



Eurodiaconia  *Connecting faith
and social justice
through action*

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION IN EUROPE

STATE OF PLAY AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

2023



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Eurodiaconia

2023

In recent years, the importance of putting a stronger focus on policies that prevent homelessness has become evident, to move away from simply managing homelessness and achieving the goal of eradicating it.

Homelessness prevention has been an increasing preoccupation for Eurodiaconia members. Building on their feedback and work, in this report, we take stock of homelessness prevention policies in ten selected countries, and we showcase the work our members are doing to help prevent homelessness.

Finally, we put forward some recommendations to strengthen homelessness prevention at both the national and the EU level.

TABLE OF CONTENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our Mission and vision..... Error! Bookmark not defined.

Our Mission **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Our Vision **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Introduction **4**

What is homelessness prevention? 5

Why this report? 6

Methodology and content of the report..... 8

Country snapshots **9**

Austria 9

Diakonie Österreich..... 9

Recommendations..... 10

Czech Republic 11

Slezská Diakonie 12

Diakonie ECCB..... 12

Recommendations..... 13

Denmark 14

Kirkens Korshaer..... 15

Recommendations..... 15

Germany 16

Diakonie Deutschland 17

Diakonie Michaelshoven..... 17

Recommendations..... 18

Latvia 19

Diakonija Latvija 20

Recommendations..... 20

Serbia..... 21

Philanthropy (Čovekoljublje) 22

Recommendations.....	22
Spain.....	23
Diaconia España.....	23
Nueva Vida.....	24
Recommendations.....	24
Sweden.....	26
Swedish City Missions (Sveriges Stadsmissioner)	27
Hela Människan	27
Recommendations.....	27
Portugal.....	29
Eunoia.....	29
Recommendations.....	30
Norway	31
Oslo Church City Mission (Kirkens Bymisjon Oslo)	31
Recommendations.....	32
Conclusions	34
EU-level recommendations	36

WHO WE ARE

Eurodiaconia is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice.

OUR ORGANISATIONAL VALUES

- Love
- Courage
- Dignity
- Hope
- Trust

OUR MISSION AND VISION

Inspired by our Christian faith, our vision is of a Europe where social injustice is eradicated and each person is valued, included and empowered to realize their fullest potential, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalized.

Eurodiaconia is a network of churches and Christian organisations that provide social and health care services and advocate for social justice. Together we work for just and transformative social change across Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

Homelessness is the most extreme form of deprivation and social exclusion in Europe, heavily impacting people's access to essential services and the enjoyment of their human rights. It is interlinked with a variety of social, economic and institutional factors, such as the shortage of adequate affordable housing, but also other factors such as health, family-related situations, employment, social protection, and poverty, making it a multi-faceted complex issue.

While no official EU figures exist, over the last decade the number of people experiencing homelessness has been on the rise across Europe. According to the 2022 estimates of the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)¹ and Fondation Abbé Pierre², there were 896,340 individuals sleeping rough or in emergency accommodation in Europe. This represents an increase of 28% in three years (In 2020 the estimate was 700,000).

Homelessness causes tremendous personal harm for people who experience it and broader costs for society as a whole. Research has shown that there are several monetary costs associated with homelessness, such as additional health and social services costs, loss of economic productivity among people in homelessness who can't access employment, or economic effects associated with visible rough sleeping in urban space. Conversely, effective homelessness preventative efforts can reduce public expenditure, by, for instance reducing the high cost of the use of non-homelessness services by homeless people (e.g., repeated use of emergency healthcare)³. Therefore, prevention should be at the center of every homelessness strategy to avoid its detrimental human, societal and financial impacts.

But to adequately prevent homelessness, it is first essential to determine what we understand by the term and experience. While there is no EU level definition, the ETHOS Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion developed by FEANTSA⁴, is widely known as a comprehensive way of understanding homelessness. It identifies four main categories of living situation: Rooflessness (without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough), Houselessness (with a place to sleep but temporary in institutions or shelter), Insecure Housing (threatened with severe exclusion due to insecure tenancies, eviction, domestic violence) and Inadequate Housing (caravans on illegal campsites, unfit housing, extreme overcrowding), further divided into 13 operational categories. It is key that policymakers across Europe adopt such a broad understanding of homelessness to be able to design comprehensive policies that adequately prevent the phenomenon instead of only addressing it when it becomes apparent.

Secondly, it implies understanding its complex root causes. For many years we have observed a

¹ FEANTSA <https://www.feantsa.org/en>

² Fondation Abbé Pierre <https://www.fondation-abbe-pierre.fr/>

³ FEANTSA (2013) "The Costs of Homelessness in Europe" https://www.feantsaresearch.org/download/feantsa-studies_03_web8038170339305812402.pdf

⁴ FEANTSA (2005) "European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion" <https://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2005/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion>

housing crisis in Europe (and beyond). Soaring property and rental prices due to housing financialization, renovations⁵ and unregulated short-term rentals, together with cuts in public investment in public and/or social housing, housing market discrimination, the proliferation of precarious jobs, and the recent record-high inflation and cost-of-living crisis have made housing unaffordable and unavailable for many, particularly for vulnerable groups. Adding to this, inadequate social protection and social support systems, lack of affordable and accessible mental health and health services, and lack of services coordination add to the structural challenges of homelessness and its prevention.

In summary, the issue of homelessness and its prevention is closely interlinked with personal circumstances but also with structural issues such as shortage of adequate affordable housing and the lack of strong social safety nets.

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION?

Becoming homeless is not the beginning of social exclusion but often the final consequence of a variety of circumstances that are usually identifiable. Therefore, a preventative approach to homelessness should focus on preventing or tackling these circumstances and early detecting the existence of cumulative homelessness risks for a person. At the same time, it should address the structural causes of homelessness, and particularly the lack of access to affordable and adequate housing. Thus, homelessness prevention involves a wide range of strategies designed to prevent individuals and families from experiencing homelessness in the first place.

According to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, prevention is defined as *"policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. It also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and support to stabilize their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of the recurrence of homelessness"*⁶. They add that *"homelessness prevention must not only include interventions targeted at individuals, but broader structural reforms directed at addressing the drivers of homelessness."*⁷

More precisely, according to Fitzpatrick, Mackie and Wood (2019, 2021)⁸, O'Sullivan (2022)⁹, homelessness prevention can be divided in five categories:

- ✓ **Universal prevention:** is the most general category and refers to measures that address the structural causes of homelessness and mitigate the broader risk of homelessness across the population. It involves ensuring equitable access to adequate and affordable

⁵ This happens when older, more affordable rental units are renovated and then re-rented at much higher rates, reducing the overall stock of affordable housing in a city.

⁶ Homeless Hub (2017) "Looking Forward: Shifting Towards Homelessness Prevention" <https://homelesshub.ca/blog/looking-forward-shifting-towards-homelessness-prevention>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P., & Wood, J. (2019). "Homelessness prevention in the UK: Policy briefing". UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence.

⁹ O'Sullivan, E. (2022) "Key Elements in Homelessness Strategies to End Homelessness by 2030: A Discussion Paper of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness"

housing, as well as establishing effective, adequate and accessible social welfare support systems.

- ✓ **Upstream prevention:** It entails identifying and assisting groups at risk of homelessness before their situation deepens; essentially, "*acting early*". This category includes measures to support individuals departing from institutions such as correctional centers or treatment and healthcare centers that have no housing solution available at the moment of their exit.
- ✓ **Crisis prevention:** this type of prevention refers to measures tailored for households at risk of homelessness in the immediate future, for instance, those experiencing family conflicts, domestic abuse or landlord conflicts and eviction threats.
- ✓ **Emergency prevention:** this is characterized by swift actions whereby temporary accommodation is urgently secured to prevent immediate homelessness. It is particularly instrumental when the risk of homelessness is imminent.
- ✓ **Repeat prevention:** these are measures aiming to provide ongoing, repeated and sustainable support and stability to prevent homelessness after individuals have received housing solutions.

According to O'Sullivan (2022), homelessness strategies should progressively move away from emergency prevention to effectively eradicate homelessness. He emphasizes that ineffective universal prevention, such as lack of affordable housing, adequate social protection and decent employment constitute the biggest barrier to effective upstream and crisis prevention efforts.

WHY THIS REPORT?

In the last years there has been an increased political impetus at the national and European level to further develop multi-stakeholders' coordination, best-practices sharing, and national strategies to prevent and eradicate homelessness.

In 2021 all Members States signed the Lisbon Declaration¹⁰, including a commitment to promote the prevention of homelessness, access to permanent housing and the provision of enabling support services. The Lisbon Declaration also launched the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness¹¹ (the Platform). The Platform, of which Eurodiaconia takes part, brings together governments, organisations and institutions, aiming to provide better outlook on the state of people experiencing homelessness, to exchange best practices, improve data collection and access to finance, and to foster the development of strategies to effectively tackle homelessness.

Equally, interventions such as the development of "Housing First" programmes, have been increasingly implemented by local governments and third sector organisations to effectively prevent and eradicate homelessness. This is also the case of locally targeted interventions for the development of specific programs based on providing access to adequate affordable housing. For example, as it is shown in this report, organisations like Eurodiaconia members are leading the

¹⁰ Lisbon Declaration (2021) on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3044

¹¹ The European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (2021)
<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1550&langId=en>

path with examples of low-rent social housing projects and homelessness prevention after institutional releases.

However, despite these recent developments, according to Baptista and Marlier (2019) “homelessness services in Europe are not sufficiently preventative in focus”, as the scale of homelessness prevention services across Europe is still limited¹². During the Platform meetings, the importance of putting a stronger focus on policies that prevent homelessness has become evident, to move away from simply managing homelessness and achieving the goal of eradicating it by 2030. In fact, in October 2022, the second mutual learning event of the Platform, gathering national government representatives, was dedicated to homelessness prevention¹³.

Equally, homelessness prevention has been an increasing preoccupation for Eurodiaconia members. The members of the Eurodiaconia's Homelessness Experts Group, created last year, decided to have homelessness prevention as their main working topic for this year. This report is the outcome of their input and work. It focuses on ten European countries and aims to look at the homelessness prevention policy framework, present the work of Eurodiaconia members and, building on their experience, propose some policy recommendations.



A preventative approach to homelessness should focus on preventing or tackling its causes and early detecting the existence of cumulative homelessness risks for a person. At the same time, it should address the structural causes of homelessness, and particularly the lack of access to affordable and adequate housing.

¹² European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Baptista, I., Marlier, E., Fighting homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe – A study of national policies, Publications Office, 2019, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/624509>

¹³ Mutual Learning Event: Design of National Strategies to Fight Homelessness and Housing Exclusion “Preventive measures to combat homelessness in the EU” 20 & 21 October 2022, Brussels <https://event2.homeless-platform-events.eu/agenda/>.

METHODOLOGY AND CONTENT OF THE REPORT

The following report draws on a methodology combining national and European-level desk research, together with insights gathered from Eurodiaconia members through the Eurodiaconia Homelessness Experts' Group and past network meetings.

Building on our members' feedback and work, in this report, we attempt to take stock of homelessness prevention policies in ten selected countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Sweden and Norway). We showcase the work some of our members are doing to help prevent homelessness in their respective countries, and finally, we put forward some recommendations to strengthen homelessness prevention at both the national and the EU level.

COUNTRY SNAPSHOTS

AUSTRIA

In Austria, around 20,000 people were registered as living in homelessness in 2021, with most of them living in Vienna. A large proportion of those surveyed cited relationship or family problems as the main reason for their homelessness.

The housing landscape in Austria is characterised by having a high proportion of tenants. 24% of households live in social housing; either municipal housing (7%) or limited-profit housing (17%). In Vienna and other urban areas, these figures are even higher. The availability of affordable social housing is seen as a first step of their homelessness prevention strategy.

Another important instrument in Austria's homelessness prevention policy is a specific provision in the Rental Act, which stipulates that the courts must inform the relevant municipality as soon as a landlord initiates an eviction proceeding against a tenant. The municipality then has the possibility to step in to support the tenant and prevent the eviction. In addition to this, the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs has funded a federal eviction prevention programme called Wohnschirm. The programme is implemented with the help of social workers who provide households either a one-time payment covering their rent arrears to help them stay in their home, or, if they cannot stay, a fixed amount to help with moving costs.

The limited-profit housing sector also contributes to preventing homelessness both through specific measures and through its very structure. These are run by limited-profit housing associations, that act as both developers and managers of housing. Tenants pay cost-based rents that are on average 25% below market rates. To prevent evictions, they have established early-warning systems where tenants are contacted very soon after their first missed payments. They are also active in Housing First programmes all over Austria.

However, the criteria for accessing social housing and support programmes are quite rigorous in terms of citizenship or equivalent status and proving connection to the area. For example, receiving a unit in municipal housing requires proof that the individual has been resident at the same address in Vienna for a minimum of two years. In this context, some people, such as migrants and EU mobile citizens, fall through the cracks of the system and can become homeless.

DIAKONIE ÖSTERREICH

Diakonie Österreich is a member of the Austrian Poverty Conference and the National Association for the Homeless. Through their 30 member organisations and 620 locations, they provide a wide range of services for people at risk of homelessness across the country. For instance, the Youth Emergency Shelter (JUNO) in the city of Villach of the Diakonie de La Tour offers flexible assistance and overnight accommodation for adolescents and young adults between 12 and 21 years in difficult situations. In addition, they provide counselling services free of charge: young people are

advised on topics such as housing, education, school/career, addiction, violence, family, friendship, health, sexuality, etc.

Moreover, the municipal diaconal organisations in Vienna and Linz have counselling centres for people at risk of homelessness. Here, they provide financial aid to people that struggle with payment arrears. Their housing counselling centre WIWA offers specific support to refugees, who find it particularly difficult to find an affordable apartment on the housing market. In the housing counselling service, they answer their questions about tenancy law and, together with volunteers, support them in their search for accommodation. Likewise, they are running a pilot project in Vienna called WOBAB focused on housing counselling and eviction prevention for vulnerable groups. The innovative character of the project WOBAB lies in its ability to address the multiple discrimination faced by the target groups and to find solutions for them. In particular, they aim to counteract racism and prejudice in the housing market and demand equal opportunities and rights for people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. More investment in public and/or social housing is needed, as there is still a lot of catching up to do in many parts of Austria. Land zoning must also help to make cheap land available for social and non-profit housing.
2. Diakonie Austria proposes the establishment of a housing investment bank, which could collect funds from the European Investment Bank and pass them on to housing developers in the form of cheap loans. According to their estimates, at least 25,000 affordable, permanent and adequate new housing units need to be added to the existing stock to help eradicate homelessness in Austria.
3. An improved housing subsidy is needed. The current housing and heating cost subsidy covers Covid and inflation-related rent arrears until September 2026, but only if the housing conditions remain stable. Where housing costs and income no longer match the criteria due to inflation, people will no longer be covered.
4. The electricity price brake implemented last year could be further developed into a basic energy guarantee, where everyone is guaranteed a certain supply of energy to cover basic needs.
5. Rent controls should be introduced in the private rental sector, where many low-income people live.

CZECH REPUBLIC

In 2022, almost 18,000 people were experiencing homelessness in the Czech Republic (12,000 living in hostels or on the street, almost 6,000 staying in temporary accommodation). In the spring 2022, 1,400 children under the age of 15 were growing up in hostels. Moreover, approximately 246,000 people are living in inadequate or insecure housing.

The "National Plan on Prevention and Fight against Homelessness until 2020"¹⁴ was adopted in 2013, developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in collaboration with an expert group on tackling homelessness. This plan helped identify challenges and set up specific goals. Unfortunately, the government decided not to renew the plan after 2020. However, some municipalities, such as Prague, have implemented their own strategies to prevent and address homelessness, moving towards housing-led and Housing First policies, and changing the allocation rules for social housing.

Social housing represents only 1% of the total housing stock, due to large-scale privatisation in the 1990s. Furthermore, increasing indebtedness and strict legislation on rent arrears have led to higher eviction rates in the last years. Some social benefits exist to support people at risk of homelessness but there is very low uptake of this aid. Moreover, there is a lack of adequate legislation to address housing shortages, as this has been largely a private issue with little involvement of the state or municipalities. Housing support varies widely depending on municipality. This results in fragmented, highly varied practice across the country.

Another issue is the existence of poverty traders: mainly private entrepreneurs who buy cheap apartments in socially excluded areas. Then they bring in people in need of housing who do not have the necessary knowledge and are unable to properly study the conditions of the rental contracts. It is often the case that the contracts have abusive clauses, such as large deposits that are not refundable at the end of the rental contract. It is also common that they demand large amounts of money for heat and water utilities from tenants. This creates a vicious circle of arrears, indebtedness and risk of eviction.

However, in the last years there has been a push for Housing First projects, funded by the European Social Fund. Also, some preventative measures already exist at the local level, such as conflict mediation support, debt counselling, and housing advice services.

Furthermore, a recently proposed Act on Housing Support, could help solve the housing crisis and prevent homelessness. It could propose to establish a wide network of accessible contact points in municipalities for housing emergency support providing people who find themselves in housing need with expert advice and help to prevent evictions. Thanks to a well-thought-out system, people at risk of losing their housing would be able to receive a special allowance to pay their arrears and would receive holistic support through a personalized plan. This Act could also support

¹⁴ "Concept of preventing and solving the problem of homelessness in the Czech Republic until 2020" ("Koncepte prevence a řešení problematiky bezdomovectví v ČR do roku 2020") <https://www.mpsv.cz/koncepce-prevence-a-reseni-problematiky-bezdomovectvi-v-cr-do-roku-2020>

the construction and renovation of apartments.

Moreover, a strong Act could support households at particular risk of losing their home or those who already find themselves in housing need, such as seniors, single mothers, persons with disabilities or children growing up in inadequate housing conditions. It could also help stop the business of poverty traders, who parasitize on the current set-up of social support, create ghettos and excluded localities and thus generally worsen the standard of living in the Czech Republic. The proposed Act should be brought into force on 1 January 2025, but it's yet to be seen what exactly it will entail.

SLEZSKÁ DIAKONIE

Slezská Diakonie provides a variety of services aimed at assisting individuals and families experiencing homelessness, including more than 70 low-threshold day and night centers, shelters for mothers with children, youth accommodation, counseling services and social rehabilitation centers. Through the support of the European Social Fund, since 2022 they are implementing Housing First programs in three cities, offering permanent housing and holistic, targeted support to beneficiaries. This initiative focuses on individuals in need of intensive support, who face challenges such as poor health, substance addiction, mental illnesses and other health-related issues. The aim is to help them achieve independence, life satisfaction, integration and good health. Furthermore, they offer multiple forms of sustained and holistic support in establishing and maintaining good relations with neighbors, support in financial planning and household management, defending the clients' interests before the authorities and landlords.

Under the same project, they also run specialized prevention and early intervention activities to minimize the risks and threats of evictions. Early intervention, including support with rent payments, financial and debt counseling, communication with neighbors, landlords and authorities, leads to a reduction in the number of evictions and, equally, an increase in the number of people who move from inadequate housing to suitable housing. Last but not least, they also help in the search for more adequate housing.

DIAKONIE ECCB

Diakonie ECCB operates shelters designed to assist people in difficult life situations. Many of these shelters are specifically tailored to women. Besides accommodation, the shelters offer counseling and comprehensive support, offering their beneficiaries the flexibility to use the services for the necessary time, based on their individual needs. In Prague, Diakonie runs a shelter for victims of exploitation and human trafficking, providing them with a general support and legal assistance. Another significant service is offered for young people at risk of homelessness, aged 18 to 26, aiming to help them transition to independent living and develop skills for managing various aspects of life, such as interaction with authorities, maintenance of a household, budgeting and job search. Some of these individuals have a difficult life situation, being released from institutional or protective education, without stable housing or have experienced domestic violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Approve a strong Housing Support Act, and ensure its proper and swift implementation.
2. Set a new comprehensive national strategy to prevent and combat homelessness, incorporating a preventative and housing-led approach, with specific measures and dedicated sufficient funding.
3. Expand the stock of social housing through targeted public investment.
4. Establish an institution discharge system and support services to support individuals transitioning from institutions to permanent housing.
5. Tackle indebtedness and protect indebted people from evictions, as over indebtedness is a major trigger for homelessness in the Czech Republic.
6. Expand the existing housing first projects to the national level, with adequate and permanent funding, to provide housing solutions and support to people experiencing homelessness.

DENMARK

In Denmark, the amount of people experiencing homelessness was 5,789 individuals in 2022 (a decrease of 10% since 2019), according to the mapping data reported by the Danish National Centre for Social Research (VIVE) in collaboration with Statistics Denmark and the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Elderly¹⁵.

The number of rough sleepers and of young people in homelessness has seen the biggest decrease. 732 rough sleepers were registered in 2019, while in 2022 the figure has dropped to 535 rough sleepers. For young people, the number has fallen from 1,023 people in 2019 to 744 people in 2022. In contrast, the number of 30-39-year-olds in homelessness remained largely unchanged with 1,312 people in 2019 and 1,300 people in 2022.

These improvements are largely explained by Denmark's extensive social protection system and by good policies put in place in recent years. There has been a strategic focus on strengthening access to housing, supported housing and Housing First programs for people exiting institutions and experiencing homelessness. In fact, amongst people leaving penal and healthcare facilities, there was a decline of approximately 20% and 13% respectively in the population without proper accommodation between 2009 and 2017¹⁶. Equally, provision of social housing support to prevent people from losing their home was put in place and funds have been set aside to develop an intensive case management support targeted at young people in the transition to a secure adulthood with a stable housing.

Furthermore, on 26 November 2021, the Danish government reached an agreement¹⁷ across the housing and social sector, which will create more affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness. The agreement includes the construction of 4,050 affordable units for Housing First initiatives. The government has allocated funds to reduce rents in existing public housing units and to permanently reduce rents for newly built public housing. Municipalities are encouraged to provide rent subsidies and transition citizens from hostels to suitable housing with social support¹⁸. Likewise, the Danish Parliament adopted a new homelessness strategy in May 2023¹⁹. This further outlines the government's recognition of the Housing First model, prioritizing housing as a fundamental need, providing housing allowances and general support to individuals experiencing homelessness to gain stable housing.

According to one of our Danish members, Denmark's new approach to prevent and tackle homelessness shows a comprehensive framework and a range of initiatives that address the issues surrounding homelessness. However, they shed light on the specific issues faced by

¹⁵ The Danish National Centre for Social Research (2022) "Homelessness in Denmark 2022" <https://www.vive.dk/media/pure/18153/9732199>

¹⁶ Kvist, J. (2019) "National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion: Denmark". Brussels: European Commission.

¹⁷ The Social and Housing Agency (2022) "Political agreement on restructuring the homelessness area" <https://sbst.dk/voksne/hjemloeshed/fonden-for-blandede-byer>

¹⁸ Ministry of Social Welfare, Housing and the Elderly "Initiatives and measures for people experiencing homelessness" <https://sm.dk/arbejdsomraader/udsatte-voksne/hjemloeshed/initiativer-og-indsatser-til-personer-i-hjemloeshed>

¹⁹ The Danish Government "Denmark's National Reform Program 2023" https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/2023-Denmark-NRP_en.pdf

marginalized groups such as EU-mobile workers and migrants, as they are actively excluded from the new homelessness strategy and policies. In fact, migrants have no rights to formal housing and there is a political discourse that fosters their exclusion. Moreover, there is increasing criminalization of survival activities in public spaces in Copenhagen, which makes it very complex for this group to subsist.

KIRKENS KORSHAER

Our member Kirkens Korshaer is one of the key national players in Denmark aiming to combat homelessness. It operates across 28 cities and employs a holistic approach with a "before, during and after" method focusing on preventing homelessness, reducing its harm and providing support to those that have experienced homelessness to prevent its repetition. The organization actively reaches out to its users through mobile contact points with vital care, food, financial guidance and everyday life advice. Moreover, they offer day and night shelters.

Some Kirkens Korshaer's employees are trained in the Housing First housing support methods and follow the residents' transition from the shelters to their own home with practical help with moving and advice about authorities. They play a great role in promoting the Housing First model, emphasizing that individuals must be allowed to make decisions about their own life and thereby foster a sense of dignity and respect. This, according to Kirkens Korshaer, in turn stabilizes and enhances the effectiveness of the individual support provided to those that are facing complex social problems such as psychological vulnerability, addictions, poverty and broken relationships.

Finally, they run a programme named Kompasset, a service based in Copenhagen specially dedicated to migrants experiencing homelessness, around 75% being EU mobile citizens. They provide different services such as a place to sleep and rest in the daytime, help in applying for jobs, assistance in getting registered in Denmark, legal advice storage of personal items and documents, Danish language classes, and a mentoring programme. Our member emphasizes that Danish policies that neglect and discriminate against migrants and EU mobile citizens leave this group in an extremely destitute situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** Homelessness and housing policies will only be successful if they expand to include migrants and EU mobile citizens, as this group has the highest risk of experiencing homelessness and social exclusion.
- 2.** Strengthen and expand the social welfare system to timely support all people at risk of homelessness, including migrants and EU mobile citizens.
- 3.** Enhance support services for individuals transitioning to permanent housing, such as in-home support and care.
- 4.** For the Housing First model to succeed, enough affordable and suitable housing needs to be available.

GERMANY

A national count on homelessness was conducted for the first time in January 2022 by Germany's Federal Statistical Office²⁰ and complemented by survey data from research institutes Gesellschaft für innovative Sozialforschung und Sozialplanung (GISS)²¹ and Kantar Public²², estimating around 262,600 people in homelessness, covering people in temporary accommodation, people sleeping rough and staying with friends or family. Approximately two thirds of people in temporary accommodation were foreign nationals, most of them refugees. In January 2023 Germany's Federal Statistical Office counted 372,060 people in temporary accommodation. The main reasons for the significant increase were primarily the sharp rise in refugees from Ukraine and improved data reporting. Combined with the people sleeping rough and staying with friends and family, this results in a total of 456,560 people in homelessness in January 2023.

Currently, Germany does not have a federal strategy or an action plan to address homelessness in particular, but municipalities and regions are responsible individually.²³ The legal framework around housing is set by the federal state and individual municipalities finance and provide the housing benefits, making the combat and prevention of homelessness and housing exclusion a task of municipalities. However, there is currently a national action plan being drafted, but its launch has been postponed to January 2024 after several organizations' push for improvements.

What makes Germany unique is that there is a Law on Social Assistance (SGB XII §§67ff), which grants a right where "people who have special living conditions associated with social difficulties must be provided with services to overcome these difficulties if they are unable to do so on their own".⁶² Furthermore, municipalities have, according to police and regulatory law, the obligation to provide shelter for homeless people. Germany has also put in place specialist centres for homelessness prevention at the municipal level.

Moreover, the Federal Government invested 1 billion EUR for social housing for 2020-2022, as well as an additional 1 billion EUR for energy-efficient social housing. The housing benefits for low-income households are in place and are re-evaluated every two years to ensure affordability of the accommodation. In 2022 these households received one-time heating cost allowance to cope with the increasing energy prices.

Despite this, according to our members, there are differences between the German legal framework and its actual implementation. In practice not all municipalities fulfill their obligation to provide shelter for homeless individuals. Likewise, Germany faces a housing crisis and homelessness poses a significant issue. The government's development of a national action plan is ongoing, but there are challenges related to legislation changes and budget allocation. For instance, if a tenant has rent debts, the landlord can send an extraordinary termination of the

²⁰ Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (2022) "Extent and Structure of Homelessness - The Homeless Report 2022" <https://www.bmwsb.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/Webs/BMWSB/DE/veroeffentlichungen/pm-kurzmeldung/wohnungslosenbericht-2022.html>

²¹ Society for Innovative Social Research and Social Planning in Germany <https://www.giss-ev.de/>

²² Kantar Public Germany <https://www.kantar.com/locations/germany>

²³ Federal Working Group for Homeless Assistance (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V. (BAG W)) <https://www.bagw.de/>

rental agreement. The tenant can avoid this termination by paying off the debts within two months of receiving the eviction notice. In practice, however, the landlord often also sends an ordinary termination, which cannot be averted by payment of rent debts. Thus, the tenant can be evicted even though the debts have been paid. In practice, this is a very common reason why people in Germany lose their apartments.

General financial cuts in social dimensions and austerity policies are also concerning and the inclusion of EU-mobile citizens within the national homelessness strategy is doubtful. This poses a big problem, particularly in larger cities such as Berlin where EU-mobile citizens are prevalent.

DIAKONIE DEUTSCHLAND

Diakonie Deutschland serves as an umbrella organization offering a network of services to individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness across Germany. Around 627,349 full-time and part-time people are employed in 33,374 Diakonie's social organisations across Germany, in various fields of assistance. This includes around 800 services for people experiencing homelessness. They aim to provide accurate information regarding homelessness in Germany and provide immediate assistance together with long-term solutions to individuals through their network. They advocate for a comprehensive support network, and specialized services for young adults, women and migrants in need of housing. Equally, Diakonie Deutschland advocates for homelessness preventive measures, such as the expansion of specialized centers for homelessness prevention and early advice for those in difficult situations, and adequate affordable housing to people with low or no income in Germany.

DIAKONIE MICHAELSHOVEN

Diakonie Michaelshoven provides services for preventing and tackling homelessness in Germany, including basic amenities like showers and laundry services, as well as assistance in finding or maintaining accommodation. They also offer holistic support in navigating challenging processes such as re-housing and reintegration after prison release. For instance, in their Cologne center, they provide support to women who face challenges such as family conflicts, abuse and domestic violence, financial problems and traumatic experiences, so they don't fall into homelessness.

Between 2012 and 2018, Diakonie Michaelshoven with the support of GISS²⁴, developed and implemented key elements of an integrated support system for people struggling with the housing crisis in the Oberberg district. At this time a project group was formed in the Oberberg district in 2018 to develop a framework and action plan for tailor-made help for people who are at risk of or experiencing by homelessness, who are not reached by the existing offers or only for a short time.

²⁴ GISS "Scientific support for the development of a help offer for "system busters" as part of the overall housing assistance system in the Oberberg district of Diakonie Michaelshoven" <https://www.giss-ev.de/pages/18/abgeschlossene-projekte/#kein%20Sprungziel%20vorhanden>

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a comprehensive and inclusive national plan to fight homelessness, incorporating a preventative and housing-led approach, with specific measures and dedicated sufficient funding.
2. Improving tenant protection mechanisms to better prevent homelessness, by, for instance, introducing a legislative change that allows ordinary termination of rental contracts to be averted by debt payments.
3. Allocate sufficient resources to ensure affordable and accessible housing solutions, especially for vulnerable groups.
4. Further expand specialized centers for tailored intervention to prevent homelessness.

LATVIA

According to the OECD report on Homeless Population²⁵, Latvia experienced an increase of 60% in homelessness between 2010 and 2017, resulting in 6,877 people experiencing homelessness in 2017, with a significant concentration in the capital city, Riga. The majority of those living in shelters are individuals between the ages of 41 and 61²⁶.

Responsibility for addressing homelessness falls on local authorities, which often lack the capacity to provide adequate support, as state support is rather limited. It is important to note the fact that Latvia has not established a formal definition of homelessness in its legislation, making it a challenge to implement positive changes by policymakers and social service providers. While some larger municipalities such as Riga manage shelters and social rehabilitation centers, these provide only basic emergency accommodation, non-continuous and minimal support and often lack essential services for prevention.

In Latvia, existing services for preventing homelessness are limited, but there are legal provisions that allow debtors to reach agreements with creditors during insolvency to keep their homes. Additionally, the Law on Residential Tenancy permits eviction of tenants with significant rent and utility payment arrears, except for specific vulnerable groups who may receive alternative accommodation from local government after a court eviction judgment, although data on the effectiveness of these measures is unavailable. Some local governments also offer additional support to prevent eviction, such as material assistance for housing-related debt repayment.

According to the OECD report on National Strategies for Combatting Homelessness from 2021²⁷, Latvia did not report having any strategies for combatting homelessness in place, but local governments can put in place different types of support for people experiencing homelessness and these services are provided within the Social Services and Social Assistance Law²⁸.

Nevertheless, in the National Development Plan 2021-2027²⁹, the Latvian government set six priorities for 2027, one of them being “Quality Living Environment and Regional Development” including housing provisions. The goal is to make housing available to all, to meet high standards regarding energy efficiency, construction, safety and amenities by 2050, and to encourage public and private investment. Some of the measures mentioned are the construction of social housing units for low-income persons, the promotion of affordable sustainable housing, and the provision of financial support for disadvantaged groups.

This lack of adequate regulations and policies, an issue that has been raised by our member

²⁵ OECD (2021) “Homeless Population” <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/HC3-1-Homeless-population.pdf>

²⁶ The Borgen Project (2020) “Examining Homelessness in Latvia” <https://borgenproject.org/homelessness-in-latvia/#:~:text=After%20a%20389%25%20increase%20in,retirement%2C%20ages%2041%20to%2061.>

²⁷ OECD (2021) “National Strategies for Combating Homelessness” <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/HC3-2-Homeless-strategies.pdf>

²⁸ ILO (2010) “Latvia Law On Social Services and Social Assistance” <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/63233/66555/F1355704673/LVA63233%20ENG.pdf>

²⁹ Cross-Sectoral Coordination Centre of the Republic of Latvia “The National Development Plan for Latvia 2021-2027” https://www.pkc.gov.lv/sites/default/files/inline-files/Summary_Latvian%20National%20Development%20Plan%202021-2027_final.pdf

Diakonija Latvia, makes advocacy work challenging and leads NGOs to focus on rather providing emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. This means that immediate, emergency assistance is available, but there is no structural approach nor coordination for adequately preventing and tackling homelessness. Likewise, our member emphasizes that very often people experiencing homelessness get registered under an existing address (from relatives or friends), because they can get social support only if they have an official address. This means that they are not counted as people experiencing homelessness and therefore, invisibilized.

DIAKONIJA LATVIJA

So far, Diakonija Latvija has been focusing their efforts on emergency accommodation and material assistance for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, such as food parcels, clothes and a mobile soup kitchen. However, they are currently shifting their focus and building social service facilities for people who come to day centers and spend their time there, eventually transforming these day centers into a Housing First project. They emphasize the need to change negative mindsets around homelessness, as it is usually seen as a persons' own responsibility and not as a system's failure.

Moreover, they offer a wide variety of services that help prevent homelessness amongst people in difficult situations, such as day centres for children and adults. Here, they provide social rehabilitation services, skill development programs, individual and group counseling on social, legal and financial matters, socio-psychological support and provide information about other possible forms of assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** Develop and implement a comprehensive national strategy to prevent and tackle homelessness and housing exclusion, incorporating a preventative and housing-led approach, with specific measures and dedicated sufficient funding.
- 2.** Develop a formal definition of homelessness and implement regular nationwide counting.
- 3.** Implement state-funded Housing First projects aiming to provide permanent housing solutions for people in homelessness.
- 4.** Develop integration and reintegration programs for individuals who are exiting institutions to reduce their risk of becoming homeless.
- 5.** Allow access to social support for everyone in need of it, particularly people experiencing homelessness, removing the requisite of a fixed official address.

SERBIA

In Serbia, according to the Census from 2011³⁰, the only one that included data on homelessness and shelters, there were 18,287 individuals without a registered residence, living in parks, trailers, slums, under bridges and on the streets. In 2021, estimates from civil society organizations³¹ suggested that there were likely between 5,000 and 15,000 people experiencing homelessness. Most of these people live in urban areas, particularly in Belgrade and Novi Sad.

In 2012, some progress was made with the adoption of a National Strategy of Social Housing³² which mandated the government to work to eradicate homelessness, suggested embracing an extensive definition of homelessness (in line with the ETHOS classification) and carrying out a set of measures to enhance the capacities of institutions to combat homelessness and to increase the accommodation available. Following the Strategy, an Action Plan was adopted, but the document offered a less detailed understanding of homelessness and left out the increase in accommodation capacities from the Strategy. Furthermore, social housing is not available across Serbia, and it is limited due to lack of finance support in local communities.

Most of the laws and regulations in Serbia dealing with social issues focus on prioritizing access to social services and benefits for youth, children without caregivers, single parents, families with multiple children, single households, elderly above 65, people with special needs, Roma and refugees. Individuals experiencing homelessness are not explicitly mentioned as potential users of these social rights, further marginalizing their status in institutional protection systems. Moreover, the effective amount of social assistance is not sufficient to cover the costs of housing and other basic necessities; obtaining the assistance takes a very long time, is administratively complex; and many of those at risk of or experiencing homelessness are not adequately informed of their rights.

The only services specifically targeting people experiencing homelessness are shelters providing emergency accommodation in extreme cases of homelessness. According to the Ministry of Labour, there are only 5 licensed shelters in Serbia with capacity for 219 people. One of them in Kragujevac, is run by our member Philanthropy, the Charitable Foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Other initiatives to prevent and tackle homelessness are run mainly by civil society organisations. However, they operate with a very limited capacity and funding.

In summary, Serbia has not adopted a comprehensive plan to prevent and tackle homelessness. However, the Serbian government created a National Strategy for Poverty Reduction³³ in 2023. For the first time, one strategic document explicitly defined homelessness as the most extreme form of social exclusion and called for a new housing policy in order to make housing more accessible, and to define minimum housing standards. The strategy acknowledges that further research is

³⁰ Statistical Office of Serbia (2011) "Census 2011" <https://www.stat.gov.rs/sr-latn/oblasti/popis/popis-2011/>

³¹ BBC Serbia (2021) "Beskućnici u Srbiji: „Život na ulici je takav da kad se probudiš ujutru, odmah razmišljaš gde ćeš uveče da spavaš" <https://www.bbc.com/serbian/lat/srbija-58840797>

³² Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure (2012) "National Social Housing Strategy Serbia" <https://stanovanje.gov.rs/doc/propisi/Nacionalna%20strategija%20stanovanja.pdf>

³³ Republic of Serbia, Ministry of European Integration (2023) "Strategy For Poverty Reduction in Serbia" https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/strategija_siromastvo.pdf

needed to determine the prevalence of homelessness in Serbia.

Furthermore, in 2022 and 2023, the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue organized several meetings on the topic of homelessness with all relevant stakeholders and formed a working group. For the first time, partners from civil society organizations and representatives of several ministries discussed the main challenges regarding homelessness, trying to find solutions. The main goal of the group is creating a strategic document with all the identified issues, challenges and examples of good practices, as well as raising awareness of the issue in local communities and the capital city. This document could be useful in the future for creating public policies and strategic documents. Some of the issues identified by the working group are lack of access to personal identification documents, lack of access to social and healthcare services, lack of definition of homelessness and data collection, as well as housing shortages.

PHILANTHROPY (ČOVEKOLJUBLJE)

Our member, the charitable foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Philanthropy (Čovekoljublje) runs a shelter for adults and seniors "Sveti Joakim i Ana" ("Saint Joachim and Anne"), located in Kragujevac. It is intended to meet the basic needs of adults and seniors facing crisis situations, and those experiencing homelessness that need accommodation and social protection. In the last three years, more than 90 people in need have been accommodated in this shelter, mostly semi-mobile or immobile older people with chronic diseases. Our member emphasizes that the focus of the government and organizations should be on creating a national strategy to effectively prevent and tackle homelessness in Serbia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.** Develop a comprehensive strategy to prevent and tackle homelessness and housing exclusion, incorporating a preventative and housing-led approach, with specific measures and dedicated sufficient funding.
- 2.** Establish a comprehensive legal definition of homelessness and a centralized system for data collection to periodically count the number of people experiencing homelessness and those who don't have access to adequate housing, to accurately assess the state of homelessness in the country.
- 3.** Prioritize homelessness prevention by increasing investment and stock of social housing, putting in place preventative approaches and fostering collaboration between governments, NGOs and social institutions.
- 4.** Strengthen and expand social welfare support systems to meet the needs of vulnerable groups, providing long-term solutions to those experiencing poverty and housing exclusion.
- 5.** Raising public awareness around homelessness and improving access to social and health care systems for people in homelessness, including access to legal personal and identification documents.
- 6.** Put in place tailor-made social services for vulnerable people experiencing homelessness and increase the capacity of institutions to accommodate and provide solutions for people in need.

SPAIN

While the Spanish Constitution determines that "all Spaniards are entitled to enjoy decent and adequate housing[...]"³⁴, this is not always translated into a reality. In Spain, 28,553 people were experiencing homelessness in 2022, according to survey data from Spain's National Statistics Institute (INE)³⁵. Two thirds of them became homeless because they lost their jobs or because they had to start from scratches after arriving to Spain as migrants.

The Spanish government has recently adopted a "Comprehensive National Homelessness Strategy 2023-2030"³⁶, with the two main objectives of preventing and eradicating homelessness. In its "Objective 1: Homelessness prevention", the strategy outlines two strategic lines. The first one puts the focus on preventing the causes of homelessness such as health problems, addictions, unemployment, family breakups, social isolation, lack of social support, loss of habitual residence, etc. The second focuses on establishing detection protocols and early homelessness intervention to reduce damage through rapid rehousing, including working with educational centers for early detection and with institutions in the discharge processes.

Moreover, the Housing Act³⁷ introduced in April 2023, is a first-ever general housing law aiming to address housing inequalities and guarantee the right to decent living. It also aims to facilitate the coordination of the various regions' policies and address universal homelessness prevention. The Act includes protection measures, such as rental controls and eviction delays, as well as promotion measures of the public housing stock.

One of the great challenges in Spain is that legislation is not equally implemented at a national level, but it is each autonomous community that decides how to apply such legislation in its territory. Thus, there may be differences with respect to the national strategy. Therefore, while these developments seem promising, it is yet to be seen if and how they will be effectively implemented in the upcoming years.

DIACONIA ESPAÑA

One of our Spanish members provides temporary housing solutions as one of its efforts to tackle homelessness. Moreover, through "Vecindad Inclusiva"³⁸, run in Galicia and Andalucia, they focus on helping marginalised groups access a dignified home. They offer a pool of rental housing for groups at risk of social exclusion, such as families with no access to affordable housing or living in substandard housing, women victims of violence and migrants, who can get help to find housing

³⁴ The Spanish Constitution (1978) <https://www.boe.es/legislacion/documentos/ConstitucionINGLES.pdf>

³⁵ The National Statistics Institute (INE) "Survey on homeless people. 2022"

https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/en/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176817&menu=ultiDatos&idp=1254735976608

³⁶ Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030, "National Strategy to combat homelessness in Spain 2023-2030"

<https://www.mdsocialesa2030.gob.es/derechos-sociales/servicios-sociales/personas-sin-hogar.htm>

³⁷ Official State Gazette Agency of Spain (2023) "Law 12/2023, of May 24, for the right to housing"

<https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2023-12203>

³⁸ Diaconia Spain "Vecindad Inclusiva" <https://diaconia.es/vecindad-inclusiva/>

and legal advice.

Likewise, their reception centers such as "Proyecto Pasarela"³⁹ for migrants which regular administrative status, mainly people with dependent minors, families or women with precarious jobs, provide the necessary support in psychological, legal, social, housing and job matters to prevent homelessness and achieve effective and real autonomy.

NUEVA VIDA

Another Spanish member, Nueva Vida, is actively engaged in homelessness prevention and intervention. They run different programs in Cantabria, the Basque Country and the Balearic Islands to assist people in situations of sexual trafficking, asylum and refuge, homelessness and prison. Therefore, all the groups Nueva Vida works with have in common that they lack a safe and stable home.

For example, in collaboration with prisons, they focus on reintegrating people into society, contributing to preventing homelessness among this population. Regarding their specific work with people in homelessness, Nueva Vida has various programs where multidisciplinary services and personalized attention are the focus of the work. In Cantabria, Nueva Vida and the Santander City Council manage the Princesa Letizia Shelter Center⁴⁰, which offers both housing and integral services to more than 1,406 people in challenging situations.

They also run three Housing First projects: one for 16 people in the town of Renedo de Piélagos, an apartment for 8 people in the town of Cabezón de la Sal, and another apartment in Santander for 2 people. A multidisciplinary team (social educator, social workers, psychologist, and free time instructor) works together to offer individualized and personalized services seeking to enable people to achieve a restored and independent life. In addition, the organization offers Spanish classes and legal assistance.

Moreover, they raise awareness about this topic in order to prevent homelessness and avoid it becoming endemic, and to support people in vulnerable situations so that they don't end up living on the streets. They are running a social media campaign which seeks to inform the general public about the reality of homelessness and the existing resources in the region. It also includes an itinerant photography exhibition called *Invisibles*, which tells the life stories of three people who have experienced different stages of homelessness. In addition, Nueva Vida visit schools and raises awareness around prejudice, stereotypes, hostile architecture and aporophobia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Effectively implement the new homelessness strategy, particularly strengthening the support capacity for preventing homelessness and ensuring adequate funding.
2. Augment the investment on public stock of affordable, adequate housing.

³⁹ Diaconia Spain "Proyecto Pasarela" <https://diaconia.es/proyecto-pasarela/>

⁴⁰ Asociación Nueva Vida "Centro Municipal de Acogida Princesa Letizia" <https://asociacionnuevavida.org/centro-de-acogida-princesa-letizia/>

3. Improve psychological care services and reduce waiting times for public services that can help prevent homelessness.
4. Replicate housing-led and Housing First projects in all territories and prioritize funding of long-term projects that address the root causes of homelessness.
5. Raise awareness among social care professionals and the general public about the reality of homelessness.
6. Implement a unified data collection system where people living in substandard housing are accounted for.

SWEDEN

The latest data shows that there were 33,250 people experiencing homelessness in Sweden. Among them 5,935 were either sleeping rough or in emergency accommodation. This data was collected during a one-week long data collection project in 2017 by organizations who are in contact with people experiencing homelessness and the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs⁴¹. A new count data will be released in November 2023.

Policy changes in the last years, in line with neoliberal privatization and deregulation of housing, have led to an erosion of the role of municipal housing companies providing public rental housing, as they now have to operate according to business principles. Thus, an emerging challenge in Sweden, according to Eurodiaconia's members, is unaffordability of housing and a consequent rise in structural homelessness, which represents a challenge for prevention strategies.

The Swedish government has put in place a new national homelessness strategy in 2022, with the purpose of reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness, as well as preventing people from becoming homeless⁴². The strategy proposes preventive measures and actions for addressing social and structural homelessness for the period 2022-2026. Some measures mentioned in the strategy include investment in the Housing First model, eviction prevention, strengthening the social perspective in community planning and increasing the involvement of social services. For instance, the government has increased its financial support for municipalities to assist individuals in paying rent and prevent evictions. The cooperation between social services, housing companies and landlords is a key factor in preventing evictions, whereby they reach tenants before notice of termination is received, focusing on families with children.

The National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) has been tasked with providing national support for the implementation of the Housing First approach, particularly among individuals with high support needs. The strategy also emphasizes the importance of outreach work to achieve the goal of eradicating homelessness, especially for municipalities that need support in developing working methods on outreach.

Moreover, as part of the new strategy, the government has tasked the National Board of Health and Welfare to conduct a new homelessness count in Sweden. The survey results will be launched in November 2023, six years after the previous count. Our member, the Swedish City Missions considers the survey is a good initiative but would like to see it conducted more often in order to better monitor homelessness over time and have up-to-date data. Equally, they refer that the official statistics do not cover certain groups such as undocumented migrants, circular migrants and those with temporary documents, masking the actual prevalence of homelessness. They also emphasize that right now, many more people are at risk of homelessness due to increased poverty

⁴¹Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (2017) – "Homelessness 2017. Scope and character"

<https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/globalassets/sharepoint-dokument/artikelkatalog/ovrigt/2017-11-15.pdf>

⁴² Swedish Government Office (2022) "The Government's Strategy to Combat Homelessness 2022-2026", pg. 2

<https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/5a5f795a1db144ec8dfe36cd60114ed7/regeringens-strategi-for-att-motverka-hemloshet-2022-2026.pdf>

and unemployment.

SWEDISH CITY MISSIONS (SVERIGES STADSMISSIONER)

In Sweden, our member the Swedish City Missions ("Sveriges Stadsmissioner") plays a large role in providing on-the-ground support for individuals experiencing homelessness in various circumstances in around 30 locations across the country. Homelessness prevention is at the core of their efforts, achieved mainly through financial support and economic guidance for individuals, Housing First programs and a Socially Responsible Housing program in Stockholm. This program aims to make long-term, safe and affordable rental housing available to target groups that are far from the regular housing market. The program includes developing the Stockholm City Mission's existing apartment stock by renovating older properties. They are also acquiring land and constructing its own buildings for the first time.

They also provide sheltered accommodation in Gothenburg, Linköping, Umeå and Uppsala, mainly for women who escape a situation of violence. Moreover, they contribute to the dissemination of information and training about Housing First initiatives through their educational platform, and advocate for policy changes at the political level. They consistently emphasize to politicians the indispensable role of civil society and how they can contribute to progress, for instance through their extensive experience within Housing First and other initiatives in socially sustainable housing.

HELA MÄNNISKAN

Another Swedish member offers a diverse range of services aimed at helping people experiencing homelessness, as well as homelessness prevention services. Their 43 open day centers cater to people struggling with addiction, homelessness, mental health issues and those in vulnerable situations, offering essential and preventive services, care and rehabilitation measures. They also provide sheltered accommodation in Jönköping, Karlskoga-Degerfors, Mjölby, Oskarshamn and Enköping. In Malmö, they also have sheltered housing for women.

Hela Människan believes that social services play an important role in preventing homelessness, both at a structural and individual level. For example, by making sure that individuals get the support they need before falling into homelessness and participating in homelessness mappings at the municipality level to provide a foundation for the development of a homelessness strategy. In fact, municipalities often ask civil society organizations for support and assistance in order to achieve what is stated in the Social Services Act. However, civil society organizations find that people's needs are often not fully covered in all circumstances, and so they work beyond the scope of the municipalities' request.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To effectively reduce the number of people experiencing both social and structural homelessness, comprehensive efforts within housing and urban development policies are required. Implementing and strengthening policies that ensure affordable housing supply and equal access for all groups, such as families with children and migrants is crucial.

2. Introduce zero tolerance for evictions that affect children and ensure structured work with eviction prevention in all municipalities.
3. Strengthen collaboration with landlords, social services, municipalities, civil society organisations, and families to reach people at risk of homelessness to solve the situation before they fall into homelessness.
4. Develop programs for individuals being released from institutions to provide them with a secure housing solution and services for a smooth transition.

PORTUGAL

In Portugal, a total of 9,604 people experiencing homelessness were identified in 2021, most of them living in Lisbon area, meaning they were sleeping rough or in public spaces, or in emergency housing and shelters. This data was collected as part of the National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People 2017-2023 (ENIPSSA) by the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security⁴³ and civil society organizations in December 2021. Portugal developed the ENIPSSA in 2017⁴⁴ with an overall strategic and holistic approach towards preventing and tackling homelessness, centred on the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. The strategy is based on three strategic objectives: promoting knowledge, information, awareness raising and education on the phenomenon; strengthening intervention aiming at promoting the integration of people in homelessness; and strengthening coordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Across the country, ENIPSSA establishes regional and local multi-stakeholders' centres composed of municipal governments, regional governments, civil society organizations and others who need to work jointly to implement the strategy. Some notable preventative initiatives are included in ENIPSSA, such as a measure designed to protect for eviction tenants aged 65 or older and those with significant level of disability who have resided in their homes for a minimum of 15 years. Additionally, some municipalities run a social emergency fund that assists households at risk of homelessness that contributes to partially cover their monthly expenses. However, the budget is capped at a maximum of 1000 EUR per year per household which is insufficient. Inadequate coverage, inability to combine this benefit with other support programs and limited capacity are some of the barriers to homelessness prevention in Portugal.

Moreover, there is a significant housing crisis in Portugal at the moment, with low levels of affordable social housing, which makes it difficult to structurally prevent homelessness. Despite these challenges and limitations, Portugal is aiming to improve its homelessness prevention strategies and enhance the support available in views of their new homelessness strategy currently being elaborated.

EUNOIA

Our Portuguese member Eunoia is currently working with local municipalities to effectively preventing and tackling homelessness. For instance, their member Aceda works hand in hand with the municipality of Almada and 24 other relevant stakeholders to locally implement the ENIPSSA in that local centre. In this context, they are running two night centres and have a night street team. Moreover, Aceda advocates for changes in legislation that would allow to convert empty storage spaces in Housing First-like apartments for people experiencing homelessness. This would allow many people currently experiencing homelessness to have a permanent housing solution.

⁴³ The Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security in Portugal <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc21/area-de-governo/trabalho-solidariedade-e-seguranca-social>

⁴⁴ National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People (ENIPSSA) <https://www.enipssa.pt/-/resultados-do-inquerito-de-caracterizacao-das-pessoas-em-situacao-de-sem-abrigo-dez-20-2>

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Expand the amount of the social emergency fund to support people at risk of homelessness.
2. Increase the emphasis on homelessness prevention, by implementing earlier identification and outreach programs to connect individuals with support services.
3. Tackle the housing crisis by increasing public investments in social housing that is adequate and affordable.
4. Improve the funding and availability of mental health services for the population at risk of or homelessness.
5. Reduce the excessive bureaucracy to ease undocumented migrants' access to rights and prevent them from falling into homelessness.
6. Increase responses and support services for people exiting institutions, for example: people leaving health institutions, or children and young people exiting care without adequate social support.

NORWAY

The national survey of homelessness in Norway, conducted in 2020, estimated that there were 3,325 individuals experiencing homelessness in the country. Norway experienced the biggest fall in homelessness of about 40% between 2012 and 2016, according to the OECD report on homeless population (2021)⁴⁵, attributed to cooperation and a long-term integrated strategy for housing and support services⁴⁶. At the same time, approximately 179,000 individuals are disadvantaged in the housing market - about 78,000 of those are children and young people under the age of 20.

The National Strategy for Social Housing Policies (2021-2024)⁴⁷ is in place in Norway to help those that are disadvantaged in the housing market, outlining the following priorities: *"no one shall be homeless; children and young people shall have good living conditions; people with disabilities shall, like everybody else, have the opportunity to choose where and how they want to live."*

However, the national strategy excludes EU mobile citizens and undocumented migrants, and these groups often have to resort to emergency shelters provided by organizations working in the private sector. Besides emergency shelters, the city of Oslo has "Winter night" (Vinternatt) which is run by the Salvation Army and commissioned by the municipality, opening only when temperatures fall below -10°C and it is considered a health hazard to sleep outside. Thus, Norway faces challenges in terms of emergency shelter capacity for people who are not considered formal residents of the country and who experience homelessness.

Additionally, in 2013, the Oslo city council adopted an amendment to the municipalities' police statutes and introduced a total ban on public sleeping: *"in public parks, green areas, open spaces, on the roads or highly dense areas, camping, sleeping, tenting or similar are forbidden without having a special permission from the municipal authority"*. The sleeping ban has been heavily criticized. The Norwegian center for human rights at the Oslo University has pointed out that criminalizing actions that are necessary for survival and are easily related to human dignity, such as sleeping, is very problematic from a human rights perspective. After looking closer into the practice of the police, the Norwegian center for human rights established that the ban seemed discriminatory and that Roma migrants were particularly vulnerable.

OSLO CHURCH CITY MISSION (KIRKENS BYMISJON OSLO)

In Norway, our member the Oslo Church City Mission (Kirkens Bymisjon Oslo) offers a range of initiatives to address and prevent homelessness and housing challenges, including emergency accommodation, housing counselling, permanent housing solutions, and advocacy work aimed at reducing evictions, combatting homelessness and increasing the housing assistance quality. The organization focuses on particularly vulnerable groups such as destitute EU migrants, individuals

⁴⁵ OECD (2021) "Homeless Population" <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/HC3-1-Homeless-population.pdf>

⁴⁶ FEANTSA (2022) "Homeless in Europe Magazine Spring 2022: National Strategies for Fighting Homelessness" <https://www.feantsa.org/en/newsletter/2022/05/18/homeless-in-europe-magazine-spring-2022?bcParent=27>

⁴⁷ Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation in Norway "National strategy for social housing policies (2021-2024)" <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/c2d6de6c12d5484495d4ddeb7d103ad5/we-all-need-a-safe-place-to-call-home-national-strategy-for-social-housing-policies-2021-2024.pdf>

with mental health issues and addictions, victims of human trafficking and children. They also engage in research initiatives to gain a better understanding and outlook of the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness.

One of their programs is "Bybo", which provides rental housing with regular and permanent contracts aiming to offer disadvantaged individuals a stable and permanent home. Moreover, the organization provides housing solutions for people released from prisons or institutions as a part of their homelessness prevention strategy.

Furthermore, after recognizing the limitations of the existing national survey conducted by the Norwegian State Housing Bank, our member conducted a quantitative survey called "I count" to gather data on EU destitute migrants experiencing homelessness in Oslo, as they are not covered by the official counting. The survey was conducted over a two-week period in November 2021 when Norway still had entry restriction due to the pandemic. Out of 209 respondents 23% answered that they were living permanently in Norway, though many of them were rough sleepers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Improve data collection by including all groups of people experiencing homelessness, based on the successful survey "I count", and utilize this data for policy making.
2. Include undocumented migrants and EU mobile citizens in the national strategy for combatting homelessness, so they don't fall through the cracks of the system. Moreover, social housing aimed at migrant workers should be developed.
3. Further expand emergency shelters' capacity, ensuring that no one sleeps rough.
4. Urgently derogate the legislation that criminalizes homelessness in the city of Oslo to comply with human rights standards.
5. Launch awareness campaigns to educate the public about homelessness and advocate for changes and political support.



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Social services providers can play an important role in preventing homelessness, both at a structural and individual level, for instance by making sure that individuals get the support they need before falling into homelessness and by providing sustainable solutions to avoid its repetition.

CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of the ten countries studied in this report, it is clear that homelessness prevention-related policies and realities vary a lot from one country to another, but some trends can be observed.

In general, most of the analyzed countries face a housing crisis, driven, amongst others, by speculation and financialization of the private housing stock, and a chronic underinvestment on social housing and/or affordable rental housing. Here, more investments and regulatory efforts are needed, with special attention to marginalised groups prone to experience discrimination and housing exclusion.

More positively we observe a new wave of homelessness strategies and housing regulations in many countries. This is true for Spain, for instance, who has recently adopted a new ambitious strategy, and of Germany, who is currently preparing its first national strategy, but that is also implementing some austerity policies that could risk weakening the overall social protection system. There is also the case of Portugal, which already had a good strategy in place, and that is now preparing a new one with a stronger focus on prevention.

Likewise, Czech Republic and Serbia, although not having a homelessness strategy in place, have recently made some promising progress on legislation and policies aimed at addressing housing exclusion, poverty and homelessness. In comparison, one country lagging behind is Latvia, which currently lacks adequate legislation, institutions and policies for homelessness prevention and eradication.

In most of the analyzed countries, third country nationals and EU mobile citizens are particularly exposed to homelessness due to discrimination and exclusion, administrative and language barriers, and lack of awareness of rights, amongst others.

Denmark and Norway, two Nordic countries with historically strong social welfare systems, tend to have in place strong homelessness and housing strategies, and have seen their homelessness numbers reduce in the last number of years. However, these countries exclude migrants and EU mobile citizens from their support policies, leaving them in a dire situation. Austria is also a strong welfare system, with a strong, long-lasting tradition of social housing. However, the criteria to access it based on residence time also excludes migrants and EU mobile citizens, who have to resort to the private sector if they can afford it or fall into homelessness. It is evident that if homelessness is to effectively be eradicated by 2030, real efforts must be put in place, so migrants and EU mobile citizens have access to adequate housing solutions and do not fall into the cracks of the system.

Moreover, Sweden, although historically a Nordic welfare state, has seen neoliberal policies implemented in the last years that have eroded the once strong public housing system, with increasing housing unaffordability and a consequent rise in structural homelessness. Our members also report an overall increase in poverty, linked to the same policies. A new

homelessness strategy is now in place, so it is to be seen how much it can tackle this growing issue.

Finally, our members remark that to successfully implement homelessness prevention policies, it is essential that these are long-term and inclusive policies that are adequately funded. Equally, coordination between different stakeholders is imperative, as well as access to funding by all these actors to implement preventative programmes. Furthermore, prevention of evictions, support for institutions' release and Housing First policies should be at the centre of preventative strategies. Lastly, it is imperative to strengthen social protection systems, making them inclusive and adequate, as this is the first step needed for a robust universal protection framework.



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EU-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

When it comes to homelessness and housing, we recognize that the competence primarily lies with the Member States. However, we believe that the EU does have a role in areas that have an influence on homelessness prevention and housing policies. Concretely, we recommend the following:

- 1. The EU should reinforce its commitment to the continuation and strengthening of European Platform on Combatting Homelessness**, in view of the next mandate. This shall include wider dissemination of the Platform actions at the EU and national level, more thematic emphasis on the importance of prevention (this could include the development of peer-exchange on affordable housing solutions and debt prevention), as well as support in the development and adoption of an adequately funded work program for the next period.
- 2. The EU needs to take a more decisive role in encouraging the construction and renovation of adequate affordable housing across Europe**, increasing the available funding, for instance through the Invest EU programme and the European Investment Bank. It could also allow for a better and combined use of local, national and European funding and EIB financing. The renovation wave is a starting point that must be developed towards the goal of creating more affordable housing across Europe.
- 3. The EU should integrate the development of affordable, adequate housing as a key policy goal in the European Semester**, developing country-specific recommendations related to affordable housing, particularly in the context of public spending or economic reforms.
- 4. In the context of the cost-of-living crisis and dramatic surge of homelessness, and in the framework of the new European Bauhaus and Renovation Wave, the European Commission should work hand in hand with local and regional authorities to finance the mobilisation of vacant housing for adequate affordable housing developments.** In parallel, support must be provided to the development of public transportation so as to bridge the gap between vacant housing location and employment opportunities.
- 5. Regarding financialization and short-term rentals, the European Commission must continue its efforts to regulate short-term rentals, particularly regarding multi-units' owners and the professionalisation of short-term rentals.** The European Commission must work hand in hand with cities to facilitate data-sharing of online platforms when it comes to professional short-term rentals, enabling the implementation of local taxes and regulations and, in doing so, empowering local actors to address the financialization of housing.
- 6. In the context of the cost-of-living crisis, the European Commission should propose a new EU-level SURE-like instrument** to help member states finance short term support to households struggling with rising utilities' costs, rent, and mortgage.

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