



A close-up portrait of an elderly woman with grey hair, looking slightly to the right. Her hands are clasped in front of her chest. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of her skin and the texture of her dark, knitted sweater. The background is dark.

CHAP. 1

HOMELESSNESS
IN EUROPE

THE STATE
OF PLAY

9

1.

AN UNCERTAIN OUTLOOK

The economic and social effects of the pandemic are being exacerbated by the current steep rise in energy and consumer goods prices. Lurching from one crisis to the next, the living conditions of the most disadvantaged households have worsened significantly over the past few years. For many working class households and a growing number of middle class households, who are facing both increasing poverty and widespread rent increases, being able to cover housing costs is no longer a given. Unfortunately, according to IMF reports¹, the outlook for the future is no better: while inflation is expected to fall gradually over the coming years, it will only be reined in by a recession, which may also entail hardship and social injustice.

The political response to the ever-rising number of homeless people across the majority of European countries is very often inadequate. It is widely felt that the crisis management approach to homelessness has its limitations, and that the new forms of “governance” heralded at the outset of the pandemic have not yet seen the light of day. The current situation is exacerbating the causes of homelessness, yet structural solutions are rarely proposed. There is however growing awareness of how bad the situation is, with homelessness now high on the EU policy agenda. The initiatives launched as part of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness send a positive signal.

Support services struggling with the energy crisis and inflation

Inflation and the increase in energy costs have also seriously impacted services that support people facing homelessness and housing exclusion. In **Germany**, accommodation services, food banks, and debt management services are facing an increase in the number of service users². According to a study by the German Parity Welfare Association, between 21 September and 17 October 2022, 60% of the support service providers surveyed were expecting their electricity bill for winter 2022-2023 to be 1.5 to 2 times as high as the year before, and 25% were expecting their heating bills to triple. No less than 46% of providers in the study said that they were at risk of having to limit their services³. While financial aid was provided to hospitals and other healthcare services⁴, no particular relief measures have yet been adopted (as of December 2022) for homelessness services (beyond the general price caps on electricity and gas applicable to the entire population). In **France**, the supported housing sector is also in difficulty. According to Unaf (France's union for supported housing), the energy price hikes are jeopardising the viability of some providers, despite various "price caps"⁵ being applied. In **Italy**, homelessness organisations and charities have stated that increased energy costs have had a significant impact on their budgets. In a study carried out by fio.PSD (the Italian Federation of Bodies for the Homeless) in August 2022, half of respondents said that these costs had increased by more than 30%⁶. The hike in expenditure has led to some reductions in services, particularly low threshold services such as showers and laundry. At the same time, more than half the organisations surveyed stated that they had seen an increase in the number of people accessing their services (particularly low threshold services, but also financial assistance for rent, energy bills, and medical costs). In November 2022, the Italian government approved an exceptional payment of EUR 50 million to help third sector organisations meet their increased energy costs⁷.

2. UKRAINIAN REFUGEES: ACCOMMODATION SYSTEMS UNDER PRESSURE

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched what Vladimir Putin called "a special operation" in Ukraine, leading to a mass exodus of civilians to the European Union. To address this influx of Ukrainians fleeing the conflict, the European Commission proposed the activation from

2 March 2022 of Directive 2001/55/EC, established following the war in former Yugoslavia and never before applied. This directive, adopted by the Council on 20 July 2001, not only provides for "minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of dis-

placed persons” but also “measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof”⁶. The decision “establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine”⁹ was adopted on 4 March, following approval of the proposal debated by the Justice and Home Affairs Council, which brought together ministers from all EU Member States. This Council stated that “as of 1 March 2022, more than 650,000 displaced persons had arrived in the EU from Ukraine through Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania”¹⁰. There is no specific method defined for distributing refugees among countries, but the 2001 Directive set out an obligation for cooperation among Member States to facilitate their protection, and the transposition into each country’s law of measures that are at least as favourable as those set out in EU level provisions. These measures, which apply for one year on a renewable basis to any person who fled Ukraine after 24 February 2022, include: right to residency, access to the labour market, access to housing, and social and medical assistance¹¹.

On 8 March 2022, the European Commission adopted the Cohesion’s Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE) proposal, ratified by the Council and the Parliament on 6 April¹². This initiative aims to guarantee countries receiving Ukrainian refugees sufficient resources to address the growing need for housing, education, and healthcare. Building on the steps taken by the Commission in the aftermath of the pandemic, this provision enables rapid allocation of available resources to support people fleeing the war in Ukraine by introducing flexibility into the Cohesion Policy rules. Furthermore, it provides that Member States can fund activity using the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) fund, one of the EU’s biggest public investment programmes post pandemic¹³. On 19 October 2022, to further

fast-track support for Member States to help integrate refugees, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament ratified the proposal for flexible assistance for territories (FAST-CARE)¹⁴, which offers additional flexibility for investment under the Cohesion Policy. These legislative provisions have enabled the European Commission to re-allocate EUR 17 billion to support Member States that have committed to receiving and assisting Ukrainian refugees¹⁵.

Despite the unequivocal response of by the European community, cohesion among Member States on the stance to take, and the calls for solidarity by the Council of the European Union, the number of refugees welcomed and the reception systems employed have varied widely from country to country. A large amount of leeway has been given to Member States around transposition of the directive into each country’s legislation¹⁶.

Due to its geographical and political proximity to Ukraine, Poland remains the country that has received the most Ukrainian refugees. More than 1.4 million people had registered for temporary protection in Poland by 12 September 2022. 92% were women, mainly with children (58%), 15% were travelling with a person aged over 60, and 22% were travelling with a person with a disability. Many of those fleeing gave up on finding refuge in another EU Member State, given the risks and resources required to continue travelling, but also because of the exemplary way the Polish people have responded. Public participation has been remarkable, particularly in terms of the housing offered by individuals to mitigate the authorities’ difficulties in sourcing emergency accommodation. Now, however, we can see this individual support running out of steam, and housing is being provided more in the form of rented accommodation (44%) and shared multi-unit buildings (13%). Just 20% of refugees are currently staying with volunteer hosts. Access

to housing remains a critical need, on a par with financial support and labour market access, with the medium- to long-term goal being integrating refugees and giving them independence¹⁷. The search for appropriate housing solutions therefore remains a fundamental issue, as the social and psychological benefits of adequate housing are clear¹⁸. At the same time, the financial aid granted to Polish households hosting refugees has been considerably reduced. The initial payment of PLN 40 (EUR 8.50) per day per person, paid by the Polish government for a maximum of 120 days, and extended for two months from April 2022, benefited close to 1.4 million refugees. This amounted to an overall estimated cost of more than PLN 1.5 billion (EUR 320 million). It is now only being paid to vulnerable individuals. Alongside this change, refugees in employment and living in shared multi-unit buildings are legally obliged to pay up to 50% of their living costs as of March 2023, with full costs payable by the end of 2023¹⁹.

Another country that has made a massive contribution to receiving Ukrainian refugees is the **Czech Republic**. By the end of August 2022, there were more than 300,000 refugees in the **Czech Republic**, making it the EU Member State with the highest number of refugees *per capita*. Half of those fleeing the conflict were hosted by citizens, while the rest were given non-residential accommodation (hotels and hostels: 30%) and rented housing (private and social: 20%). As they cannot access the national benefits system, beneficiaries of temporary protection get a specific allowance, which does not enable them to fully meet their needs if they are not in a position to find work. Refugees from ethnic minorities, particularly the Roma community, are without a doubt the most vulnerable group; they are often housed in camps for refugees or temporary accommodation structures. Voluntary sector commentators recognise the significant voluntary efforts of civil society

in transporting and distributing humanitarian aid, through which more than CZK 4 billion (EUR 168 million) was raised in six months. However, they are now concerned about the lack of material and human resources, which could lead to feelings of injustice among some disadvantaged Czech citizens around what they perceive as preferential treatment. According to stakeholders on the ground, the massive influx of refugees has destabilised the support system for people who are homeless, although it is too early to measure its impact on social and public services. At the same time, there is unrest among a section of the population in the context of rising energy and common consumer goods prices, and an ever-increasing number of people resorting to food banks and social protection services²⁰.

In **Germany**, no less than 1,015,150 Ukrainians were recorded in Germany's Central Register of Foreign Nationals by the end of October 2022. Ukrainians accounted for 57% of those registered that year²¹. Entry of Ukrainians into Germany is regulated by Article 24 of Germany's Residence Act. These refugees, who did not go through the usual asylum seeker process, received residency status for one year, automatically renewable for two further six-month periods if required. Despite this distinction with other migrants seeking international protection, not all Ukrainian refugees are subject to the same residency rules. Those who arrived after 1 June 2022 are obliged to reside in the federal state in which they registered before resettlement in other communes and districts. This does not apply to those hosted privately, which amounted to half of those fleeing the war at the beginning of the conflict. The majority of Ukrainian refugees are living in the country's largest cities, Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Cologne and Frankfurt. Dispersal to these cities is dependent on the accommodation available, in accordance with Germany's Asylum Seeker Benefit Act (AsylbLG).

Despite the temporary regulation being favourable to Ukrainians and enabling them to access the same social rights as German nationals, including as regards housing, the length of stay in initial reception accommodation (hotels, sports or cultural centres) tends to be long before sustainable accommodation is accessed. In fact, Ukrainian refugees face difficulties obtaining a rental contract and are largely dependent on the accommodation that local authorities are legally obliged to provide, with more and more having to resort to shared housing.

Due to the binding legislation voted in by the European Parliament, all EU Member States have, to various degrees, received Ukrainian refugees in accordance with the rules around subsidiary protection. While several issues have arisen through this unconditional reception of refugees, housing is unquestionably one of the major challenges. EU funds have been made available to help Member States accommodate these refugees in the best possible conditions, and governments have been able to find and subsidise private accommodation (such as hotels) on a massive scale. Despite this, governments have struggled to adequately stretch the existing housing supply. Furthermore, as highlighted by the OECD in a memorandum summarising the policy decisions made regarding accommodation²², Member States have come up against completely different problems when looking for longer-term housing solutions for refugees.

Several countries – particularly **Germany, Greece, Ireland, Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden** – have used existing centres for asylum seekers. However, given the lack of available places, and in order to be able to continue receiving refugees from other countries, several specialised accommodation centres have also had to be set up. In February 2022, **Poland** opened eight new reception centres along its border to receive Ukrainian refugees. This measure was quickly extended,

with extra centres set up throughout the country, especially in Warsaw and Krakow. Some countries have resorted to using hotels, hostels, and even schools to provide shelter for refugees. Emergency solutions have also been found by using cruise ships, containers, tents, and mobile hangars. In the absence of appropriate buildings, these places, which are normally meant for very short stays, are frequently being used to house entire families for long periods. In general, these measures that favour “privileged” refugees have often resulted in the already weakened systems for accommodating vulnerable people becoming overstretched.

Alongside this – in an incredible wave of solidarity – a large proportion of Ukrainian refugees have been housed by their compatriots who already have accommodation or by individuals on a voluntary basis. To mitigate the financial burden on host families, financial support for providing accommodation was introduced in some countries – including **Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the United Kingdom, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic**. In **Belgium**, those offering accommodation to refugees can give them a rental contract if they are working or receiving a welfare benefits. “Solidarity housing” does however require a framework and regulation: to facilitate contact; to organise the dispersal of refugees based on the features of the housing offered; and to avoid risk of exploitation and human trafficking, particularly of a sexual nature. However, these initiatives are no more than stop-gap measures. There is a need to find long-term solutions given that the war shows little sign of ending soon.

In several European countries, specific financial assistance has now been reduced to encourage refugees to integrate into the rental market. Support for housing or for resettlement is often offered to those accessing the private rental market. This can be targeted or be part of the

minimum welfare benefits allocated to all residents. In **France** and **Ireland**, information is available to help beneficiaries of temporary protection in their search for housing. In **Spain**, funding is available to hire a broker or estate agent. Nonetheless, this transition towards renting apartments – both private and social – is putting pressure on an already oversubscribed market. Furthermore, difficulties in accessing housing can be exacerbated for refugees due to their lack of familiarity with the language and the local rental market, inadequate income, or

the inability to produce the documents required by landlords. This is not to mention the discriminatory behaviour and negative bias against foreigners on the part of landlords at times.

All of these factors point to a worrying increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion in the years to come. This trend has been worsening over recent decades and the available data still struggle to provide the full picture.

3.

895,000 HOMELESS PEOPLE IN EUROPE: STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF HOUSING EXCLUSION

Housing exclusion is difficult to gauge and some believe that measuring its true extent in Europe is impossible²³. There are two obstacles to understanding it. The first – and indeed the most important – is the lack of available data. Local and national level statistical studies are being developed but their geographical reach does not currently allow for a complete mapping of the homeless population on a European scale. What's more, the counts undertaken can usually only cover a fraction of housing exclusion situations, as a large proportion of those affected fly under the radar of the data collection instruments. The second obstacle, more methodological in nature, relates to how the data produced is not comparable. The definitions used, the survey methods, the quality and the reliability of the data are all factors that complicate attempts at comparative analysis and data organisation. The categories can differ widely from one country to another; the

figures can relate to people, households, accommodation sites, or administrative processes; the surveys can consist of a snapshot of the situation at a given moment (stock) or data collection over a longer period (flow); and the methods and their robustness can vary widely (night counts, data accumulation, sampling, extrapolation, etc.).

A question of definition

Among the methodological issues raised, the primary problem is the disparity in definitions used to qualify situations of housing exclusion. This problem is all the more delicate because these situations vary considerably from one country to the next and the same term can describe very different realities. These ambiguities can be observed through the administrative categories

used by Member States. Currently, 20 EU Member States have an official definition to serve as a reference point for policy strategies. However, given the specificity of each Member State's socio-economic context, and the varying levels of interest among governments in the issue of housing exclusion, the living conditions covered by these definitions do not completely overlap. In Italy for example, only people living rough or in hostels are considered officially homeless, while in Romania the national definition also includes people staying in hospitals and prisons due to a lack of housing, those at risk of eviction and those living temporarily with friends or family²⁴. Alongside these national definitions used by state-level statistics institutes, there are a variety of categories used in academic research and

service provider surveys. While they may share common characteristics, their data collection tools are also relatively unique, with each one designed to take account of specific situations.

Some data collection methodologies use categories explicitly inspired by the typologies developed by FEANTSA, while others use statistical classifications that maintain some overlaps with these typologies. In all cases, ETHOS²⁵ and ETHOS Light²⁶, developed to cover a wide range of housing exclusion situations²⁷, can quite easily be superimposed onto the different classifications in use. However, they do not always fully correspond and transposing the categories in ETHOS/ETHOS Light requires, in most cases, a certain number of simplifications.

ETHOS LIGHT**EUROPEAN TYPOLOGY OF HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION**

Very uneven results

The surveys carried out across Europe show broad disparities in their results. While some of these disparities can be put down to the objective differences in each country's context, the inconsistent results are largely owing to the disparity in resources allocated to data collection. Not to mention the fact that homeless people are not taken into account in the same way across Europe. In reality, only a handful of countries' surveys attempt to cover the full range of living situations listed by the ETHOS typologies (surveys from **Belgium, Denmark, Finland**, and **Sweden** are among the most comprehensive). Naturally, the majority of surveys focus on the most obvious forms of housing exclusion (ETHOS Light 1 and 2). "The more visible the [housing exclusion] situation (e.g. living rough, living in emergency shelters, etc.), the higher the probability of that condition being defined as homelessness"²⁸. Also included on a relatively systematic basis are people in specific accommodation for vulnerable and homeless groups (Ethos Light 3): homeless hostels, temporary accommodation, transitional accommodation, etc. However, this category is not as uniform as it might seem. Some countries expand it to include refuges for victims of domestic violence, while others include reception centres for asylum seekers²⁹. The most difficult situations to recognise and identify as housing exclusion are generally the least likely to be counted (ETHOS Light 4, 5, and 6). This is particularly true for people who, through lack of housing, are staying temporarily with friends or family (ETHOS Light 6). In addition to the methodological difficulties, several factors related to national context can probably explain this state of affairs. Recognising and accounting for these categories also undoubtedly leads to deeper questions about

how social inequalities are produced – questions which few governments seem prepared to ask. "Wider definitions of homelessness are likely to incorporate populations who tend not to have high and complex needs, such as severe mental illness, nor to exhibit behaviours that include criminality and addiction, and whose main characteristic is poverty. If homelessness is not just about individual pathology, but may sometimes have purely structural causes, that raises some very uncomfortable questions about the nature of society"³⁰.

Cataloguing and organising the data

The data presented in the following table were selected based on three criteria: the reliability of the methodology used, the geographical coverage, and the date of the survey. As far as possible, preference was given to statistics from official or research institutes whose results are approved by the authorities. For surveys with detailed results, the data on each housing exclusion situation covered were reorganised to comply with the ETHOS Light categories. When the situation in which a person found themselves could not be precisely determined, the data was considered to fall under several categories³¹. Also of note is that living situations not described by ETHOS Light were grouped under the category "Other". While the data were reorganised in as rigorous a manner as possible, the exercise led by necessity to multiple reductions. The table does not therefore claim to reproduce the complexity of all housing exclusion situations in each Member State.

The surveys were organised in terms of their methodology and their date. Three types were identified: point-in-time counts (blue), data col-

lection carried out over a long period (green), and outdated surveys or ones with unreliable data (yellow). Results from the third type of survey were not integrated into the general table. To be prudent, surveys whose data collection period was difficult to determine were classified under the second type. This is particularly the case

for national censuses for which the date on which the data was extracted was clear but the recording period was not. Also included in this second category were ad hoc counts, which do not classify results in terms of living conditions (this only relates to statistics produced as part of the Dutch census).

COUNT TYPES**CLASSIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE METHOD USED AND QUALITY OF DATA COLLECTED**

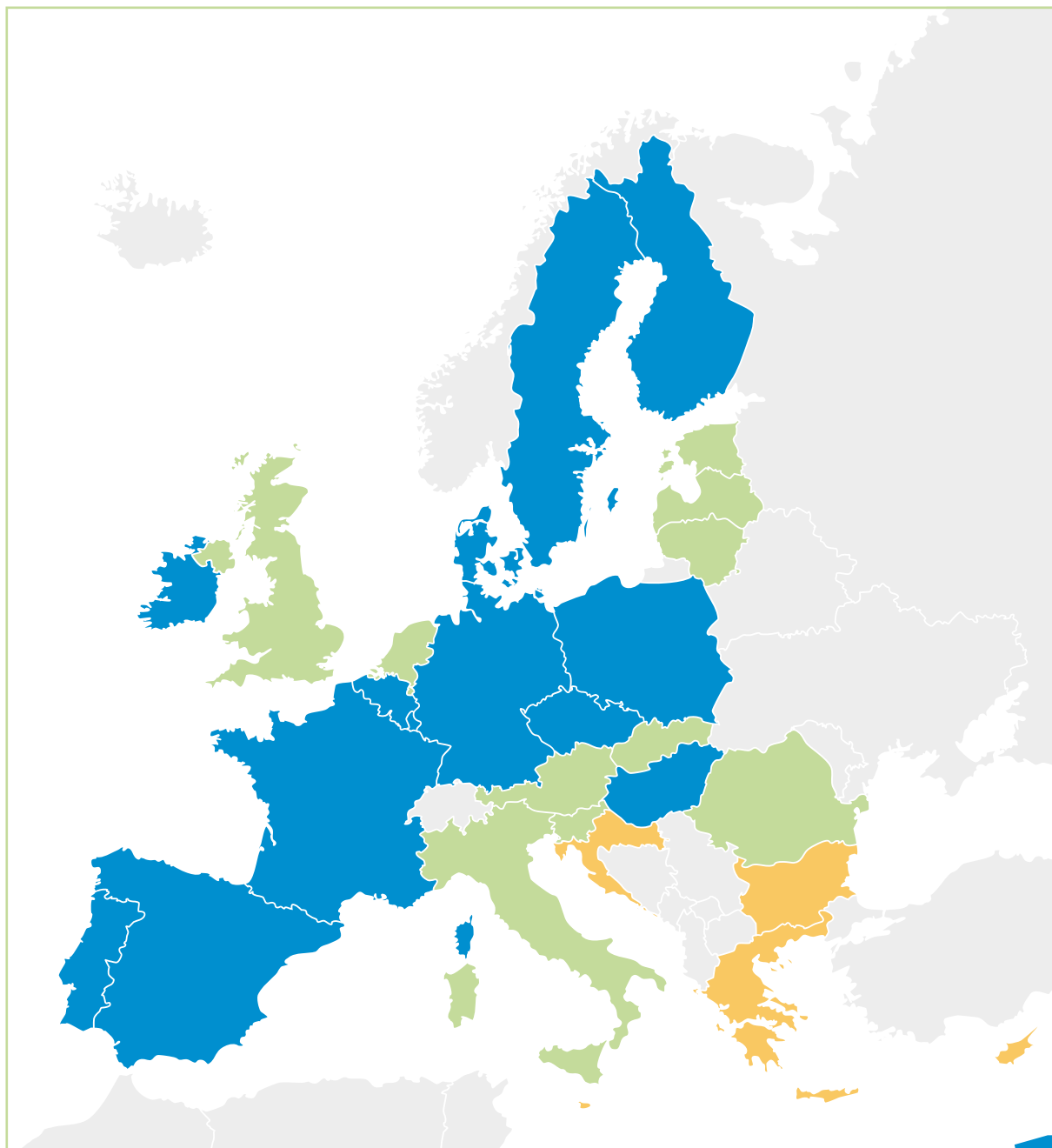
Point-in-time counts




Administrative data (flow) / Regardless of categories



Dated or insufficiently robust surveys



DATA ON HOUSING EXCLUSION**STATISTICS FROM RECENT SURVEYS, COUNT TYPES, AND DETAILS BY ETHOS LIGHT CATEGORY**

Country	Date	Method	Period	Description
 Germany	2022	Count Survey	1 night 1 week	The census, which covers people in temporary accommodations, is supplemented by an extrapolation of the results of a local count of people sleeping rough and people staying with third parties
 Austria	2020	Recording	1 year	Data are collected on people who are recorded as homeless in the central population register and on those who are reported by some of the accommodation services during the year
 Belgium	2020 2021	Counts	1 night 1 week	The figures are based on a compilation of the results of point-in-time censuses (night counts and statistical collections) carried out in several cities and regions of the country
 Denmark	2022	Count	1 week	The biennial national questionnaire survey covers homeless people who are known to accommodation centres, social services, local authorities and non-governmental organisations
 Spain	2022	Count Extrapolation	6 weeks	The data collected concerns a representative sample of adults who are homeless and users of temporary accommodations and social restaurants located in major cities
 Estonia	2017	Recording	1 year	The figures recorded annually refer exclusively to homeless people who are not registered as having a formal address and who make use of the services of temporary accommodation
 Finland	2022	Count	1 night	The census consists of a compilation of data collected by municipalities from social assistance registers and from agencies responsible for processing applications for rental housing
 France	2021	Count	1 night	The data provides information on places in temporary accommodation and housing (night shelters, integration and stabilisation centres)
 Hungary	2022	Count	1 night	The annual questionnaire survey makes it possible to reach a proportion of rough sleepers and beneficiaries of emergency accommodation and temporary shelters
 Ireland	2022	Count	1 week	The figures produced monthly by local authorities refer to the number of homeless people using temporary accommodation financed by the state
 Italy	2021	Recording	1 year	The data obtained from the population census refer to persons registered with a virtual address at the municipal registration offices or at the homeless assistance services
 Latvia	2021	Recording	1 year	The annual statistics produced by the Ministry of Social Affairs cover people benefiting from accommodation in a night shelter or a homeless hostel

ETHOS 1	ETHOS 2	ETHOS 3	ETHOS 4	ETHOS 5	ETHOS 6	Other	Total	Source
32,467	48,440	129,705			52,033		262,645	Destatis GISS & Kantar Public
							19,912	Statistik Austria
1,187	2,320	3,193	671	2,551	2,608	994	13,524	Bruss'help Fondation Roi Baudoin
535	246	2,955	195		1,152	704	5,789	VIVE
4,508	11,498			5,478		7,068	28,552	Instituto Nacional de Estadística
	1,546						1,546	Sotsiaalministeerium
492		302	328		2,564		3,686	Asumisen rahoitus- ja kehittämiskeskus
	166,331	42,743					209,074	Fondation Abbé Pierre
1,649	5,295						6,944	Menhely Alapítvány
	11,632						11,632	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
							96,197	Istituto Nazionale di Statistica
	5,644						5,644	Labklājības ministrija

Country	Date	Method	Period	Description
 Lithuania	2021	Recording	1 year	The administrative data collected as part of the national census relate to people living in an emergency shelter or homeless hostel managed by social services
 Luxembourg	2017	Count	1 night	The figures collected from around twenty operating organisations refer to the number of homeless adults being cared for in the accommodation structures
 Netherlands	2021	Count Extrapolation	1 night	The census, based on a compilation of data from different social welfare registers, aims to estimate the number of people aged 18 to 65 who are recorded as homeless
 Poland	2019	Count	1 night	The questionnaire survey is based on a national intersectoral collaboration involving local authorities, police, homeless accommodation, associations and volunteers
 Portugal	2021	Count	1 night	The census, which is carried out at the level of each municipality by coordinating the various support services, covers rough sleepers and people in temporary accommodation
 Romania	2017	Recording	1 year	The figures represent the average number of homeless people accommodated monthly in night shelters and social rehabilitation centres managed by the authorities and associations
 UK	2019	Recording Extrapolation	1 year	The data are the result of a compilation of national estimates of the number of homeless households produced from different administrative sources
 Slovakia	2020	Recording	1 year	The annual administrative statistics on the use of social services include homeless people accommodated in night shelters, hostels and transitional housing
 Slovenia	2020	Recording	1 year	The figures, produced from the annual reports of social service providers, refer to homeless people receiving a supported accommodation service
 Sweden	2017	Count	1 week	The survey, which is conducted every six years, collects data from organisations that are in contact with homeless people who are adults or minors living without their parents
 Czechia	2019	Count Extrapolation	1 week	The census consists of an extrapolation of the results of surveys (night counts and statistical collections) carried out in a large part of the country's municipalities
 Europe		Compilation of counts		Total number of persons whose living situation is described by ETHOS categories 1, 2 or 3 and who have been covered by a point-in-time count (first type of survey)

ETHOS 1	ETHOS 2	ETHOS 3	ETHOS 4	ETHOS 5	ETHOS 6	Other	Total	Source
	4,009						4,009	Statistics Lithuania
	420						420	Ministère de la Famille, de l'Intégration et à la Grande Région
							32,000	Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
2,551	4,299	16,962	3,062	3,456			30,330	Ministerstwo Rodziny i Polityki Społecznej
4,873		4,731					9,604	ENIPSSA
	1,997	979					2,976	Ministerul Muncii și Solidarității Sociale
17,042	46,875	22,371		18,556	137,588		242,432	Crisis
	7,609	3,052					10,661	Ministerstvo práce, sociálních věcí a rodiny
		1,047					1,047	Inštitut Republike Slovenije za Socialno varstvo
990	4,921	8,154	2,447		5,726	11,031	33,269	Socialstyrelsen
8,892	2,716	8,045	4,172				23,825	Výzkumný ústav práce a sociálních věcí
	533,054							

Towards a European estimate

On the basis of this organisation of data, it is possible to provide an estimate of Europe's homeless population. To calculate this, statistics produced as part of the point-in-time counts (blue) covering people under ETHOS Light categories 1, 2, and 3 were added together. In total, 533,054 people were identified across 13 Member States through point-in-time counts carried out between 2017 and 2022. The combined populations of these 13 countries was 305,558,738 people (these figures are based on Eurostat data and correspond with the date of the survey). The homeless people counted therefore represented 0.174% of the total population of these countries. By applying this percentage to the total European population (i.e. 513,854,345 in 2022, according to Eurostat), the number of homeless people in Europe is estimated to be 896,430.

895,000

MINIMUM ESTIMATE
OF THE NUMBER OF ROUGH
SLEEPERS, PEOPLE STAYING
IN NIGHT SHELTERS AND IN
TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

Towards better surveying

This calculation gives an approximate idea of the minimum scale of the problem but in no way constitutes a method that establishes the real number of people who are homeless or facing housing exclusion in Europe. There are many biases and limitations inherent in this exercise. Despite the selection used, compiling data from surveys with such different methodologies is risky. While the counts carried out in some countries explicitly targeted "homelessness" and therefore cover a range of housing exclusion situations, the data produced in other countries were part of very broad data collections that only addressed homelessness indirectly. Furthermore, extrapolating local results to all of Europe is questionable at the very least because it presumes an even distribution of the homeless population. Until surveys are streamlined and methods across Europe are harmonised, there will not be reliable statistical data. In the meantime, this attempt can be viewed as an invitation to boost efforts to achieve reliable data. The intention is to lay the foundations for discussion and future work with the European institutions and Member States, particularly given the renewed EU-level commitment in this area.

4. SOME RECENT NATIONAL DATA

The lack of a home is a multi-faceted problem which is often difficult to convey. Measuring this lack raises numerous methodological and practical issues which each count tries to address based on local administrative and political specificities. While in some Member States, large-scale measurement tools have yet to be established, in others, statistical evaluation has been developed over a long period, and gradually perfected over the years. Whether through a national population census or through targeted surveys, quantifying the number of people experiencing homelessness or housing exclusion is an essential condition throughout Europe for deploying policy strategies that can adequately address the problem.

GERMANY

Since 2022, Germany has had a nationwide data collection system on homelessness. This data collection is carried out by Germany's Federal Statistical Office every year on 31 January. As the data collected only covers people in accommodation centres, the 2020 law regulating collection of data³² provides for *supplementary empirical surveys* to gain an understanding of other forms of housing exclusion. Research institutes – GISS and Kantar Public – were commissioned to carry out these surveys that will take place every two years, one week after the main data collection. The surveys consist of counting and surveying, in representative municipalities, people living rough and those living temporarily with third parties. Their total number in Germany will then be estimated by extrapolation. People whose data is recorded by both processes are identified and extracted from the total count. The combina-

tion of the two techniques provides for a reliable overall figure.

According to the data from the Federal Statistical Office, 178,145 people were staying in reception accommodation and official shelters on 31 January 2022³³. Taking into account those who are double counted (8,800), and the number of minors living with their parents (6,600), GISS and Kantar Public estimated the number of people living rough and in situations of hidden homelessness at 84,500³⁴. In total, there were reported to be at least 262,645 people experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion in Germany³⁵.

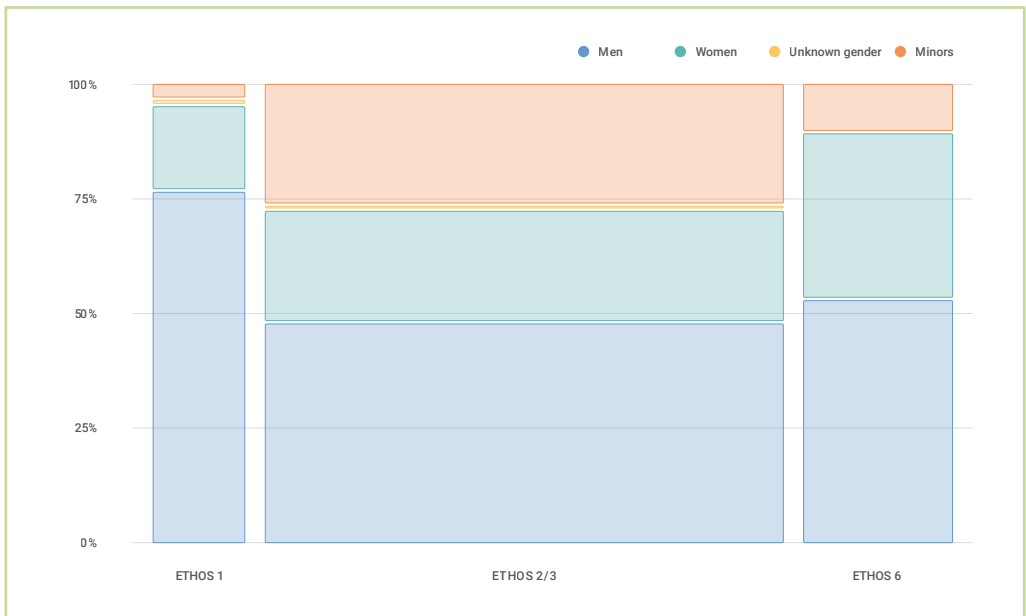
Looking just at minors within the three sub-populations (*figure 1*), it is clear that there were proportionally more young people in accommodation services (26%) and living with third parties (11%) than in public spaces (3%). Adult women, for their part, represented a proportionally larger share of those living temporarily with friends or family (36%) than those staying in accommodation services (24%) and those living rough (18%). Adult men were overrepresented in the public space (77%) and, to a lesser extent, among the sub-populations staying with third parties (53%) and in accommodation services (48%). In general, the living situation by age differed widely among the three groups: the average person sleeping rough is aged 44, i.e. 12 years older than the average person staying in an accommodation service and 10 years older than the average person staying temporarily with third parties.

More generally, analysis of the socio-demographic composition of the three sub-groups taken in isolation pointed to particular characteristics³⁶. Those who were forced to live rough or in makeshift shelters are, for the most part,

men aged between 30 and 50. They generally live alone and were either German nationals or from Eastern Europe. About two thirds of people staying in accommodation services were foreign nationals, often recognised refugees without a housing solution. Generally speaking, they were

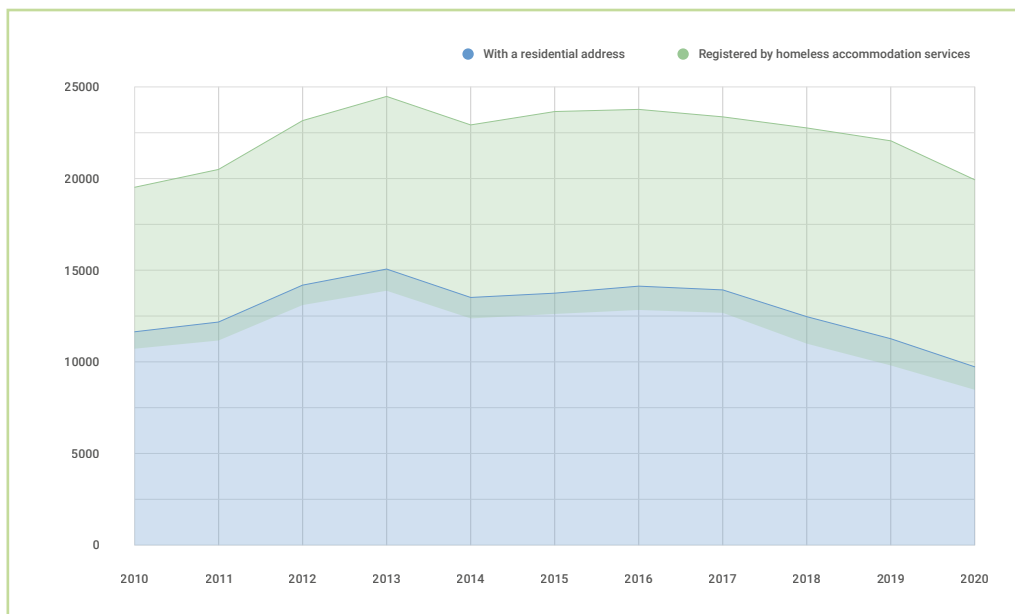
relatively young and mainly live in a household with their children. The sub-population living with friends or family includes a significant proportion of women. The majority of them were young German nationals.

FIGURE 1 - GERMANY
DISTRIBUTION BY GENDER AND AGE ACCORDING TO ETHOS LIGHT CATEGORY



Destatis / GISS & Kantar Public · own calculations

FIGURE 2 · AUSTRIA
CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE REGISTERED



Statistik Austria data

AUSTRIA

In Austria, the statistics mainly covered the number of people officially registered as homeless by the local authority. This status is granted to people who give the address of a third party or a support service³⁷. To consolidate the data collected on the basis of this indicator, Statistik Austria also relied in part on the statistics produced by temporary accommodation services. However, as not all services were taken into account, the data on user numbers are incomplete.

According to Statistik Austria, 19,912 people were registered as homeless in Austria during 2020³⁸. This figure derives from a compilation of the data collected via the two recording methods, correcting for double counting. The number of homeless people on the population register who gave

an address was 9,721 while 11,441 were recorded by homelessness services. Broadly speaking, there were far fewer people registered as homeless for the whole year (31%) than the number temporarily experiencing housing exclusion.

The number of people counted increased significantly year on year between 2010 and 2013. Since 2013, the figure has oscillated between 24,459 and 19,912 (*figure 2*). Between 2019 and 2020, the number of homeless people fell by 10% (2,126 people). This is one of the most significant drops in the past few years. A number of reasons may explain this trend. The restrictions put in place to contain the pandemic and the ensuing social repercussions (e.g. the temporary ban on evictions) may be one factor. Likewise, extending Housing First measures meant that a sec-

tion of the public who were usually included in counts were no longer deemed homeless. Those working on the ground nevertheless maintain that homelessness numbers should be closely monitored in the years to come, as they may well increase again given the current political and migration context.

The majority of those counted in 2020 were aged between 25 and 64 (70%). The proportion of those aged 65 and over was just 8%. As this age group was almost three times larger in the wider Austrian population (19%), this figure may indicate that homeless people on average have shorter life expectancies³⁹. Across those counted, there are significantly more men (about 69%) than women. The distribution of men and women across age groups, however, gives a more nuanced picture: while there are significantly more men (71%) than women aged over 18, the distribution is more balanced in those aged under 18 (47% female, 53% male)⁴⁰. Furthermore, more than half of all homeless people recorded were living in Vienna (58%). Regarding geographical distribution of the national population, homeless people were overrepresented in the country's biggest cities.

DENMARK

Since 2007, the Danish Centre for Social Science Research (VIVE) have carried out a national survey on homelessness every two years. The 2021 edition was carried over until 2022, due to the exceptional circumstances caused by Covid-19. The survey relies on massive participation from support services and local authorities who are invited, over a given week, to fill out a questionnaire for each homeless person with whom they are in contact. The services included are in a variety of sectors: in addition to accommodation centres and local authority services, rehab centres, psychiatric services, and several NGOs contribute.

A total of 5,789 people were counted in 2022⁴¹. Among them, 535 were living rough (9%), 248 were staying in night shelters (4%) and 2,955 were staying in hotels, homeless hostels, or transitional housing (51%). The survey also enabled a range of people to be included who, due to the lack of a housing solution, were staying in institutions (195 people: 3%) or with third parties (1,152: 20%), between 7 and 13 February 2022. Added to this were the 319 people who were in a situation other than those defined in the survey (6%) and the 385 people whose precise living conditions were unknown (7%).

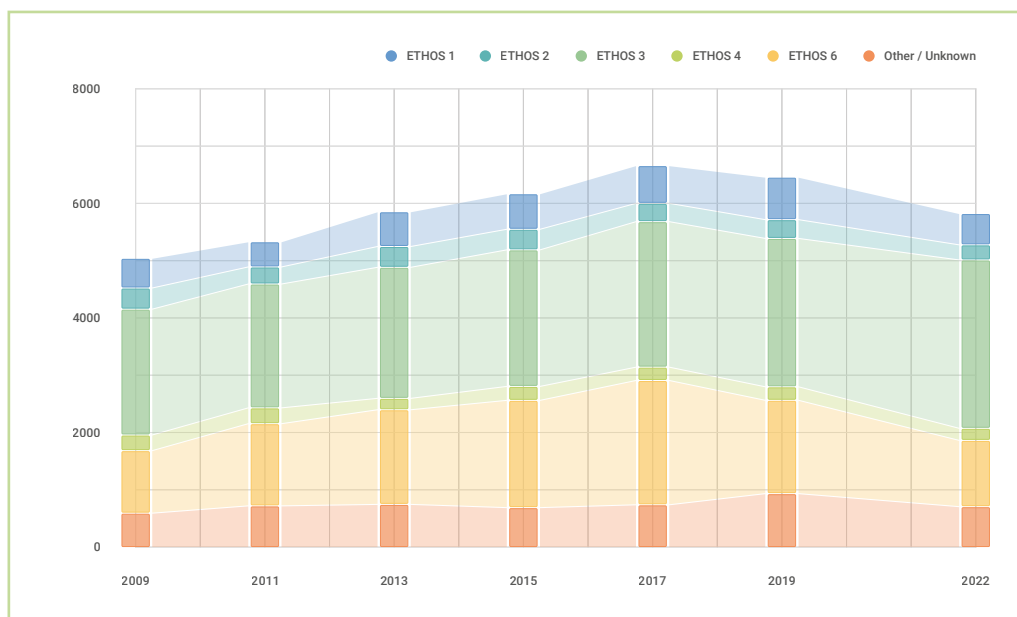
Between 2019 and 2022, the number of people experiencing homelessness fell by 10% (figure 3). This significant drop contrasted with the steady rise before 2017 when the total number of people counted reached 6,635. The drop was particularly steep in numbers of people living rough, i.e. 732 in 2019 compared to 535 in 2022 (-27%). Among the explanations put forward to account for this change was the recent increase in capacity in accommodation centres. The number of people accommodated in these services increased from 2,290 to 2,736 in three years. The last count also showed a reduction in the number of people forced to temporarily stay with friends or family (1,152 in 2022 compared to 1,630 in 2019, i.e. -29%). The general downward trend observed since 2017 was very likely owing to the country's various initiatives to combat homelessness in recent years, in particular its introduction of a Housing First approach⁴².

If we look at changes in the demographics of the homeless population, we can see that this downward trend was not evenly distributed. While the number of people aged under 24 years significantly decreased between 2019 and 2022 (-26%), the number of homeless people aged 60+ increased slightly (+9%). This difference can be explained by the fact that a number of local authorities implemented prevention policies

that specifically targeted young people⁴³. An analysis of the geographical distribution shows that the great majority of the Danish homeless population was concentrated in the large metropolitan areas and medium-sized cities. A quarter of people counted in 2022 were living

in Copenhagen (24%) and almost half were in the capital's wider region (44%). While the drop in number of people observed in Copenhagen between 2019 and 2022 was slight (-5%), the drop in Aarhus, the country's second-largest city, was significantly larger (-32%)⁴⁴.

FIGURE 3 - DENMARK
CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE COUNTED BY ETHOS LIGHT CATEGORY



VIVE data

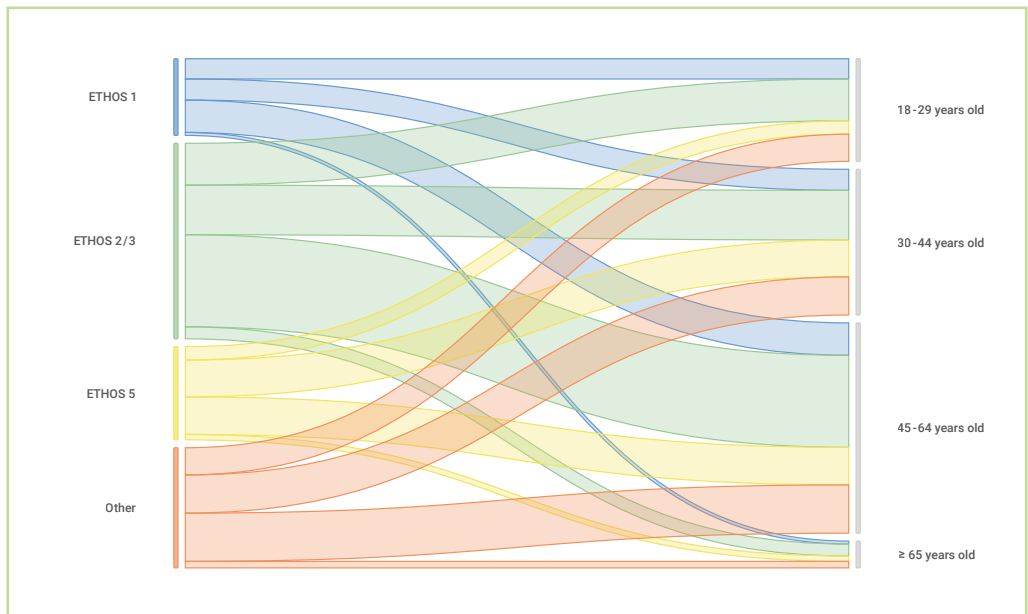
SPAIN

In 2022, 10 years after the previous study, Spain's National Statistics Institute (INE)⁴⁵ carried out a new survey on housing exclusion. In this count, anyone aged over 18 was considered homeless if they did not have access to housing that met generally accepted criteria of habitability from 3 February to 18 March. The survey consisted of detailed data collection via questionnaires given to a representative sample of people who frequented accommodation centres and soup kitchens in cities of over 20,000 people. The objective was not just to be able to estimate by extrapolation the number of homeless people in Spain, but also to identify their socio-demographic profile, living conditions, and their difficulties accessing housing.

According to the results of this study, Spain counted 28,552 homeless people, i.e. 24% more than in 2012. Of these, 4,508 were living rough (16%) and 5,478 were staying in makeshift shelters or squats (19%). The survey also showed the deployment of short- and medium-term accommodation solutions: at least 40% of all respondents stated that they were staying in accommodation services or shelters for homeless people (11,498).

The great majority of those surveyed, all of whom were experiencing homelessness or housing exclusion, were men (77%). While women remained in the minority, there was nonetheless an increase between 2012 and 2022 (23%, up from 18%). The average age of the population surveyed was 43. Relative to other age groups, respon-

FIGURE 4 - SPAIN
DISTRIBUTION OF ETHOS LIGHT CATEGORIES ACCORDING TO AGE GROUP



INE data

dents aged between 45 and 64 were particularly overrepresented (12,366 people, i.e. 43%). Some correlations could also be observed by cross-referencing people by living conditions and by age (*figure 4*). The proportion of people living rough was, for example, higher among those aged under 29 than among the total population (20%, compared to 16%). Conversely, people living rough were proportionally under-represented among those aged over 65 (11% compared to 16%). Furthermore, among foreign nationals who constituted about half of all respondents, 68% were under 45, whereas only 34% of the same age group were Spanish nationals⁴⁶.

The survey also enabled data to be collected on the amount of time spent homeless. 36% of people surveyed were homeless for at least one year, 27% for three years, and 40% for more than three years. The main sources of income for the homeless population were welfare payments (minimum income, unemployment benefit, or other types of payments), which 33% of people surveyed were receiving. Other income came from family sources (7%), work (7%) and NGO benefits (6%). No less than 30% of homeless people stated that they have no source of income at all⁴⁷. Regarding their health, 37% of respondents reported suffering from a chronic illness. Among these illnesses, the most frequently cited were psychiatric problems, which affect 9% of those surveyed. Depression also affected a much higher proportion of homeless people than the wider population 60% of respondents stated that they have symptoms of depression, compared with 13% of the national population aged over 15⁴⁸.

FINLAND

In Finland, the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) conducts a survey on housing exclusion every year⁴⁹. In 2022, 71% of Finnish cities and municipalities

(209 of 293) participated in the study by providing data sourced from social services, landlords, and bodies responsible for managing applications for rented housing. Of these, 96 stated that there were homeless people in their area.

On 15 November 2022, the day of the survey, ARA counted 3,686 homeless people, 7% fewer than in 2021. The data collected enabled a distinction between several types of homelessness, i.e. living rough or in emergency accommodation (492 people or 13%), staying in a dormitory or hostel for homeless people (302 people or 8%), staying in an institution due to lack of housing solution (328 people or 9%) and living temporarily with third parties (2,564 or 70%). The survey results also showed that the number of people without a home for more than one year fell by 14% (1,133 people in 2022, compared to 1,318 in 2021). Generally, homeless people are concentrated in the south of Finland, mainly in the greater Helsinki region where 42% of the population surveyed were living.

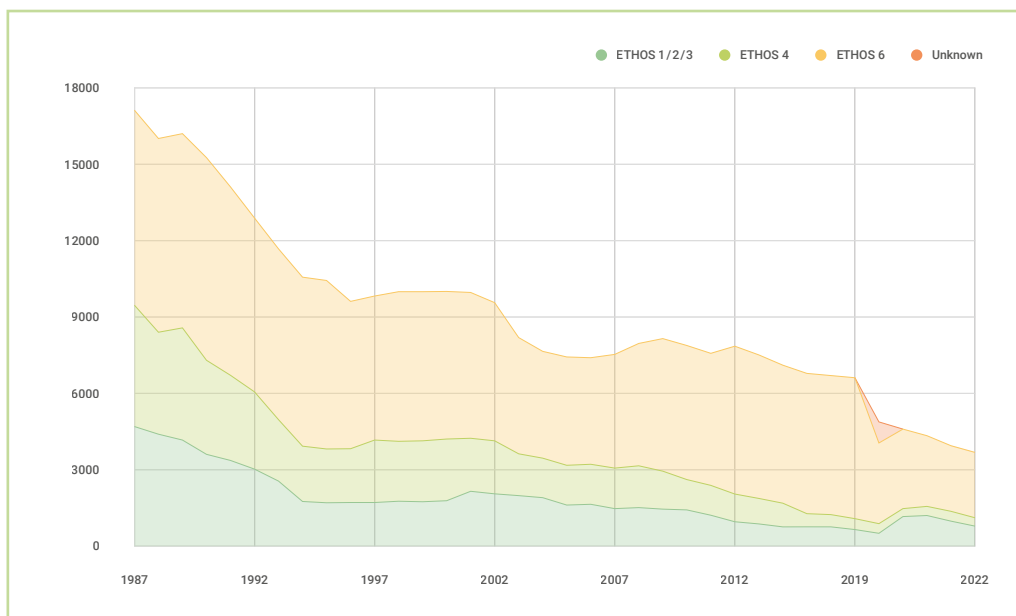
In 1987, there were more than 17,110 homeless people in Finland⁵⁰, a figure that has fallen drastically over the long term (*figure 5*). Successive counts have highlighted some significant variations, particularly an increase in numbers between 1996 and 2000, a probable consequence of the serious economic crisis experienced from the beginning of the 1990s. Overall, the statistical data demonstrate the effectiveness of the Finnish methods for eliminating homelessness and housing exclusion: for each survey carried out between 2010 and 2022, a fall in the number of homeless people was recorded.

Finland's success has been due to an integrated national strategy combining financial assistance, targeted support services, and developing the stock of accommodation for rent. Financial assistance is guaranteed by the welfare system which provides an allowance for people on low incomes that covers about 80% of housing

expenditure. An emergency welfare payment can supplement this allowance if it is insufficient. Targeted support is mainly based on the Housing First approach: support services provide housing to homeless people before any other form of medical or support intervention. This approach avoids the pitfalls that can occur when access to welfare assistance is conditional upon having an address. Finally, Finland has invested massively in housing specifically for homeless people, by both converting some existing shelters into residential units and by building new apartments. Between 2016 and 2019, grants from ARA led to the construction of 2,200 housing units.

While undeniably effective, the Finnish strategy also appears to be less costly as investments are largely offset by the reduced cost of support interventions: evaluations have shown annual savings in the order of EUR 9,600 to EUR 15,000 per person per year⁵¹. Furthermore, contrary to what has been seen in other countries, the support system for homeless people showed itself to be particularly resilient throughout the social and health crisis caused by the pandemic, mainly because so many vulnerable people were already housed and supported in self-contained units.

FIGURE 5 • FINLAND
CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE COUNTED BY ETHOS LIGHT CATEGORY



ARA data

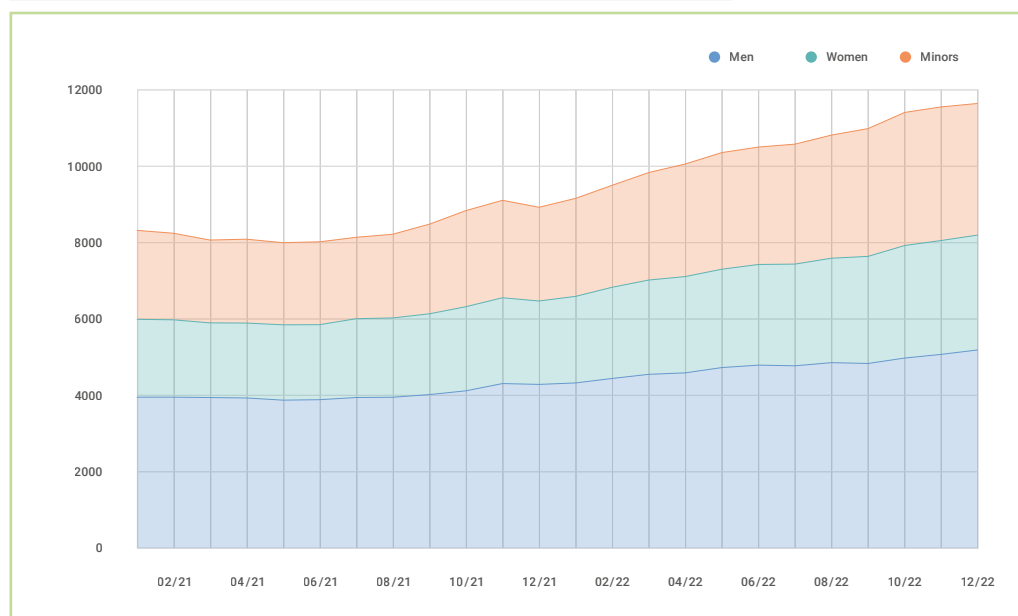
IRELAND

In Ireland, the Ministry of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) publishes a report every three months on the number of people staying in state-funded emergency accommodation. The data are extracted from the Pathway Accommodation & Support System (PATH)⁵², a centralised database enabling all service providers and local authorities to share information on management of service users and to follow, in real time, the occupancy rate of emergency accommodation. These statistics serve not just to measure changes in homelessness but to evaluate how the legislation and welfare assistance are being implemented.

During the week of 24 to 30 December 2022, 11,632 people stayed in emergency accommodation in Ireland⁵³. Of these, there were 5,571 single adults and 1,594 families that included 3,442 children. The geographical distribution of the homeless population was very unevenly spread: 72% of the people counted (8,376) were living in Dublin. Most of the adults staying in accommodation services were Irish nationals (4,971 or 61%). Of the other users, 1,826 people (22%) came from the European Economic Area or the United Kingdom and 1,393 (17%) came from third countries.

The statistics, extracted from the PASS system on a monthly basis, provide a longitudinal perspective on homelessness in Ireland (*figure 6*).

FIGURE 6 · IRELAND
CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE ACCOMMODATED BY SEX AND BY AGE



Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage data

According to the data collected, the number of people relying on accommodation services increased by 40% in the past two years. This drastic increase has not however been completely linear; the steep increase observed between January and December 2022 (+27%) far exceeded that recorded between January and December 2021 (+7%). While this acceleration may reflect how recent inflation has impacted the rental market, many observers claim that the explosion in homelessness in Ireland is due to more structural factors, i.e. a severe lack of social and affordable housing as a result of the budgetary restrictions introduced to mitigate the 2008 financial crisis. Beyond the general increase in numbers in emergency accommodation in 2022, the figures also show marked differences among sub-groups of beneficiaries. While the number of men increased from 4,323 to 5,186 (+20%) from January to December, the number of women increased from 2,264 to 3,004 (+33%). At the same time, the number of families in emergency accommodation increased at a much faster rate than that of single adults (+42% and +16% respectively).

Alongside the monthly statistical reports, the Ministry of Housing, Local Government and Heritage publishes quarterly reports detailing the different support services provided. These reports mainly give information on the number of people for whom a housing solution could be found, either at the moment they entered the system or when they left an accommodation service. In 2022, 5,472 adults were supported into a home (either managed by local authorities or on the private rental market), which represented a 5% increase on 2021. Furthermore, 240 rental contracts through Housing First programmes were concluded in 2022: the new national plan, launched at the end of 2021, provides for 1,319 such places to be established by 2026⁵⁴.

ITALY

At the end of 2022, Italy's National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) published the results of Italy's population count of 31 December 2021⁵⁵. For the first time, this edition provided information on three previously unstudied segments of the population: people living in institutions (educational establishments, hospitals and care institutions, retirement homes, prisons, etc.) people living in camps, and homeless people. The latter category was evaluated based on administrative criteria; a person was considered homeless or roofless if they were registered as such in the local authority register, and/or if their correspondence address was that of a charity.

In total, 96,197 people identifying as homeless were counted at the end of December 2021. According to stakeholders in the charity sector, this figure only very partially represented the extent of homelessness in the country. In particular, they highlighted the fact that this count, based exclusively on "administrative indicators", did not give the full picture of homelessness. Furthermore, these stakeholders were critical of the incomparability of the data with the results of previous surveys, due to the gap in methodologies used.

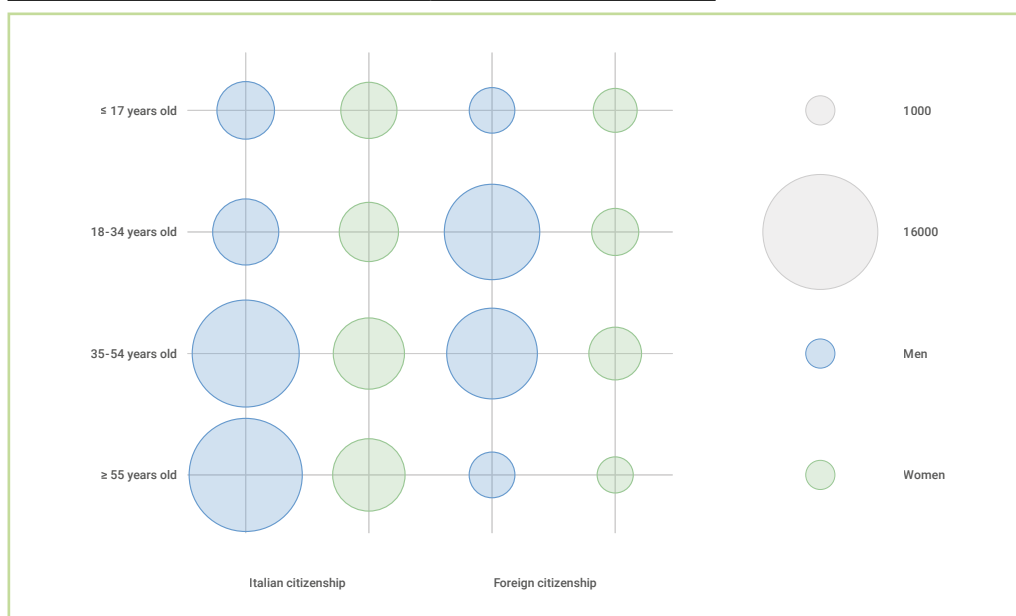
The majority of the homeless population counted was male (68%). The average age is 42 and 62% of people counted were over 35. The data collected by ISTAT enabled two separate cohorts to be distinguished: Italian citizens, and foreign nationals who made up 38% of the total number. The average age in the former cohort was 46, while it was just 35 in the latter cohort⁵⁶. Distribution by gender was also slightly different in the two groups. The ratio was 198 men for every 100 women among Italian citizens, and 262 men for every 100 women among foreign nationals. By stratifying the population according to gender, age, and citizenship (*figure 7*), at least two significantly large sub-groups emerged: Italian men

aged over 55 (15,760) and foreign national men aged between 18 and 34 (11,126). A range of nationalities were represented among foreign-born homeless people: 56% come from an African country, 22% from a European country, and 17% from Asia. The results also indicated a high number of people from war-torn or politically unstable countries such as Somalia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

The geographical distribution of the homeless population across Italy is very uneven. Although homeless people were counted in 2,198 municipalities, half of the homeless population was

concentrated in just six cities: Rome (23%), Milan (9%), Naples (7%), Turin (5%), Genoa (3%) and Foggia (4%). In Rome and Milan, the proportion of foreign nationals was almost 60%. The latter figure was significantly lower in Naples (9%), which counted a proportion of homeless women well above the national average (50%). The number of foreign nationals among the homeless population was particularly high in Calabria, especially in the town of San Ferdinando, known for its vast camp of tents and makeshift shelters. In this commune, foreign nationals accounted for 10% of the total population living in the municipality⁵⁷.

FIGURE 7 - ITALY
DISTRIBUTION OF PEOPLE COUNTED BY SEX, BY AGE AND BY CITIZENSHIP



National Institute of Statistics data

NETHERLANDS

Since 2009, Statistics Netherlands (CBS) has conducted an annual study to gauge the size and composition of the homeless population in the Netherlands. This estimation is calculated based on data sourced from different administrative databases: the national population register, social assistance register, and probation services register. The statistical method used, known as "capture-recapture", consists of cross-referencing different sources in order to determine the proportion of people who are homeless and facing housing exclusion within the national population. The extrapolation is based on the number of people aged 18 to 65 registered as homeless in these databases on a specific date, i.e. 1 January of the year in question. The results of the study therefore do not include people without residence permits as they, by definition, cannot be listed in the registers⁵⁸. The count covers several housing exclusion situations, i.e. living rough or in makeshift shelters, staying in emergency or transitional accommodation, staying temporarily with friends, acquaintances, or family.

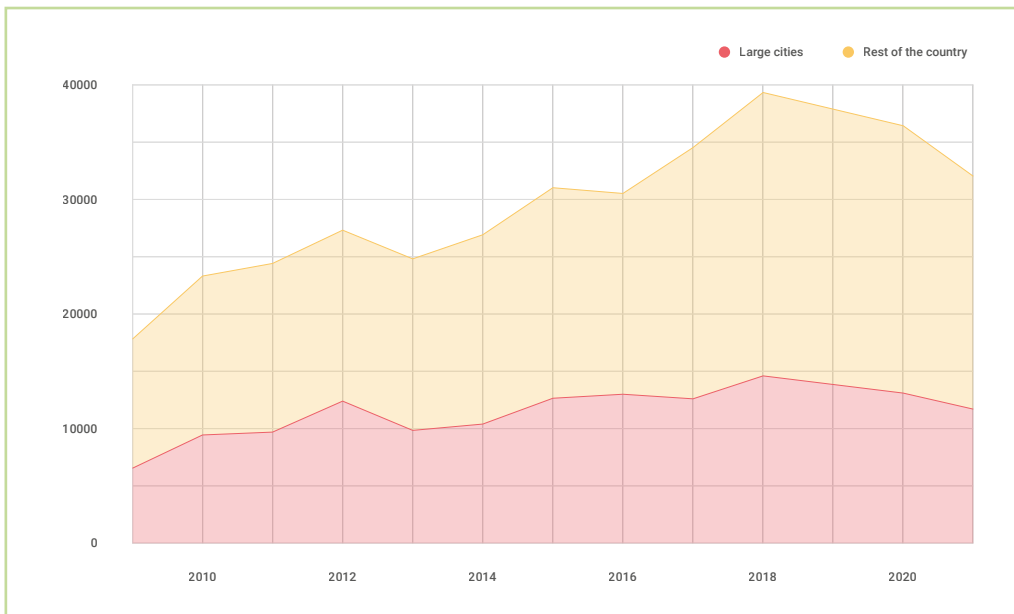
On 1 January 2021, Statistics Netherlands estimated that 32,000 people aged between 18 and 65 had no permanent residence in the Netherlands⁵⁹. Men made up the majority of this population (83%). Some 18% were under the age of 28, and 21% were over the age of 49. The study also shows that a significant proportion of homeless people have immigrant backgrounds (62%). Furthermore, it shows that 37% of people experiencing homelessness were living in one of the country's four largest cities: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht.

According to estimates, the upward trend of homelessness in the Netherlands is being reversed. The large increases seen between 2009 and 2018 (+121%) have been followed by a gradual fall in the number of homeless people over the

past few years (-19%). Between January 2020 and January 2021, the number fell from 36,400 to 32,000 people (-12%). This downward trend was particularly marked for people aged between 18 and 27 (-33% in one year). Statistics Netherlands highlighted that among the population of people experiencing homelessness, the proportion of those aged between 18 and 27 fell from 35% to 18% between 2016 and 2021⁶⁰. Regarding the geographical distribution of this population (*figure 8*), the data collected shows several variations over time. The percentage of people counted in the country's four largest cities went from 45% in 2012 to 37% in 2021.

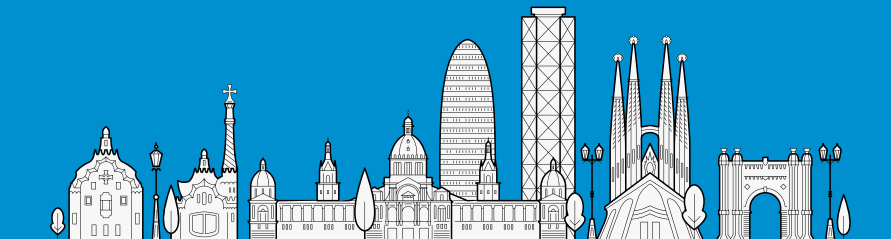
The Dutch Government put the reduction in the number of homeless people down to the political efforts of recent years; local authorities made 6,000 to 7,000 housing units available between 2020 and 2021, services to support those in rent arrears were expanded, and the number of evictions due to arrears was reduced⁶¹. However, organisations working with homeless people, and also the councils of some larger cities, have cast doubt on the results from the latest estimates. In October 2022, elected officials in Amsterdam and Utrecht called on the government to take immediate action on a situation they consider to be worrying⁶². Homeless charities were also categorical: all accommodation services have reported a steady flow of new users⁶³.

FIGURE 8 • THE NETHERLANDS
CHANGE IN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE COUNTED BY GEOGRAPHICAL AREA



Statistics Netherlands data

HOMELESS IN METROPOLITAN



BARCELONA

BARCELONA 1063 rough sleepers
May 2022 +19% in one year

XAPSLL (2022)

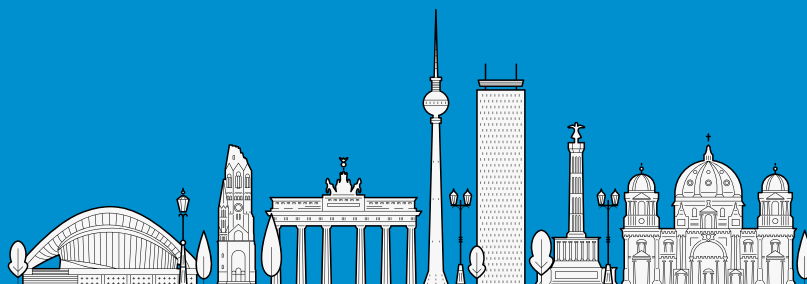
Diagnosi 2022. La situació del sensellarisme a Barcelona, Barcelona : XAPSLL

<https://www.sensellarisme.cat/wp-content/uploads/Diagnosi-2022.-La-situacio-del-sensellarisme-a-Barcelona.-Evolucio-i-relacio-amb-el-mercat-laboral.pdf>

BERLIN

Zeit der Solidarität (2020)
Nacht der Solidarität : Berlins erste zahlenmäßige Erfassung und Befragung 2020, Berlin : Stadt Berlin

<https://zeitdersolidaritaet.de/ergebnisse/erste-zahlenmaessige-erfassung-und-befragung-2020/>



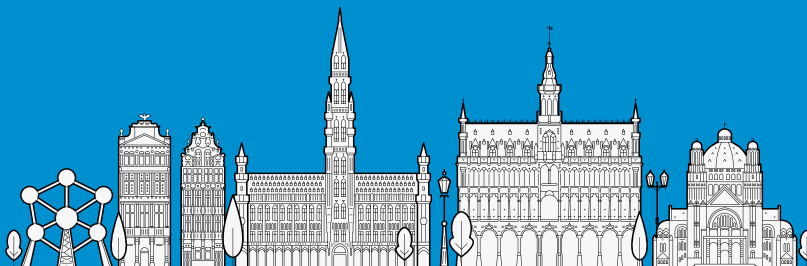
BERLIN 965 rough sleepers

January 29, 2020 1011 people in emergency accommodation

BRUSSELS

Bruss'help (2021)
Dénombrement des personnes sans-abri et mal logées en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale Bruxelles : Bruss'help,

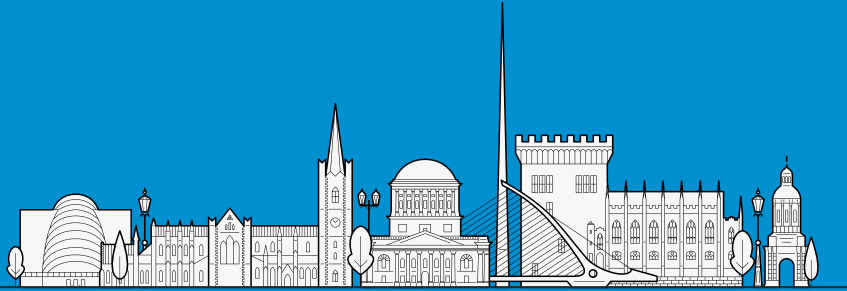
http://www.bruss'help.org/images/Denombrement_2020_vdef.pdf



BRUSSELS 719 rough sleepers

November 9, 2020 1928 people in emergency accommodation

N AREAS



DUBLIN 8376 people in emergency accommodation
December 2022 +31% in one year



DUBLIN

Dublin Region Homeless Executive (2022)
Monthly Report to Dublin City Councillors on Homelessness, Dublin : DRHE

<https://www.homelessdublin.ie/content/files/Homeless-update-34-December-2022.pdf>



PARIS

Atelier parisien d'urbanisme (2022)
Les personnes sans-abri à Paris la nuit du 20-21 Janvier 2022, Étude, Paris : APUR

<https://www.apur.org/fr/nos-travaux/personnes-sans-abri-paris-nuit-20-21-janvier-2022>



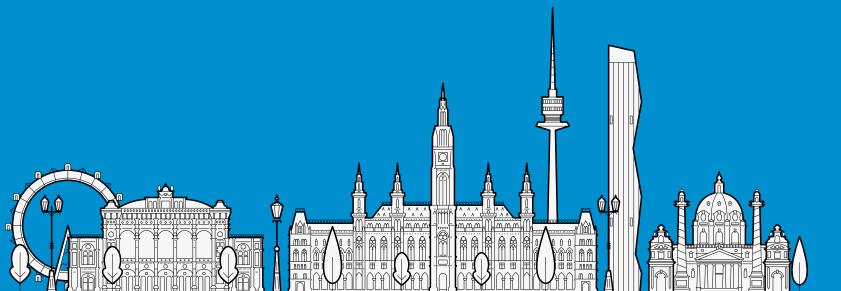
VIENNA

FSW (2021)
Zahlen, Daten, Fakten 2021 des Fonds Soziales Wien und seiner Tochterunternehmen, Wien : FSW

https://2021.fsw.at/uploads/downloads/GB_Zahlen-Daten-Fakten-2021.pdf



PARIS 2598 rough sleepers
January 20, 2022 69% living rough for more than a year



VIENNA 12460 beneficiaries of homeless services
year 2021 +50% in ten years

5. EU COMMITMENTS TO ENDING HOMELESSNESS

« Homelessness is the most extreme form of social exclusion and it is growing across the EU. We must act now. The European Platform on Combatting Homelessness will help partners to share experiences and policy measures that have worked in their regions and cities, so we can radically reduce homelessness in Europe. »

Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Employment and Social Rights, 21 June 2021.

While the European Commission cannot create binding legislation on combatting homelessness, it can make provisions for coordinating and supporting Member State policies to this end. The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)⁶⁴ has, since 2017, provided the framework for European Union social policy. It consists of a list of 20 principles that aim to guide Europe towards greater equity and inclusion; a set of beacons that national, regional, and local authorities are invited to use as a guide⁶⁵. Principle 19 is specifically about social housing, housing assistance, preventing forced evictions, and access to services for homeless people. One of the most important initiatives launched by the European Commission to implement its action plan is the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH)⁶⁶.

The European Platform on Combatting Homelessness declaration⁶⁷ was signed on 21 June 2021 at a conference hosted by Portugal, which held the European Council Presidency at the time. Nicolas Schmit (Commissioner for Employment and Social Rights), national ministers, and representatives from the European

Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, civil society organisations, social partners, and cities committed to working together to end homelessness by 2030. It is the first time that EU institutions and Member States have shown genuine political commitment to ending homelessness and agreed to work together to achieve this goal. Since then, several steps have been taken to lay the foundations for a structure and to begin a variety of activities. All Member States have designated civil servants to represent them within the Platform, and a steering group was put in place, chaired by former Prime Minister of Belgium, Yves Leterme. The EPOCH working programme was adopted during the second ministerial meeting organised by France, which held the European Council presidency at that time⁶⁸. It defined three workstreams (data collection and analysis, knowledge sharing, funding). A series of concrete activities have since been launched:

1. Learning events for civil servants responsible for Member States' policies to combat homelessness.
2. A pilot project for counting homeless people, based on a common methodology, in various cities across Europe in 2024.
3. A capacity- and knowledge-building programme for Member States and stakeholders starting in 2024.
4. A forthcoming call for projects to support and fund innovation to address homelessness.
5. An OECD study on developing a common framework for monitoring homelessness and a toolbox to inform national strategies.

6. Data collection by Eurostat, the EU's statistics body, on the experience of homelessness within the population – a module which will be included in the 2023 European Union survey on incomes and living conditions (EU-SILC).
7. A working group focused on funding, directed by the European Commission and the Council of Europe Development Bank, aiming to promote the matching of housing-related projects with EU grant opportunities and loans.

These activities are still in their early stages and it is too soon to evaluate their impact. They do however demonstrate the European Commission's unprecedented engagement. EPOCH is a work in progress; the platform constitutes an experimental form of policy coordination with several unusual characteristics. Involvement is entirely voluntary and its activities are largely deployed outside of formal structures such as the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) and the Social Protection Committee (SPC). Its approach is adapted to a sector in which the EU's scope and potential for involvement are limited. It is clear that there are potential stumbling blocks in such an initiative, but the existence of this first EU policy action on combatting homelessness is encouraging. EPOCH has the potential to get political decision-makers and stakeholders to work towards a common goal by developing knowledge, learning, and debate, by improving monitoring and data quality, and by using appropriate EU funds and financial instruments.

Several areas of EU policy and legislation directly or indirectly influence homelessness and housing exclusion: migration, free movement of people, antidiscrimination, economic and fiscal governance, the Green Deal, health, etc. The overlap between these policies and homelessness is often not recognised or taken into

account, which can have serious consequences. EU legislation on asylum, for example, requires Member States to provide asylum seekers with appropriate reception conditions. However, in several countries, many asylum seekers face homelessness and destitution, which is a contravention of EU law that too often goes unquestioned. Effective action against housing exclusion on an EU scale requires going beyond isolated social policy initiatives. One of the main aims of the platform will therefore be to link the EU's different policy domains to ensure that they all contribute to preventing and eliminating homelessness.

The European Platform on Combatting Homelessness should become a useful, practical forum to support EU Member State policies. However, ambitions at EU level cannot replace the political will of local, regional, and national authorities. To avoid being reduced to vague statements of intent, EPOCH must be able to provide concrete support to progressively improving policies and services by offering concrete tools and activities. It should also work towards ensuring that all relevant EU policies play their role in preventing and tackling housing exclusion.

FEANTSA and the Abbé Pierre Foundation welcome the European Commission's new action on homelessness and stand ready to both contribute to the platform and to rigorously scrutinise its results. Given the 2024 European Parliament elections, we are calling for strong political support from Member States, stakeholders, and representatives from EU institutions so that EPOCH can make significant progress towards eliminating homelessness by 2030.

1

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