The background of the cover is a photograph of a grand, historic library or archive. The room features high wooden ceilings, large wooden pillars, and floor-to-ceiling bookshelves filled with numerous old, leather-bound books. In the foreground, three flags are displayed on tall, silver flagpoles that converge at a circular base on the floor. From left to right, the flags are the European Union flag (blue with yellow stars), the flag of Portugal (green and red with a white shield in the center), and the flag of the Portuguese Republic (white with a black and yellow coat of arms). A semi-transparent teal banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the title and dates in white text.

LISBON, PORTUGAL

***26-27 SEPTEMBER 2024
STUDY VISIT REPORT***



**Co-funded by
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WHAT IS EPOCH PRACTICE?

EPOCH Practice is a project led by FEANTSA and co-funded by the European Union to promote knowledge and capacity building in support of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness.

Over the course of two years, we are developing a series of activities aimed at National policy makers and all stakeholders involved in the fight against homelessness in Europe:

- A series of **12 webinars**
- **Inspiring Practices briefs**
- **Training sessions**
- **A Community of Practice** with Member States' representatives
- And also **3 study visits**, the first of which took place in September in Lisbon

This programme aligns with the European Union's ambition to significantly reduce homelessness by 2030.

OUR 1ST STUDY VISIT: LISBON

The study visit is one of the core activities of the EPOCH Practice program, which is being delivered throughout 2024-2025. The first of three visits took place in Lisbon, Portugal, in collaboration with the Lisbon Municipality and the Portuguese Institute for Social Security.

This initiative is primarily designed for EPOCH members, focusing on Member State delegates. However, it also welcomes other homelessness stakeholders, encouraging participants to disseminate the knowledge gained during the sessions within their respective networks. These study visits aim to create a platform for mutual learning and dialogue, highlighting both the successes and challenges faced in local and national contexts.

The visit occurred on the 26th and 27th of September 2024, at various venues across Lisbon.



FROM DECLARATION TO ACTION: LISBON AT THE FOREFRONT OF EUROPE'S COMMITMENT TO COMBAT HOMELESSNESS

The Lisbon Declaration, signed in 2021, is a key document outlining a joint European commitment to address homelessness across Europe.

It marks the first concrete step towards coordinated action against homelessness at the European level, emphasising the need for collaboration among Member States, EU Institutions, and stakeholders to develop sustainable solutions that prioritise human rights, dignity, and equitable access to housing.

This declaration led to the establishment of **EPOCH, the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness**, of which our EPOCH Practice project is an integral part.

Our inaugural study visit to Lisbon not only provided invaluable insights into the practical implementation of these principles but also serves as a nod to the spirit of the Lisbon Declaration.

ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS: LISBON MAYOR MOEDAS CALLS FOR EUROPEAN COOPERATION

The event began at Lisbon City Hall with a welcome from **Mayor Carlos Moedas**, joined by:

- **Sofia Athayde**, the City Councilor for Human and Social Rights, Health, Education, Youth, and the Municipal Plan for People Experiencing Homelessness,
- **Helga Correia**, Advisor for Social Action and Inclusion to the Secretary of State Clara Marques Mendes.



Mayor Moedas highlighted the urgent need to tackle homelessness and the housing crisis in Lisbon. He emphasized the importance of European cooperation to address these challenges through local and international collaboration.

LISBON'S 2024-2030 MUNICIPAL PLAN: A COLLABORATIVE STRATEGY TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS



Paulo Santos

Coordinator of the Task Force for the Implementation of the Lisbon Municipal Plan for People Experiencing Homelessness.

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[Website](#)

Lisbon Municipal Plan for 2024-2030



Reduce homelessness in Lisbon through decisive public measures and tailored responses.



€69,644,300
over six years.



A key aspect of the new plan is its participatory development process, which included:

- 9 stages
- 21 entities involved
- 130 participants and partners
- 195 people experiencing homelessness
- 338 individuals without stable housing

A total of **722 proposals** were gathered.



Strategic axes

- Prevention
- Street-level intervention
- Housing
- Social inclusion
- Knowledge and communication

Paulo Santos introduced the Lisbon Municipal Plan for 2024-2030.

The plan is structured around 4 key areas:

- **Official data** from Npisa (the planning and intervention center),
- **An evaluation** of the previous plan,
- **The construction process** for the new plan,
- The plan's **specific interventions and responses**.

[Full Plan Here](#)



[Full Presentation Here](#)



PORTUGAL'S NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF HOMELESS PEOPLE: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH



Henrique Joaquim

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[Website](#)



Strategy currently under review following a change of government

Portugal's National Strategy for 2025-2050

Henrique Joaquim presented the **National Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Homeless People**.

Based on an **inclusive definition of homelessness**, which includes:

- Individuals living in public spaces, emergency shelters, precarious locations, or temporary accommodation.
- The definition follows the **ETHOS Light** framework.

Key principles of the Strategy

- 1 Human rights and dignity
- 2 Equality and non-discrimination
- 3 Person-centered approach

Despite the successes of the governance and management models, **challenges remain**:

- Implement an Integrated Governance Model
- Establish a Digital Information System (currently in progress)
- Launch a Cross-Ministerial Project:
 - National Emergency Housing Program (Recovery & Resilience Facility – €176M for 2,400 places)
- Scale Up Housing Solutions



The strategy focuses on

Holistic, integrated interventions

Case management and individualised support plans

Flexibility and innovation in solutions

Full Presentation Here



Full translated Strategy



DAY ONE: LUNCH IN A SOCIAL RESTAURANT

The site visits commenced at lunchtime at the **Salvation Army's Centro de Alojamento & Reinserção**.

This gathering coincided with their weekly event, "**Communitarian Lunch - Pizz'And Love**," which brings together local residents and shelter users for a communal meal.

The initiative's main goals are:

Community Integration

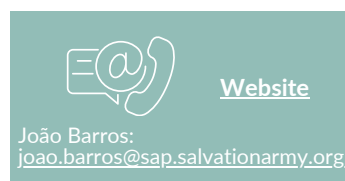
The lunch aimed to strengthen ties between the shelter and the surrounding community, fostering a sense of belonging.

User Participation

Meals were prepared and served by the shelter's residents, promoting active participation.

Open Discussions

Attendees engaged in meaningful conversations about integrating shelters within local communities.



DAY ONE - ONE-STOP-SHOP SHELTER

In the afternoon, the group split into two to visit the One-Stop-Shop Shelter, known as **CAEM (Municipal Emergency Center)**

This center opened on September 15, 2021. CAEM has a capacity to accommodate **128 homeless adults** for limited periods and serves as a hub for various support services.



Overview of CAEM:

- **Collaborative Effort:** Managed by VITAE and Associação Ares do Pinhal, in partnership with the Lisbon City Council.
- **Comprehensive Services:** Provides social and health support, vocational training, employment assistance, and legal protection.
- **Inclusive Environment:** Welcomes people with pets and couples, offering three drug consumption rooms (DCRs): one for alcohol, one for smoked drugs, and one for injections.

Discussion Points:

- **Personalised Support:** Emphasis on treating each person as an individual to promote community integration.
- **International Learning:** The CAEM team had previously visited countries with similar models to gather insights and share experiences and now they host trainings and visits to continue this international collaboration.

DAY ONE - THE USE OF THE RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE EU FUND

After the visit to CAEM, participants attended two additional presentations. The first focused on utilising the **Recovery and Resilience EU Fund** to improve shelter quality.

VITAE's Restructuring Plan for the Centro de Acolhimento do Beato (CAB):

VITAE, in collaboration with IADE and the Lisbon City Council, presented their renovation plan for CAB, a homeless accommodation center, funded through the Recovery and Resilience Fund by the Institute of Social Security and the Institute of Housing and Urban Rehabilitation (IHRU).

- **Current capacity:** 271 individuals across different services:
 - Temporary accommodation
 - Male and female integration communities
 - Emergency accommodation
- **Team:** Multidisciplinary, working under an integrated intervention model.
- **Services provided:**
 - Social and medical support
 - Employment assistance
 - Legal and migration aid
 - Harm reduction programs
 - Basic needs (meals, hygiene)



However, CAB's physical infrastructure has not kept pace with modern intervention methods. The restructuring introduces trauma-informed design to enhance the living environment, aiming to move away from mass housing models to smaller, individualised units.

Goals of the Restructuring:

- **Promote** comfort, safety, and a sense of belonging.
- **Align** the physical environment with the social intervention model.
- **Incorporate** elements such as harmony and beauty to help residents move away from past traumas.

CASA's Social Emergency Accommodation Centre:

Nuno Jardim from CASA discussed their centre's operations, which provide temporary shelter for up to 72 hours for homeless individuals and families. Funded under the "National Urgent and Temporary Housing Programme" through the Recovery and Resilience Fund, CASA faces several challenges in execution:

Capacity: Supports families, individuals with reduced mobility, couples, and their pets.

Funding: €138.1 million for acquisition and renovation through RE-Co2-io2 investment, spanning 20 years.

Challenges:

- Regulatory and legislative hurdles
- Heavy reliance on state funding
- Limited network capacity



Presentation slides here



DAY ONE - ADDRESSING WOMEN'S HOMELESSNESS

MANAS Presentation: Addressing Women's Homelessness

Founded during the COVID-19 pandemic, MANAS is a peer-led project for women and non-binary individuals who have survived violence. It focuses on mutual support, providing safer spaces for vulnerable women, particularly those who use drugs or are involved in sex work.

- **Core Values:** Intersectional, bottom-up approach to community care.
- **Harm Reduction:** Gender-responsive strategies to combat violence, with improved access to healthcare and services, including sexual and reproductive health.
- **Employment:** MANAS offers low-threshold employment, compensating participants for training and workshop involvement.

Achievements:

Community Building: A growing community of women, trans women, sex workers, homeless individuals, and people living with HIV.

Activism: Artistic and holistic practices used to foster empowerment and challenge societal structures.

Advocacy: Initiatives contributing to public policy innovation and the creation of a permanent self-managed feminist library aimed at providing stable employment for its members.

MANAS has created a visible social movement among women who use drugs, fostering increased visibility and employability for its participants.



DAY TWO - PANELS AND HARM REDUCTION SERVICE

On the second day, participants had the opportunity to tailor their experience, choosing between visits to harm reduction services and panel discussions on housing solutions.

Housing Led Panel

Focused on services for LGBTQAI+ young people.

Opus Diversidade: LGBTQI+ Housing Support

- **Shared Apartment Programme:**

Provides stable housing for vulnerable LGBTQI+ individuals since April 2022, funded by the Portuguese Institute of Social Security.

- **CATE Temporary Shelter:**

Offers 72-hour emergency accommodation for recently homeless individuals, prioritising those affected by violence, loss of autonomy, migrants, sex workers, and transgender people transitioning.

Opus Diversidade [Website](#)

Contact: geral@opusdiversidades.org

Housing First Panel

Explored successful implementations of this approach in Portugal.

CRESCER – É UMA CASA Project: Launched in 2013, it targets chronically homeless individuals, expanding from Mouraria to the entire city due to its success. [Full presentation here!](#)

AEIPS: This initiative focuses on those experiencing mental health struggles, promoting housing stability and community integration.

Both projects are co-funded by local and national bodies and face challenges related to the private rental market.

Harm Reduction Service - GAT IN Mouraria

The GAT IN Mouraria center is a community-based facility offering a wide range of services for people who use drugs (PUD), particularly aimed at reducing risks and harm.

Services provided include:

- **Healthcare:** STI testing, nursing care, medical consultations, and treatment support.
- **Peer Support:** Peer-to-peer HIV testing, counseling, and social support.
- **Practical Assistance:** Access to social benefits, legal help, and employment or housing services.
- **Essential Items:** Distribution of food, hygiene products, internet access, and drug-use materials (smoking and injection supplies).

Key points discussed:

- The importance of **hiring of a peer worker** to address the clients' needs.
- **Introducing gender-specific hours** for women and non-binary clients to improve support and balance.



[Website](#)

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CONCLUSION

Our first large-scale EPOCH Practice event, the Lisbon study visit was a dynamic, fast-paced learning experience. Over two days, **47** participants had the opportunity to engage with presentations on ambitious local and national strategies to combat homelessness. This set the stage for exploring the city's radically diverse homelessness services, as participants travelled across the city to encounter and learn from a range of approaches. Some of the most innovative services we visited showcased the unique harm reduction and safe consumption practices in Lisbon.

Unimaginable in some European countries, the decriminalisation of drugs in Portugal lays the ground-work for the provision of judgement-free spaces where people experiencing homelessness can safely consume drugs, with due respect for their autonomy and dignity.

Such pioneering services go to the heart of the mission of EPOCH Practice – to allow policymakers and practitioners to encounter international practices that may inspire or challenge them. In contrast, we also visited shelters where drugs and alcohol are prohibited, as is still commonplace in many homelessness services across the EU. Placing these services side-by-side allowed participants to draw comparisons and contrasts, to measure up successes and challenges, and to engage in dialogue about the principles of harm reduction.

We owe gratitude to the Lisbon Municipality, the Portuguese Institute of Social Security, the many homelessness services we visited, and the service users who allowed us into their spaces, for opening up their city to us with warmth and honesty, to allow for this transnational exchange.



Silvia BUSI
EPOCH Practice officer
FEANTSA

THANK YOU LISBON!

Lisbon was the first city that accepted the challenge of hosting an EPOCH Practice study visit. The collaboration between the Lisbon Municipality and the Portuguese Institute of Social Security allowed us to explore different aspects of homelessness within the city's reality and demonstrated how fundamental a multi-level, multi-disciplinary intervention is for successfully tackling homelessness.

WE HEAR FROM YOU!

I participated in the Lisbon Study Visit with the aim of getting to know another country's policies and practices on homelessness. The study visit included presentations of policies at a national and a municipal level, as well as site visits. What I enjoyed the most the first day was Magda Ferreira's presentation (MANAS & SOMOS – Women's Homelessness). This wonderful lady showed us how peer work can promote harm reduction. Magda helps women who use drugs improve their lives within their situation. She does not act as a missionary and she is not judgmental.

The next day there was a visit in the area of Mouraria (Harm Reduction and Peer Work - GAT and CRESCER) where we were shown how people experiencing homelessness or poverty can find care and help without having to follow strict rules or meet specific pre-conditions. This session again had to do with harm reduction, peer work and acceptance, and aligns with my way of understanding the provision of help in society.

When experience is shared among stakeholders, one can evaluate his/her own work even better. I turned back to my country with new ideas for my job, especially as regards harm reduction. Working with the homeless or people that are socially excluded is a very fulfilling job but it can also be very demanding.

Arranging such events brings us, stakeholders, closer together towards our common aim: to help society be a more inclusive and happier place to live.



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-
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