



Mutual Learning Event:
Design of National Strategies
to Fight Homelessness and
Housing Exclusion
Final Report

Thon Hotel, Brussels, 23 June 2022

Introduction

It is one year since the Lisbon Declaration was signed by the 27 EU Member States as well as regions and civil society organisations with the goal of eradicating homelessness by 2030. Over the past few years, we have seen how the wider context affects homelessness – for better and worse. The COVID-19 pandemic led, albeit temporarily, to measures that reduced rough sleeping and decreased evictions in many Member States. These temporary measures highlighted the opportunities for permanent solutions. Looking ahead, the cost-of-living crisis is likely to be a factor in increasing flows into homelessness and therefore must be dealt with as far upstream as possible to mitigate its effects on our most vulnerable populations.

The Mutual Learning Event on the Design of National Strategies to Fight Homelessness and Housing Exclusion took place on 23 June 2022 in Brussels. The event was attended in person by members of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, as well as experts on homelessness and housing exclusion from the EU Member States. The goal of the event was to share experiences, success stories and challenges about the design of national strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion.

The Mutual Learning Event was centred around workshops on three national strategies, preceded by a presentation from Eoin O’Sullivan, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin. Prof. O’Sullivan presented a conceptual framework on the definition and dynamics of homelessness. This provided the theoretical basis for homelessness policies from prevention to exit into sustainable housing, and included key aspects related to governance and evaluation. Particular attention was paid to the importance of quality data and data collection methodologies, together with sound evaluations for which more EU-based research is needed.

From this wider perspective, the workshops then allowed participants to home in on how these concepts are being practically applied in three different national strategies – Portugal, Ireland, and Denmark. Participants could attend two of the three workshops so a brief overview of all three national strategies was given in the morning plenary. Portugal, Ireland, and Denmark were chosen for the workshops because of the quality and ambition of their respective strategies. Q&A sessions served to highlight the successes, gaps, challenges, and opportunities inherent in the strategies how lessons learnt could be applied in other Member States.

The Chair of the Platform’s Steering Board, Yves Leterme, opened the event by recalling the main elements of the three workstreams in the Platform’s work programme, namely 1) definitions and monitoring, 2) access to funding, and 3) mutual learning. He spoke about how the EU’s added value lies in the networks it creates and the opportunities to share and exchange experiences as this Mutual Learning Event clearly demonstrated. While attendance was excellent at the Event, Mr Leterme noted that about six Member States had no representation which points to the work that needs to be done in terms of increasing engagement and making eradicating homelessness a priority across all 27 Member States.

Katarina Ivankovic-Knezevic, Director of Social Affairs, DG EMPL, European Commission, referred to the broad EU commitment in the fight against homelessness and housing exclusion by emphasising the importance of all stakeholders – from EU and national policy makers to civil society – in eradicating homelessness, evidenced by the many organisations that have signed up to the Lisbon Declaration. She also emphasised the reciprocal nature of the Mutual Learning Event, as she too looked forward to learning from presenters and participants about the obstacles they are encountering in their national contexts, the role of Housing First principles in their strategies, and how the homeless population is being identified and counted.

Conceptual framework on the dynamics of homelessness

Prof. O’Sullivan, School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin presented a conceptual framework of the dynamics of homelessness. This framework, drawing on relevant research, understands homelessness as a dynamic process and identifies intervention points for policies on homelessness – prevention, entry, duration, and exit.

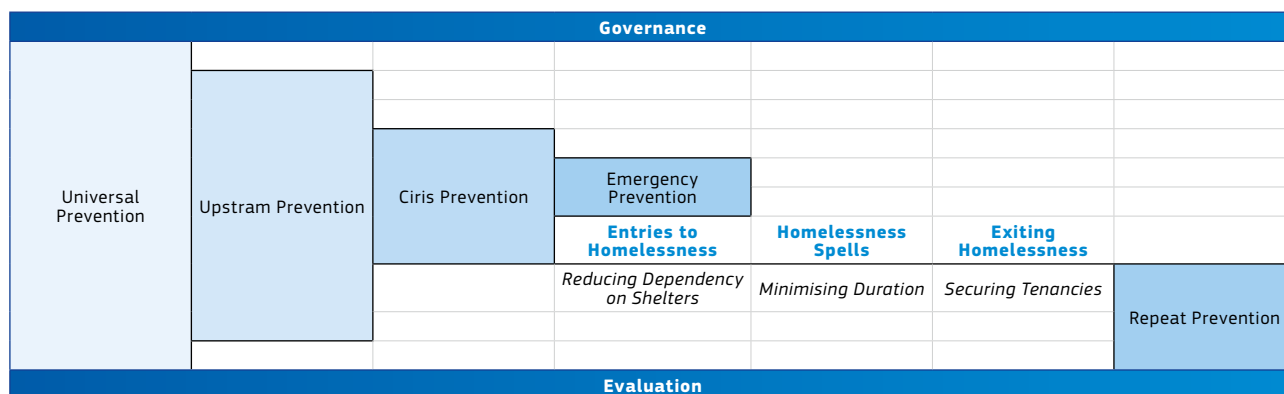


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the dynamics of homelessness, adapted from Fitzpatrick et al (2021) and Lee et al (2021). Eoin O’Sullivan.

Prevention

Of these, prevention is the most important, both in terms of harm reduction to vulnerable people and cost-efficiency to Member States. Prof. O’Sullivan isolated and analysed the five stages of prevention based on research by Fitzpatrick et al.¹

- Universal prevention involves creating social policies, housing policies, and welfare policies that ultimately provide affordable housing and reduce poverty.
- Upstream prevention requires the targeting of sections of the population that are particularly at risk of becoming homeless such as people leaving prison, and young people exiting the care system.
- Crisis prevention focuses on people who are imminently at risk of becoming homeless through, for example, providing financial assistance or mediating with their landlord.
- Emergency prevention is widely provided through the provision of shelter accommodation and aims to ensure that people have a roof over their heads.
- Repeat prevention aims to ensure that those exiting homelessness do so permanently and its success largely hinges on the type of tenure that they exit into.

There is growing evidence of the types of intervention that are effective at each of the above stages of prevention; however, the fundamental underlying factor is the supply of affordable and secure housing. Finland, for example, has been very effective in tackling homelessness through a wide range of measures yet it is accepted that the most effective of these has been the increased supply of affordable housing.

Pathways through homelessness: entry, duration, exit

The entry into homelessness is influenced by an interplay between individual circumstances and socio-economic structures, which vary widely across Member States. Prof. O’Sullivan focussed on people entering homelessness through rough sleeping and emergency accommodation as this corresponds to how most EU countries define homelessness. The provision of shelter-type accommodation is still the go-to response to homelessness across Europe despite a large body of research indicating that this is extraordinarily expensive and does not achieve anything other than providing a roof on a given night. Nevertheless, expenditure on emergency accommodation is continually increasing across Member States, including the costs of hotel rooms for overflow which is a feature of the response in some countries.

1. Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P. and J. Wood (2021) Advancing a Five-Stage Typology of Homelessness Prevention, *International Journal on Homelessness* 1(1) pp.79-97.

The evidence shows that passive services – temporary shelters, day services, street-based subsistence services – are costly and do little to provide sustainable solutions for people experiencing homelessness. Expenditure should therefore be shifted away from passive services and towards active services – prevention, social housing provision, Housing First – so that the goals of the Lisbon Declaration become reality.

There is a large body of research on duration of stays in emergency accommodation that is useful in determining the type of supports homeless people require. The categories of stays in emergency accommodation as developed by Kuhn and Culhane² – long-term, episodic, or transitory – can be used to define the type of supports required to exit homelessness. People experiencing long-term or episodic stays in emergency accommodation require immediate access to housing without pre-conditions and with social supports. Whereas the solution for the majority of those experiencing transitory homelessness is rapid rehousing with secure tenancies.

Research shows that the type of tenancy – secure, quasi-secure, insecure – through which a person exits temporary accommodation is the determining factor in whether or not they return to homelessness. Another important factor in avoiding a return to homelessness is the support provided, with many people needing little more than financial support (e.g. rent supplements) while those with more complex needs are best served through a Housing First approach.

As with preventing homelessness, successful *exiting* of homelessness is dependent on the provision of secure and affordable housing, particularly social housing.

Governance

- In North America, they tend to have ‘charismatic leaders’ in policy areas, whereas in Europe we tend more towards institutional processes and structures to achieve policy goals. The EU approach is more likely to achieve sustainable solutions to ending homelessness.
- Stable and continuous governance structures, including continuity of key personnel and strong leadership, are vital to the success of any policy.
- Within this stable governance structure, integrated strategic approaches are necessary to prevent and respond to homelessness.
- Finally, gaining consensus and buy-in from all stakeholders means that all parties are working towards the common goal; this has been a key factor in the success of the Finnish policy.

Measuring and evaluating

Robust data collection on homelessness is highlighted in the Lisbon Declaration as being necessary for allowing comparison and monitoring at EU level. To this end, the terminological framework provided by the ETHOS and ETHOS Light typologies should harmonise understanding and categorisation of homelessness across the EU; however, uptake of this typology is not consistent.

Prof. O’Sullivan emphasised the importance of understanding the difference between point-in-time surveys versus period-of-time surveys and what types of conclusions can be drawn from each survey method. Point-in-time surveys (taken on a given night, for example) are useful for monitoring trends or identifying service needs, though they risk distorting the figures on number of people accessing homeless services. To really understand the scale of the homelessness problem, period-of-time surveys are required.

Regarding policy evaluation, there is a growing evidence base of policies that have been effective in the fight against homelessness but the vast majority of this research is coming out of North America. There is thus too much reliance on North American data which may not be appropriate to the European context. A European evidence base needs to be developed assessing the various strategies and measures that exist across the continent.

2. Kuhn, R., & Culhane, D. P. (1998). Applying Cluster Analysis to Test a Typology of Homelessness by Pattern of Shelter Utilization: Results from the Analysis of Administrative Data. Available at: https://repository.upenn.edu/spp_papers/96

Denmark

The Danish National Strategy presentation was given by Stine Højland Pedersen, Special Advisor, Department for Marginalised Adults, Ministry of Social Affairs and Senior Citizens.

The Danish context

Historically, homelessness has been seen as a social issue and, to a lesser extent, a housing issue. The first homelessness strategy in Denmark was launched in 2009, and despite changing governments there has been an ongoing focus on reducing the number of homeless people. An important element of these strategies has been trialling evidence-based measures that have grown steadily in scope and ambition.

Denmark has a very well-developed social system, financed by taxes and providing equal access to services. The country is divided into 98 municipalities, through which social services are delivered. The welfare system is based on a preventive approach, where citizens are supported with social and economic efforts to prevent them from falling into homelessness. In addition, 20% of the country's total housing stock is not for profit. Currently, for example, 40 000 not-for-profit homes are being rented to tenants for EUR 470 or less.

Data and definitions

Denmark is a shining light of data collection when it comes to homelessness in that they take very detailed and regular assessments of numbers and profiles of homeless people. Since 2009, there has been a biannual count of homeless people carried out with the support of shelters, institutions and municipalities. In the week of counting in 2022, 5 789 people were registered as homeless, while the number in 2019 was 6 431. This corresponds to a decrease of approximately 10%. In addition to a count, data is collected on the person's profile, which services they use, their reasons for becoming homeless, etc. For example, according to data from 2022, 47% of homeless people live in shelters, 66% of people living in homelessness have a substance abuse problem, and 62% have mental health problems. These comprehensive data provide a solid basis for developing and adjusting the national strategies and maintaining a political focus on implementing the Housing First approach.

Underpinning this data collection is the Danish definition of homelessness which is widely based on the modified ETHOS-light typology. This includes not only rough sleepers and shelter users but also broader categories of homelessness situations such as people staying temporarily with friends or family or in short-term transitional housing without a permanent contract.

Shelters

For those citizens who fall through the social safety net and end up in shelters, they will find high-quality shelter provision. The overall target group for shelter stays are people with social problems who either have no home, or are unable to stay in their own home. Admission to the shelters is for the director of the shelter to decide. The municipalities cover funding for shelters, but the State reimburses the municipality for a proportion of the costs. Although the shelters are considered of high quality and cost effective, the average length of stay in shelters and the number of shelters has been increasing over time.

Evolution of national strategies

Denmark's national homelessness strategies began in 2009 with 17 municipalities involved on a voluntary basis. There are now over 30 municipalities taking part and Housing First principles have become increasingly embedded in each subsequent strategy. As part of the preparations for the current political agreement, a working group was set up to identify barriers to implementation and to develop additional solutions. The new political agreement on homelessness further increases focus on the Housing First method with two main goals: reducing the number of homeless citizens significantly and ending long-term homelessness. At present, preparatory work for the law is underway, so the amended rules can enter into force mid-2023.

The new strategy consists of three tracks – housing, social support, and governance. The need for the three tracks emerged from analysing data about the target group – data from the ongoing counts, from the housing supply statistics, and from the evaluations and analyses.

- Housing: Focus is partly on providing more affordable housing, through construction of up to 2 250 new not-for-profit housing units and through supporting a temporary rent reduction in 1 800 existing not-for-profit housing units. Municipalities will also increase their referrals to housing.
- Social support and governance structure: Moving from passive support to active support is key to the new strategy by to strengthening the economic incentives providing a housing first method, and by ensuring that every homeless citizen has an individual action plan.

Housing First in the Danish context

Housing First began to be integrated into the Danish system from the first National Strategy in 2009. However, in 2020 only 8% of the target population were part of a Housing First approach. Research was carried out in 2020 to identify barriers to full implementation of Housing First. These barriers included:

- lack of appropriate housing;
- inadequate cooperation on relevant subject areas across municipalities and sectors;
- poor knowledge of the Housing First approach;
- Housing First not being prioritised at municipal or national level;
- lack of local political consensus.

One of the primary ways Denmark is now encouraging a shift towards a Housing First approach is by redirecting its funding of homeless services. Currently the state reimburses municipalities for 50% of the cost of shelter stays. This is gradually being defunded which will make shelters much more expensive to the municipality. In tandem with this, the state will redirect the funds into reimbursing municipalities for support-in-housing for two years following a stay in temporary accommodation. This move aims to incentivise municipalities to accommodate homeless people in permanent housing, i.e. within a Housing First approach.

Denmark has developed the following initiatives to support the implementation of Housing First:

- establishment of a national partnership of stakeholders, inspired by Finland and Norway;
- creation of a new task force to strengthen the casework and performance of municipalities and improve implementation of Housing First;
- development of a fund for civil society work.

Future challenges

As elsewhere in the EU27, increasing the supply of affordable housing must be part of the solution and the Danish government is tackling this through providing more affordable housing. This will ultimately enable homeless people to transition into housing (with supports) and allow for shelters to be downscaled.

While Housing First has been part of the Danish strategy for some years, uptake on this approach has been slow so far. Initiatives have recently been rolled out to remedy this though it is too soon to deem them a success.

Ireland

The presentation on Ireland's national strategy was given by Rosemarie Tobin, Principal Officer, Homelessness Policy, Funding and Delivery, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and Siobhán Nic Thighearnáin, Housing for All Project Management Office, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The Irish context

Culturally, Ireland has a high proportion of owner-occupiers and in general people expect to own their own homes. However, Ireland is still feeling the effects of the Celtic Tiger years and subsequent economic crash. The massive drop in construction of housing, including social housing, that followed the crash has led to a significant supply problem. Housing is now a hot topic affecting all levels of society with affordability challenges across all types of tenure. These housing and economic issues have had a detrimental effect on homelessness in Ireland. The issue of homelessness is very high on the public and political agenda which brings some positives but risks leading to knee-jerk reactions rather than long-term strategic thinking.

Data and definitions

Real-time data on numbers using emergency accommodation are captured through the Pathway Accommodation and Support System (PASS), an online shared system used by homeless service providers and Local Authorities. Dublin counts rough sleepers twice a year (as defined by ETHOS category 1) and there are plans for a national rough sleeping survey in the future. Figures from March/April 2022 indicate that 91 people were sleeping rough in Dublin. Nationally, there are over 10 000 people in emergency accommodation (ETHOS categories 2 and 3 not including those in domestic violence refuges).

Accessing housing and accommodation

Those on low incomes are facilitated to access the private rental market through a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). Social housing is delivered, allocated, and managed by the Local Authorities with funding from the national government. Accessing social housing is based on an 'Assessment of Need' which takes into account income, right to reside, local connection, alternative accommodation available, and rent arrears. Following the economic crisis, construction of social housing abruptly stopped for several years resulting in a severe shortage and long waiting lists (currently 59 000 people on waiting lists).

Emergency accommodation is delivered, managed, and funded (10%) by Local Authorities with the remaining 90% being funded by national government. When emergency accommodation is full, hotels are used for the overflow. This is a costly system and in 2020 exchequer funding for emergency accommodation reached a high of EUR 271 million.

National Strategy

Ireland's national strategy, 'Housing for All' (published September 2021), is a combined housing and homelessness programme to 2030. It aims to address the dual challenge of low housing supply and low affordability across all tenures with the stated goal that 'Everyone in the State should have access to a home to purchase or rent at an affordable price, built to a high standard and in the right place, offering a high quality of life.' It specifically targets:

- the lack of supply in the private sector for purchase and rent;
- the lack of social housing;
- housing affordability;
- high building costs;
- vacant housing stock;
- the need to bring stock up to modern environmental standards.

The plan takes a 'whole of government' approach, with actions to be taken by government departments, local authorities, state agencies and others. By 2030, the goal is to build 90 000 social homes, 36 000 affordable homes, 18 000 cost rental homes, and 170 000 private homes.

While this is a full-scale housing strategy, 'Pathway 2' of the strategy, 'Eradicating Homelessness Increasing Social Housing Delivery and Supporting Social Inclusion' includes the objective to eradicate homelessness by 2030 in line with the Lisbon declaration. There are 18 distinct actions under this objective, including:

- the expansion of Housing First and outreach services for rough sleepers;
- enhancement of family support, prevention and early interventions services;
- tenancy sustainment supports;
- development of a case management approach for homeless people;
- converting emergency accommodation to own-door permanent housing;
- incentivising the integration of one-bed housing units into new developments;
- the creation of a youth homelessness strategy.

Governance and accountability

Housing for All recognises the need for interagency supports to address the complex combination of social, health, and economic needs of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, in addition to their specific housing need.

There is high-level and ongoing political oversight of the Housing for All plan with a cabinet committee on housing chaired by the Prime Minister (the Taoiseach). Additionally, dedicated workstreams focus on specific areas of delivery such as investment, industry capability, and public service delivery (for example, sourcing the additional 27 000 construction workers needed to meet housing targets). Quarterly reports are published by the government with updates on progress.

The strategy provides for a new National Homeless Action Committee (NHAC), chaired by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage and comprises representatives from different government departments, agencies, and bodies. One of the main objectives of the NHAC is ensuring greater cross-government cooperation to better implement actions in Housing for All.

Finally, there is a strong project management approach to the Housing for All plan with a dedicated unit within the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), with responsibility for ongoing monitoring and oversight of the plan, as well as a Housing for All Project Management Office operating within the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Future challenges

To reach the strategy's goal, an average of 33 000 homes needs to be built every year. COVID-19 and its associated lockdowns hampered construction activity in 2020 and 2021. Inflation, shortages or delayed delivery of raw materials, along with substantial rises in construction input costs, remain a challenge.

This year, the government's target under Housing for All is 24 600 new homes. In the 12 months to the end of March 2022, a total of 22 219 new homes were completed. The Irish strategy is generally considered excellent on paper but, as with the Portuguese strategy, it is too early to pronounce it a success.

Portugal

The Portuguese national strategy was presented by Henrique Joaquim, National Coordinator of the National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People in Portugal.

The Portuguese context

Portugal traditionally has high levels of owner occupancy. The financial crisis of 2007/2008 had a significant and sustained effect on the country however with a drop in economic activity and an increase in unemployment. This led to low spending on housing and the expansion of the private rental market.

Data and definitions

Understanding the problem of homelessness starts with data, and Portugal thus instigated a national survey of homelessness three years ago. The survey is sent to 278 municipalities and, with a 95% response rate, provides a comprehensive picture of Portugal's homeless situation. With three sets of comparable annual data now available, they are in a position to be able to adequately assess the situation. In addition to the national surveys, local teams also carry out monthly counts.

Their counting methodology is based on ETHOS light categories 1 and 2, i.e. people living rough and people in emergency accommodation. People who are residing irregularly in Portugal are included on an equal basis, but the survey does not count people living temporarily with third parties (ETHOS category 8).

According to the 2020 survey, 8209 people were homeless in Portugal, of whom 3420 were roofless (ETHOS category 1) and 4789 were without a home (ETHOS category 2). Almost 79% of homeless people in Portugal are men. Most homelessness in Portugal is concentrated in the west and south of the country. The survey also collates data on the profiles of homeless people.

The next step is using this data to provide solutions for homeless people. To this end, a Digital Information System is currently being made operational. The system goes beyond data collection; it will be used by case managers to manage each person's individual plan and, if necessary, share the individual plan with other stakeholders if, for example, a homeless person moves cities.

National Strategy

Fundamentally, the Portuguese strategy represents a shift away from managing homelessness (mainly through the use of congregate accommodation) towards a housing- and person-centred approach. Assuming homelessness as a "complex social problem", the basic principles around which the strategy is designed are human rights, equality, non-discrimination, and dignity. The central vision is that no one is on the street for more than 24 hours for lack of alternative. Culturally this represents a major shift in the field of homelessness so ensuring this concept is accepted and implemented across Portugal's many municipalities and civil society stakeholders requires patience and education. This is an ongoing process and is being communicated through webinars and two training programmes – one on the national strategy's general approach and another on case management.

Governance and accountability

The Portuguese President, via civil society lobbying, was instrumental in getting homelessness on the government agenda. The national strategy retains a high level of governance through:

- the Interministerial Committee representing different ministries;
- GIMAE representing public and private non-profit organisations as well as the local homelessness units;
- the Advisory Committee representing entities or people with experience in the field.

A national executive manager is responsible for ensuring that the plan is implemented through the municipalities and encouraging the creation of specific homelessness units within the municipalities' local teams. The programme involves more than 35 public and NGO organisations covering social security, housing, health, justice, police, and migration services.

Implementation

The strategy focuses on the following three elements.

1. **Prevention:** The focus on prevention is a relatively recent change of direction. There are several pilot projects underway to define a framework and key indicators for prevention that target for example, young people in care, evictions, and health service discharges.
2. **Housing:** The model for this strategy is housing-led rather than Housing First. The aim is to create different models for different profiles for example small housing units with modular construction for max 10-20 people. So far, the strategy has led to the supply of 534 places in Housing First units and 432 shared apartments. The latter units, while being an improvement on the shelter model, are still transitional rather than a permanent solution. There is currently a call for tenders to provide five or six pilot projects of small units to cater to a maximum of 10-20 people e.g. individual or collective houses in which 2-3 people live together.
3. **Intervention:** Any plan must be person-centred, promoting an integrated intervention. Portugal is, for example, trying to guarantee each person a case manager working with case manager methodology. There are now 32 cities working with this approach and most homeless people in these cities have a case manager. Ongoing intervention when a homeless person moves into permanent housing is a means of preventing repeat homelessness and while efforts have been made in this regard, more needs to be done.

Funding

Projects are being funded by, among others, the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) to the tune of EUR 176 million, and mainly centre on investing in small housing units for a maximum of 15-20 homeless people.

Future challenges

The Portuguese strategy faces several challenges including rolling out the countrywide digital information system which is currently awaiting GDPR authorisation.

Prevention-oriented measures are a relatively new change of direction in Portugal and, while pilot projects are underway in this area, there is still a lot of work to be done on preventing homelessness.

Also, an external evaluation system for the Portuguese strategy is being initiated and this must be put into operation before the current strategy ends in 2023.

Finally, the ultimate challenge to the Portuguese strategy is the lack of affordable and adequate social housing. Investment in social housing supply began in earnest two years ago but seeing the fruit of this investment takes time.

Final plenary

This discussion was moderated by Michele Calandrino, Team Leader Disability and Inclusion, DG EMPL, European Commission. He introduced the workshop moderators to present the highlights of their respective presentations and Q&A sessions.

Workshop highlights

Denmark, moderated by Freek Spinnewijn, Director of FEANTSA:

- Denmark's data collection is highly sophisticated;
- the focus is on homelessness as a 'complex social problem';
- state funding is being redirected from shelters to Housing First;
- buy-in from all stakeholders will drive policy forward;
- Denmark could be more ambitious regarding homeless migrants.

Ireland, moderated by Mike Allen, Director of Advocacy, Communications & Research at Focus Ireland:

- housing and homelessness are completely integrated;
- there is some risk in focusing so much on the housing aspect;
- housing cannot be left to the private sector alone;
- political will and public buy-in are strong;
- newly arrived non-EEA migrants may not be entitled to social welfare or social housing supports which means that routes out of emergency accommodation are limited for this cohort.

Portugal, moderated by Nicholas Pleace, Director of the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York, UK:

- Portugal's strategy is bold and ambitious;
- huge conceptual shift towards housing- and person-centred approach;
- disseminating the concept country-wide is an ongoing process;
- strategy integrates housing, health, social security, migration, police services;
- work to be done on integrating homeless migrants, particularly Roma.

Engagement

Mr Calandrino then initiated discussion about increasing engagement, both politically and among the wider population, on the issue of homelessness. There is wide discrepancy across EU states on where homelessness sits on the political and public agenda. In Ireland, for example, homelessness is seen as an extreme symptom of the wider housing crisis and is therefore very high on the public agenda.

Mr Calandrino then spoke about three of the main pillars that had emerged from the day's discussion:

1) Data and definitions

Comparing the three national strategies has demonstrated the importance of definitions and how they ultimately drive policy. We can see this in how the Danish and Irish strategies diverge due to their differing definitions with Denmark focusing more on social aspects and Ireland more on housing.

There is a lot of work underway regarding counting homeless populations and although there is still no EU-wide number, there is a lot of data out there. Two forthcoming initiatives include the pilot project on a European Homelessness Count (EUHC), requested by the European Parliament and the OECD work on a policy toolkit.

2) Funding

EU funding could be better used at national level. The Lisbon Declaration includes a commitment to ensure that we move forward on this front. Member States have the primary responsibility, under shared management, to design homelessness projects to be supported by EU funds. Nonetheless, the Platform will facilitate the exchange of information on funding opportunities and project design.

3) Mutual Learning

The presentations and discussion from this Mutual Learning Event have been very useful in eliciting the key points that will be part of the agenda going forward. Added to this, the conceptual framework presented by Professor Eoin O'Sullivan has provided a clear map of the dynamics of homelessness that can and should inform the creation of integrated policies on prevention, entry, exit, governance, and evaluation.

Consensus brings continuity

Mr Calandrino ended by stating the need for deep and robust consensus on solutions to homelessness across government and civil society. Strategies with a high degree of consensus can survive both changes in personnel and external shocks. In this way, momentum can be maintained in the fight to eradicate homelessness and reach the goals of the Lisbon Declaration.

Conclusion

This Mutual Learning Event on the Design of National Strategies to Fight Homelessness and Housing Exclusion took place exactly one year after the signing of the Lisbon Declaration. By focusing on the national strategies of three countries – Portugal, Denmark, and Ireland – similarities and differences in policy development and implementation were elicited. Themes emerged through the workshops providing not just a snapshot of the strategies presented, but also a learning path for future Mutual Learning Events.

Defining, collecting, and acting on data: The issue of definitions of homelessness across Europe was discussed at several points and is likely to continue well into the future due to the complexity of finding agreement across 27 Member States. In just the three national strategies presented, definitions around homelessness already contained wide variation. The inclusion – or not – of migrants (ETHOS category 5) and people living with third parties (ETHOS category 8), for example, leads to vastly different figures.

Similarly, robust data methodology is crucial to intelligent policy design as well as to evaluation and assessment. In particular, understanding the different data outcomes that result from ‘point-in-time’ versus ‘over-time’ data collection is important for creating good policy and merits further discussion. More EU-based research is needed because, although there is an abundance of studies coming from the US for example, these are not necessarily applicable to the EU context.

Unlocking housing-led policies via supply: A unifying factor in the three country strategies is that they are all moving towards Housing First or housing-led policies to varying degrees. There are elements of these policies that could be replicated across other Member States, while bearing in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. The primary challenge to this change in policy direction, which again applies in all three countries as well as other Member States, is supply of affordable and secure housing.

Accessing EU funds: Uptake of EU-level funding to address homelessness is low. Greater understanding of how and when EU instruments can be used is required. For example, while infrastructure projects are an obvious target for EU funding, there was less certainty among participants about how to use EU funds for projects that integrate support and housing. There is huge opportunity in this area and further work is needed to bridge the gap.

Evaluating policy impact: Despite the excellent national strategies presented by the three countries, measurable outcomes remain elusive, partly because the strategies are still in their early stages. Fundamentally, the question of how success is measured remains open with, for example, some countries counting reduction in rough sleepers and others counting reduction in long-term homeless people. Thus, outcome measurement will remain on the agenda for some time to come.

The fruitful discussion from this first Mutual Learning Event will feed into future meetings and it is hoped that the policymakers and civil servants present will share the ideas and lessons learnt with colleagues in their respective Member States.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion
Directorate D – Jobs, Skills and Social Policies
Unit D.3

Contact: Maria Iles

E-mail: EMPL-HOMELESSNESS-PLATFORM@ec.europa.eu
European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

Manuscript completed in September 2022.

This document has been prepared for the European Commission however it reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Commission is not liable for any consequence stemming from the reuse of this publication. More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://www.europa.eu>).

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

© European Union, 2022

The reuse policy of European Commission documents is implemented based on Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39).

Except otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC-BY 4.0) licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated.

For any use or reproduction of elements that are not owned by the European Union, permission may need to be sought directly from the respective rightholders.