies on the housing issue and act accordingly. European sectoral policies whether related to anti-discrimination, health, migration, free movement, disability, taxation, consumer protection, competition, energy, or macro-economic governance, must take into account homelessness reduction and the rights of homeless people. Similarly, the fight against homelessness must be integrated into the mandates of the European institutions, agencies and organisations that monitor policies and social rights, including the European Labour Authority, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Eurofound, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

Ensure that the innovations in the 'New European Bauhaus', part of the European Commission's Renovation Wave, include projects that enable access to dignified, adequate and affordable housing for homeless people

By designating the 'New European Bauhaus'⁴² a durable aesthetic that is open to all, the European Commission is committing the new Recovery Plan to unlocking a wave of renovation that will take vulnerable people into account. This initiative's ambition, calling for creativity and interdisciplinarity, is an unprecedented opportunity to implement projects designed for and with homeless people. This pioneering approach must be closely linked with approaches based on fundamental rights. Innovative projects in this field absolutely must enable access to dignified, adequate and affordable housing and can in no way promote temporary or precarious solutions or sideline the central issue of securing a permanent home.

Improve the statistical monitoring and evaluation of public policies by looking to the expertise already acquired in European cities

Build on the advances made in terms of statistical work and data collection on homelessness in the EU by organising a European Night of Solidarity

In the absence of comparative European statistics on homelessness, the European Union and Member States must commit to furthering the advances made in the area. The optional questions in Eurostat's 2018 ad-hoc module on housing difficulties and past experience of homelessness⁴³ should be made mandatory and extended to all Member States by integrating them into the EU-SILC annual survey on income and living conditions. A European Night of Solidarity could also be considered based on the model of the census surveys of homeless people, on a given night, in cities. By benefiting from the experience of European cities and capitals that have already carried out surveys like this, methodologies, practices and data could be shared enabling quantitative and qualitative monitoring on the issues related to homelessness in urban areas and this may encourage other cities and capitals to undertake their own surveys.

Encourage all cities, including small and medium-sized ones, in their efforts to fight homelessness

Homelessness and housing exclusion are not just the prerogative of large cities: there are people experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion in every city in Europe, regardless of size. Many innovative, ambitious and concrete initiatives are being taken at local level to enable homeless people to access their fundamental rights. Integrated strategies to fight homelessness have a much greater chance of succeeding and are far less complex to implement when they are adopted on a small scale. These types of strategies enable objectives to be clearly defined and have action plans that are precise and workable, for a reasonable and defined number of beneficiaries. These steps must be identified, highlighted and supported to create and leverage impact.

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These estimates are the result of a methodology established by FEANTSA in 2009 which only uses data collected at a specific time (over a given night or a given week), through different methods and in countries where the data are available. The data must thus be approached with caution and considered within the context of a lack of common definitions and methodologies along with the dire lack of a standardised statistical framework at European level. Regarding the need to work towards a standardised statistical framework on homelessness, see OECD (2020), 'Better data and policies to fight homelessness in the OECD', *Policy Brief on Affordable Housing*, OECD, Paris, available at: <http://oe.cd/homelessness-2020>.

2

This report was finalised on 15 March 2021. The most recent European data on poverty, released by Eurostat, is based on the pre-pandemic reality of 2019.

3

In this report, a 'homeless' person is understood in accordance with the European ETHOS typology, developed by FEANTSA. The ETHOS typology is available in several languages: <https://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2005/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion?bcParent=27>. There are many definitions, methodologies and sources used in this report. Official national data on homelessness exists in some Member States but not in others and for these we have opted for regional or local data.

4

Data extracted from the 2018 ad-hoc Eurostat module on housing difficulties and material deprivation, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/1012329/18706724/2018+EU-SILC+module+assessment.pdf>

5

Homeless people can be without shelter, in makeshift shelters, in shared accommodation, in hotels, in CADAs (reception centres for asylum seekers), or not-for-profit housing. People forced to live with other people make up a significant core (people aged 17 to 59 years living with people who are not directly related to them, who do not have the means to move out) as well as over-25s forced, after a period of independent living, to return to live with parents/grandparents due to a lack of independent housing, and people over 60 living with people who are not directly related to them. Included here are adult children over 25 years who are not studying but still have never moved out despite wanting to, due to lack of means. Foundation Abbé Pierre (2021), 'L'état du mal-logement en France 2021' [Housing exclusion in France 2021], available [in French] at: https://www.fondation-abbe-pierre.fr/documents/pdf/reml_2021_cahier_4_les_chiffres_du_mal-logement.pdf

6

'Acute homelessness'

7

Annual study by ARA [Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland]: https://www.ara.fi/fi-FI/Tietopankki/Tilastot_ja_selvitykset/Asunnottomuus/Asunnottomat_2020/59753

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The Portuguese Strategy for the Integration of Homeless Persons (ENIPSSA) on data collected on 31 December 2018 in 278 mainland Portuguese municipalities on homelessness: *Inquérito de caracterização das pessoas em situação de sem-abrigo* [Survey of homeless people] - 31 December 2018, available at: <http://www.enipssa.pt/documents/10180/11876/Inqu%C3%A9rito+de+caracteriza%C3%A7%C3%A3o+das+pessoas+em+situac%C3%A7%C3%A3o+de+sem-abrigo+-+31+dezembro+2018+%E2%80%93+S%C3%ADntese+de+resultados/c982bee2-475e-42e4-9be6-756c09a2ed9f>

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https://www.rtb.be/info/regions/detail_plus-de-5300-personnes-sans-abri-et-mal-logees-a-bruxelles-une-augmentation-de-30-par-rapport-a-2018?id=10721007

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Labour & Social Research Institute, 2019.

11

Nuit de la Solidarité [Solidarity night]: <https://www.paris.fr/pages/participez-a-la-nuit-de-la-solidarite-pour-evaluer-le-nombre-de-personnes-a-la-rue-5436>

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Plano Municipal para a pessoa em situação de sem-abrigo 2019-2021 - Lisboa. Available at: https://observatorio-lisboa.eapn.pt/ficheiro/Projeto_PMPSA_2019_2021.pdf

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European Social Policy Network (2019), 'National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion - Czech Republic', p. 19.

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Foundation Abbé Pierre (2021), *L'état du mal-logement en France 2021 - Rapport annuel #26'* [Housing Exclusion in France 2021 - Annual Report #26], p. 204, available [in French] at: https://www.fondation-abbe-pierre.fr/documents/pdf/reml2021_rapport_sur_letat_du_mallogement-web.pdf

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https://www.irsvv.si/upload2/SVP_konno_29.5.2020_pop.pdf

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<https://www.thejournal.ie/e118-homeless-accommodation-dublin-4635631-May2019/>

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European Social Policy Network (2019), 'National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion - Czech Republic', p. 10.

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Shelter (2019), 'Homelessness crisis costs councils over £1bn in just one year', Press release 14 November 2019, available at: https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/homelessness_crisis_costs_councils_over_1bn_in_just_one_year

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Opinion presented by Jean-Marie Morisset on the PLF (draft finance law) 2020, *Cohésion des territoires* [Territory cohesion], 21 November 2019, in Foundation Abbé Pierre (2021), *op. cit.*, p. 205.

20

The number of people in emergency accommodation in Ireland peaked in autumn 2019 (10,514 people in October 2019 of whom 3,826 were children) and has been trending downwards since without returning to 2014 levels. The data reflect the number of people in private emergency accommodation (including hotels, B&Bs and other residential facilities used in emergencies), in supported temporary accommodation (including hostels with professional support on-site) and in temporary emergency accommodation (without support or with minimal support). An unknown number of homeless families placed in their own home, i.e. independent housing, are not included in these figures.

21

See the relevant chapter in this report.

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See FEANTSA & Foundation Abbé Pierre (2020), Fifth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2020, available at: <https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2020/07/23/fifth-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe-2020>

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To find out more about the different policies and strategies in the fight against homelessness, see FEANTSA and Foundation Abbé Pierre (2018), Third Overview on Housing Exclusion in Europe 2018, available at: <https://www.feantsa.org/download/full-report-en1029873431323901915.pdf>

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[https://www.ara.fi/fi-FI/Tietopankki/Tilastot_ja_selvitykset/Asunnottomuus/Asunnottomat_2020\(59753\)](https://www.ara.fi/fi-FI/Tietopankki/Tilastot_ja_selvitykset/Asunnottomuus/Asunnottomat_2020(59753))

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31

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<https://www.france24.com/fr/20201010-covid-19-en-%C3%A9le-de-france-un-pr%C3%A9caire-sur-deux-touch%C3%A9-par-le-virus>

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THE OTHER EUROPE
FACTS AND DATA ABOUT
HOMELESSNESS IN THE EU

4% of Europeans



have been homeless at least once in their lifetime



amongst them
1/4 lived on the street,
in emergency/temporary accommodation
or in a place not suitable for housing



3/4 lived with relatives

Main reason for housing difficulties:



family and/or relationship problems



unemployment, insufficient resources or financial problems



end of a rental contract or uninhabitable housing

BEING HOMELESS
IN EU CITIES

IN DUBLIN

Between 2014 and 2018,
child homelessness
rose by



IN LISBON

The number of homeless
people in 2018 was

2,328

1,286

roofless people were
counted on the night of
May 15 2019, an increase of
40% since 2011



HOMELESS CAPITALS

1,296

families with 2,816 children were counted as being homeless in one week in 2018



173%

increase since 2013

IN BARCELONA

IN PARIS

3,601

people were counted sleeping rough on the night of January 30 2020

24,900

people were urgently accommodated the same night as part of the Cold Plan



5,313

people were counted homeless on one night in November 2020 (+28% since 2018)

IN BRUSSELS

933

of which were children (+51% since 2018)

2,100

homeless people were counted over one week in 2019.

IN PRAGUE





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