



Spain's First comprehensive National Homelessness Strategy

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The first Spanish "Comprehensive National Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020" was adopted in November 2015. Its objective is to reduce the homeless population from around 23,000 in 2015 to 18,000 by 2020. It is unclear how reaching the targets of this consensual and innovative reform will be funded, while interregional coordination of housing policy remains problematic.

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Description

The Spanish government adopted the first "Comprehensive National Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020" (ENI-PSH) on 6 November 2015. Homelessness is defined according to the typology proposed by the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA).

The new strategy has emerged to address the following factors:

- 1) several resolutions of the European Parliament on the need for an EU homelessness strategy (EP, 2010, 2011 and 2013);
- 2) the implementation of the measures contained both in the Spanish National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2013-2016 and in the legislative proposal for a national strategy for the homeless approved by the Spanish Parliament on 30 April 2014 with a high degree of political consensus;
- 3) a response to the aggravated social needs of homeless persons resulting from the economic crisis, as well as to the demands of social platforms and organisations focusing on housing and homeless persons represented by the State Council of Social Actions NGOs.

The ENI-PSH is based on a diagnosis of the situation of the homeless population, noting that the number of homeless people has increased from 21,900 in 2005 to between 30,000 and 36,000 in 2012. Biggest rises are among young

women (18% of homeless people were women in 2005 vs. 25% in 2012) and persons over 45 years old (29% vs. 42.5%). The increase in homelessness between 2005 and 2012 is due, above all, to mortgage defaults (38%) and to loss of employment (35%) according to the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE, 2012).

The objective of the ENI-PSH is to prevent homelessness as well as to reduce the number of persons living on the street and foster their social inclusion. The ENI-PSH aims to reduce the homeless population from around 23,000 in 2015 (estimation elaborated by ENI-PSH on the basis of INE 2012 figures), down to 20,000 in 2018 and 18,000 by 2020. To this end, the strategy provides five general objectives. These are geared to prevention, awareness-raising, safety, restoring life projects, and finally improving information and public services. The objectives are assessed against over 40 indicators. A mid-term evaluation of the ENI-PSH is foreseen in 2019 and a final evaluation in 2021.

The most noteworthy measures are the promotion of counselling services in situations of loss of housing, and ad hoc financial support for rent payments and household consumption. The new strategy also aims to appoint case managers for homeless people, to prevent overlaps in the interventions of different services and public administrations, and to establish protocols for collaboration between

health services and case managers. Furthermore, it intends to train mixed street work teams involving social and health professionals, to improve employability of homeless persons by facilitating hiring by insertion companies and to create a Resources network for the homeless population in partnership with the Third Sector.

Innovative approaches to housing are also included, such as the Housing First programme aimed at persons experiencing the worst conditions of homelessness, and to whom a home is provided in conjunction with personalised support and continuous social accompaniment in order to achieve their social re-integration.

Outlook & Commentary

The ENI-PSH results from the legislative proposal approved by the Spanish Parliament on 30 April 2014. It is a highly necessary reform in view of the economic crisis which has aggravated the situation of homeless people in Spain. The situation of homeless people has become chronic, affecting socio-demographic profiles ever closer to the average population.

The new strategy has been adopted through consensus between the various Ministries involved, Third Sector organisations and the Autonomous Communities. It incorporates an innovative approach geared to housing (with measures such as

“Housing First”) and focusing on individuals (embodied in the figure of case managers), making it possible to carry out more individualised and coordinated monitoring of homeless persons at territorial and sectoral level. The new strategy also comprises specific targets for the reduction of homelessness and constitutes a comprehensive reform that includes measures to be implemented in various territorial and sectoral areas: social services, justice, employment, health services etc.).

Nonetheless, these potential strengths may not materialise in practice, due to the lack of a dedicated budget for implementation and, as stated by the Spanish Federation of Organisations Supporting Homeless People, to the lack of additional budget for issues related to prevention, social innovation, research and ongoing evaluation.

As importantly, implementing such a comprehensive reform requires a system of vertical (between central and regional administrations) and horizontal (among the different areas of social intervention) coordination which remains insufficient in the area of housing. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the reform may constitute a new start for the coordinated development and design of strategies for homeless persons in the various regions of Spain.

Further reading

Declaration of the European Parliament of 16 December 2010 on an EU homelessness strategy (<http://goo.gl/dvFhC9>).

European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2011 on an EU Homelessness Strategy (<http://goo.gl/neRhdo>) and resolution of 11 June 2013 on social housing in the European Union (<http://goo.gl/oZCzak>).

FEANTSA, European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (<http://goo.gl/O17jKB>).

Instituto Nacional de Estadística - INE (2012): Encuesta a las personas sin hogar 2012 (<http://goo.gl/VajbZs>).

Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad – MSSSI (2015): Estrategia Nacional Integral para Personas Sin Hogar 2015-2020 (<http://goo.gl/2yYuWc>).

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