

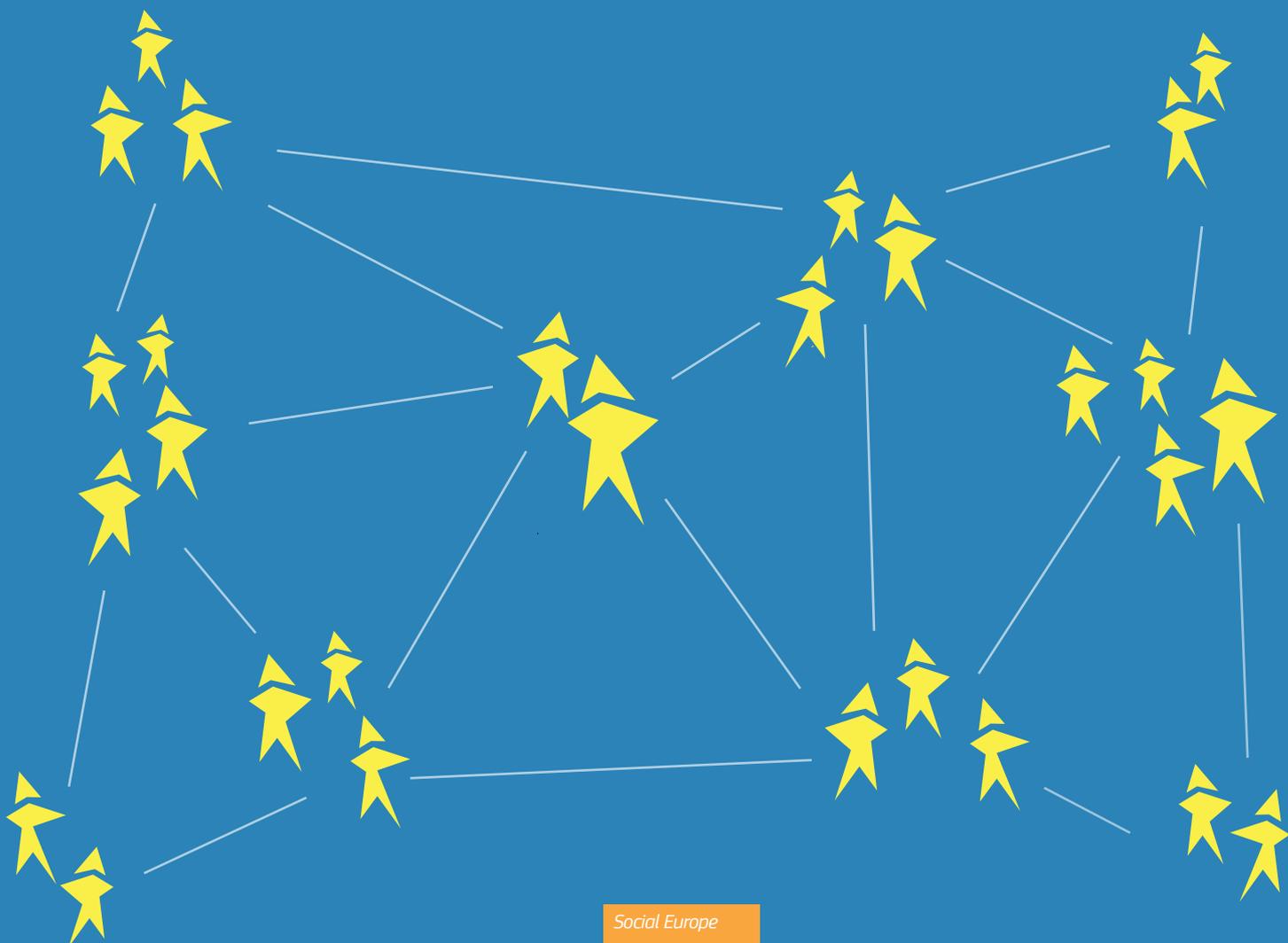


EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Austria

Marcel Fink



Social Europe

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European Social Policy Network (ESPN)

**ESPN Thematic Report on
National strategies to fight
homelessness and housing
exclusion**

Austria

2019

Marcel Fink

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Summary

In Austria there is no national strategy for tackling homelessness and housing exclusion. This is, *inter alia*, caused by the fact that the responsibility for policy areas that could be part of such a strategy is dispersed across the different layers of the political and administrative system, namely at national state level, and in the federal provinces (*Länder*) and municipalities. Because of this situation, *inter alia*, no national definition of homelessness and housing exclusion exists.

Data on people who are roofless (*obdachlos*) or homeless (*wohnungslos*) were for a long time extremely limited, and were not available for some federal provinces and/or did not meet standards for validity.

However, data on so-called registered homelessness, which have been made available for some years now, indicate an overall increase in the number of homeless people over the decade to 2017. People born abroad, and men, are both overrepresented in this group. In the latter case this reflects the fact that women are more likely to try to avoid rooflessness or homelessness by living in precarious housing or with friends etc.: this phenomenon may be termed 'hidden female homelessness'.

Overall, rising homelessness is likely to be caused by two structural developments, namely rising housing costs and rising unemployment. Housing costs have especially increased for rented dwellings, which especially in urban areas provide a substantial part of total housing. Rising unemployment has a direct effect on housing problems, as social transfers are in many cases not sufficient to cover housing costs. Survey results indicate that unemployment is one of the most frequent causes of homelessness.

The extent and mix of services provided to homeless people show substantial differences between the individual provinces. Relatively comprehensive and integrated strategies appear to exist in Vienna, Upper Austria and also Vorarlberg, whereas some other federal provinces, such as Burgenland and Carinthia in particular, are lagging behind. Emergency accommodation and day centres for homeless people are still the most widespread form of services available for homeless people, and are mostly centralised in big cities. Furthermore, temporary accommodation in the form of transitional housing is available in most provinces and especially in bigger cities. Services for the homeless in Austria have traditionally followed a 'staircase' approach, but over recent years a clear tendency towards more housing-oriented strategies has become visible. Examples are Housing First projects in Vienna, Graz and Salzburg, and the housing strategy followed in the federal province of Vorarlberg.

No detailed long-term follow-up studies on the effectiveness of different types of services for homeless people are available for Austria. Exceptions are the – very positive – results of different Housing First pilot projects or the programme implemented in Vorarlberg. On the other hand, there are some hints that the traditional staircase approach does not show favourable results, as indicated by the evidence for the effects of homelessness on mortality.

To tackle housing exclusion and homelessness, and the structural causes of the latter, in an inclusive manner it would be necessary to take measures to: a) prevent rising housing costs; b) safeguard affordability via adequate transfers to low-income households; and c) provide high-quality services for eviction prevention and for people who become homeless. However, recent developments do not indicate any major positive steps on the first two points. On the contrary, both plans (further liberalisation of tenancy regulations) and measures already decided (cutback of minimum-income benefits) by the centre-right government point in the opposite direction. This will leave federal provinces and municipalities with – in all likelihood – further increased problems of homelessness, to be dealt with via the social services for this target group. However, a greater incidence of homelessness will, against the background of limited financial resources, make it even more difficult to offer (rather costly) high-quality housing-oriented services to the people affected.

1 The nature and extent of homelessness and housing exclusion

In Austria, there is no *national* strategy addressing homelessness and housing exclusion, because this policy area is to a large extent the responsibility of each of the nine federal provinces. Because of this situation, *inter alia*, no national definition of homelessness and housing exclusion exists. The ETHOS¹ and ETHOS Light classifications are often used within the (few) analyses on homelessness and housing exclusion (see for example Schoibl 2013, 4f.; Bauer/Klapfer 2015) and by interest organisations such as the Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe (BAWO – National Association of Assistance to the Homeless²). According to Schoibl (2013, 4) the federal provinces frequently do not cover all categories within the ETHOS or ETHOS Light classification in drawing up the legal basis for assistance to the homeless. The main groups addressed in the related legal and/or administrative definitions are, in terms of the ETHOS categories, 'roofless' people (people living rough and people in emergency accommodation/night shelters) and some 'homeless' people, namely people living in short-term accommodation for the homeless, but also including some types of longer-term accommodation such as hostels, temporary accommodation, transitional supported accommodation, residential care for older homeless people or supported accommodation for formerly homeless people.

Data on people who are roofless or homeless were for a long time extremely limited, and were not available for some federal provinces and/or did not meet standards for validity, being based on initial responses given by homeless assistance organisations to sporadic surveys (Schoibl et al. 2009).

However, data on so-called registered homelessness have been made available for some years via the compilation of so-called inclusion indicators, provided by Statistics Austria on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection³ (for the most recent release see BMASGK 2018). These data, deriving from the residential register, encompass two categories of people deemed to be roofless or homeless.

The first of these two indicators enumerates people registered as living in institutions for homeless people. The list of institutions used for this purpose derives from the so-called registry census (*Registerzählung*) of 2011. This list, all in all, includes 132 institutions providing shelter to homeless people. However, institutions focusing on homeless women and refugees, and institutions specifically providing housing for homeless elderly people, are not taken into account. Furthermore, only addresses are taken into account where the building is exclusively used to provide shelter to homeless people. Because of this restriction, the number of institutions/addresses taken into account is reduced to 56.⁴ For these reasons, the number of persons indicated as being registered in institutions for homeless people can be interpreted as a lower limit (BMASGK 2018, 30).

The second category is people registering themselves as roofless. Since 2001 roofless people have been able to register themselves with the residential registry authorities (i.e. the municipality) as roofless, if they can show probable cause that the focus of their 'life and relations' (*Lebensbeziehungen*) has been in the related municipality over at least the

¹ European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.

² The BAWO, founded in 1991, is an umbrella organisation of organisations/facilities providing assistance to the homeless in Austria. The members of BAWO are social non-government organisations (NGOs), and the declared goal of BAWO is to co-ordinate supra-regional tasks and to provide targeted public relations work to combat and eliminate housing shortage and homelessness. For further information see: <http://www.bawo.at/de/content/bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft-wohnungslosenhilfe-startseite.html>.

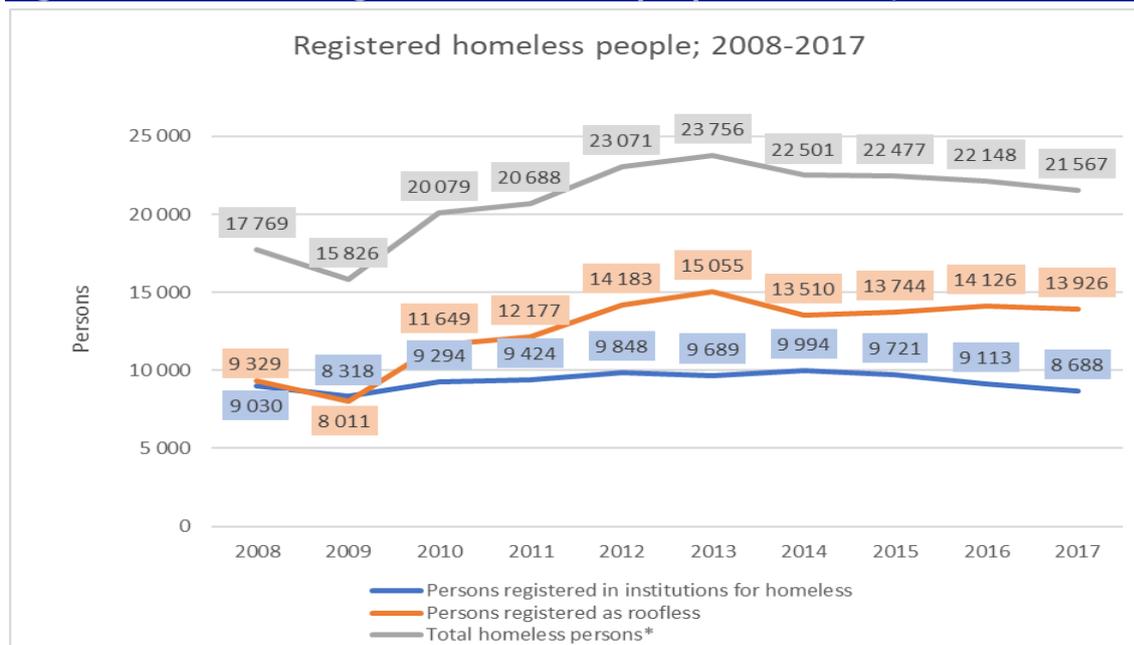
³ Bundesministerium für Arbeit, Soziales, Gesundheit und Konsumentenschutz (BMASGK).

⁴ Statistics Austria regularly updates this list of institutions. However, in order to provide comparability over time, the BMASGK report on inclusion indicators only takes into account institutions covered in the 2011 registry census (BMASGK 2018, 30).

previous month; and if they indicate an address as a contact point⁵, which they visit on a regular basis. It is unclear what share of all roofless people actually register themselves with the registry authorities. The number of registered roofless people thus also only indicates a lower bound of all people affected, as the number of people without any registration might be substantially greater (see also Bauer/Klapfer 2015, 3).

Figure 1 shows the development of the number of the registered homeless according to the definition described above. These data cover people according to the ETHOS Light operational categories 1 and 2, and part of 3 (excluding women's shelters or refuge accommodation; see Tables A1 and A2 in the Annex).

Figure 1: Number of registered homeless people in Austria, 2008-2017



Note: * Some people are counted under both headings (i.e. registered in institutions for homeless and registered as roofless), but the total is adjusted for double counting.

Source: Statistics Austria; BMASGK indicators on social inclusion (BMASGK 2018, 29).

The total number of registered homeless people amounted to 21,567 people in 2017, an increase of 21% since 2008. It consisted of 13,926 people who had registered as roofless, and 8,688 who were living in institutions for the homeless. The peak in total registered homelessness was reached in 2013 and from then on there was a slight fall. The number of registered roofless increased somewhat between 2014 and 2017, after a substantial decline between 2013 and 2014; whereas the number of people registered in institutions for the homeless fell somewhat between 2014 and 2017. The BMASGK (2018, 28) notes that the latter observation is also due to the fact that the list of institutions covered is the one taken from 2011 (see footnote above), and that therefore new institutions established since then are not taken into account. This means that the number of homeless people in institutions is underestimated for the most recent years, and that therefore an overall increase in the number of homeless people is more likely than a fall (see also below on data according to specific reference dates).

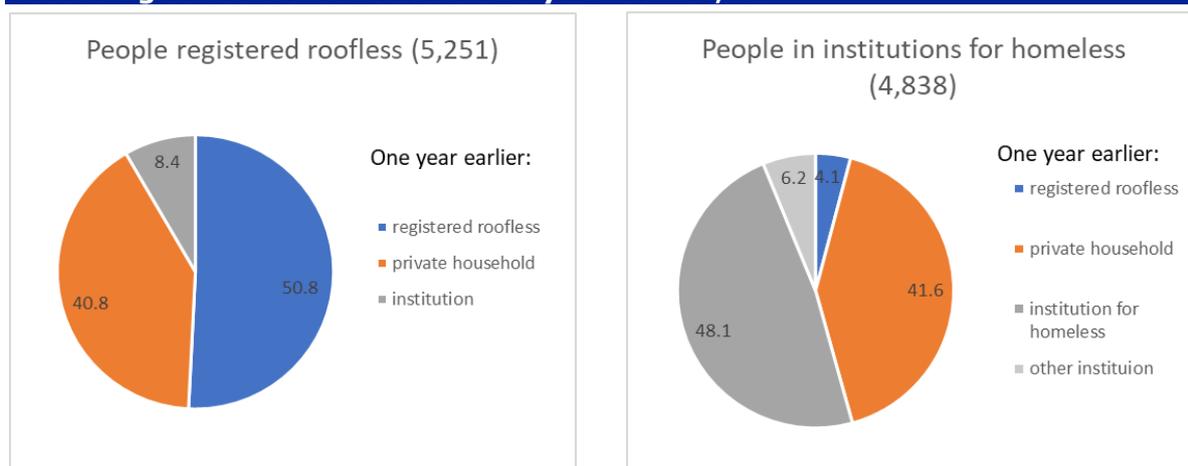
⁵ The 'contact point' also serves as an address for services, e.g. receiving social transfers or post, if the owner of the contact point agrees. Contact points may be private addresses, homeless assistance institutions, or facilities for probationary services, social counselling or addiction counselling.

Overall, from a micro perspective, registered homelessness is highly dynamic: approximately 60% of those registered as homeless in 2017 had not been registered as homeless in 2016 (*ibid.*, 28).

Bauer/Klapfer (2015) provide data calculated according to a concept closely related to the one presented above. On the one hand their results only cover two reference dates (31 October 2011 and 31 October 2012), thereby reducing the number of registered homeless when compared with the data presented above, which cover a whole year. On the other hand, they include a more comprehensive list of relevant institutions, totalling 146 altogether, including women's shelters and institutions providing housing for people leaving penal institutions.

According to these data, 6,701 persons were registered as roofless on 31 October 2012, and 5,402 were registered in institutions for homeless people.⁶ Out of the first group, 21.6% had not been registered with the residential register one year earlier; and out of the second group, 10.4%.⁷ For the rest, an entry exists in the residential register for both reference dates. Figure 2 presents the residential status of people registered as homeless on 31 October 2012 who had also been registered one year earlier. It indicates a very dynamic situation, with around 40% of those registered as homeless (roofless or living in institutions for homeless) having been registered in private households one year before. On the other hand, about 50% of all people registered as roofless had had the same status one year before. And more than 50% of those people living in institutions for the homeless had been resident in an institution of some kind a year earlier.

Figure 2: People in Austria registered as homeless on 31 October 2012 according to residential status one year earlier, %



Source: Bauer/Klapfer (2015, 4).

Bauer/Klapfer (2015) also provide information on the sociodemographic composition of people registered as homeless.

In October 2012, 77% of all persons registered as roofless were men and 23% were women. The share of men was somewhat lower among people registered in institutions for the homeless (69% men and 31% women). Overall, men therefore dominated among the registered homeless. However, it should be noted that women may be more likely to

⁶ In the following paragraphs we present more details on these – somewhat outdated – figures. For later years, only total numbers of registered homeless calculated according to the same methodology have been presented (Statistik Austria 2018b). According to them, 7,156 persons were registered as roofless on 31 October 2016 (+6.8% compared with 2012), and 5,454 (+1% compared with 2012) were registered in institutions for homeless people.

⁷ This may be caused by several factors, including that the person had immigrated to Austria after the reference date of 31 October 2011 or had been born after this date. One other possibility is that the person had been living in Austria one year earlier, but was not registered with the residential register in a time window of 90 days around the reference date due to other reasons.

try to avoid rooflessness or homelessness by living in precarious housing or with friends etc. (Bauer/Klapfer 2015, p. 5): this phenomenon may be termed 'hidden female homelessness'.⁸

The largest age group (40%) of all those registered as roofless was young adults/older children (aged 15-29). 32% were aged 30-44 and 21% 45-59. 2% were aged under 15, and 5% were older than 59.

Those people registered in institutions for the homeless showed a somewhat different composition in terms of age groups. Here, the largest group was those aged 45-59 (30%), followed by those aged 30-44 (25%) and those aged 15-29 (20%). 10% were aged under 15, and 15% 60 and over. Overall, therefore, the registered roofless displayed a higher concentration of younger people, whereas people registered in homeless institutions tended to be somewhat older.

Table 1 provides information for 31 October 2012 on registered homelessness according to country of birth. A substantial proportion (c. 40%) of all registered homeless people had not been born in Austria (the equivalent share for the whole population of Austria is 16.1%) (Bauer/Klapfer 2015, 6). This indicates that among all registered homeless people those born outside Austria were substantially overrepresented.

In respect of those people registered as roofless only, more than 50% had been born outside Austria, whereas their share of those living in institutions amounted to 27%.

Table 1: Registered homeless people in Austria according to country of birth, 31 October 2012

Country of birth	Roofless		In institution		Total	
	Number	% total	Number	% total	Number	% total
Austria	3,338	49.8	3,943	73.0	7,281	60.2
Not Austria	3,363	50.2	1,459	27.0	4,822	39.8
<i>Of which:</i>						
<i>EU/EEA/incl. Switzerland</i>	812	12.1	494	9.1	1,306	10.8
<i>Former Yugoslavia (excl. Slovenia)</i>	407	6.1	351	6.5	758	6.3
<i>Turkey</i>	207	3.1	145	2.7	352	2.9
<i>Other European countries*</i>	777	11.6	97	1.8	874	7.2
<i>Africa</i>	475	7.1	155	2.9	630	5.2
<i>Asia</i>	634	9.5	181	3.4	815	6.7
<i>Other</i>	51	0.8	36	0.7	87	0.7
Total	6,701	100.0	5,402	100.0	12,103	100.0

Source: Statistics Austria, Bauer/Klapfer (2015) & own calculations.

* Note: Around 95% of all persons born in other European countries were born in the Russian Federation.

⁸ See e.g. <http://www.bawo.at/de/content/wohnungslosigkeit/frauen/frauenwohnungslosigkeit.html>.

About 54% of the registered homeless who had been born in Austria lived in institutions for homeless people, whereas this only held for around 30% of those born outside Austria. The share of roofless people among all homeless people was especially high for persons born in 'other European countries' (c. 89%), for people born in Africa (c. 75%) and for people born in Asia (c. 78%). These data reflect the fact that access to a place in institutions for homeless people usually requires Austrian citizenship, or, in the case of EU citizenship, long-term legal residency in Austria (BAWO 2013; Schoibl 2016).

Another fact worth noting is that registered homelessness was largely concentrated in the biggest cities. Around 70% of all registered homeless people in October 2012⁹ lived in the capital city Vienna, and in total another 20% in the five other larger Austrian cities (Graz, Linz, Salzburg, Innsbruck and Klagenfurt) (Bauer/Klapfer 2015, 6, 12). A similar situation held for people registered as roofless, of whom 79.1% lived in Vienna, and another 16.3% in the five larger cities. People living in institutions for the homeless showed a very slightly lower concentration in the biggest cities, with about 60% registered in Vienna and 25% registered in the five larger cities.

Only very limited quantitative information is available on the health status of homeless people. However, according to an evaluation study on homeless assistance schemes (*Wohnungslosenhilfe*) in Vienna, published in 2012, 57% of the clients¹⁰ of homelessness assistance reported physical health issues, 39% mental and emotional problems, 20% problems with the consumption of alcohol and other drugs, and 6% other addictive behaviour (especially gambling addiction and shopping addiction) (Riesenfelder et al. 2012, 337, Table 252). In total, around 27% reported no health-related issues. Overall, it appears that health problems are a major challenge in the context of homelessness. Klotz et al. (2019) recently presented research results on the mortality risk of registered homeless people compared with the whole population of Austria. Due to the comparatively low number of registered elderly homeless people, and the problem of hidden forms of homelessness in the case of women, the analysis was constrained to males aged 15-64. On 1 January 2015, there were 15,849 men of that age who had experienced registered homelessness in the calendar years 2013 and 2014. Out of those, 414 (2.6%) died in the years 2015 to 2017. This number exceeded by 310 the number statistically expected based on the mortality risks in the general population. The mortality risk of the homeless was thus 4 times as high as in the general population. Furthermore, significant excess mortality was observed for all age groups. The highest excess mortality was observed at ages 35-44. The most pronounced effect was found for mental and behavioural disorders related to substance abuse, and for cirrhosis of the liver. Overall, homelessness appeared to shorten the life expectancy of males by approximately 20 years.

As indicated above, overall homelessness (roofless people and those living in institutions for the homeless) rose over the 10 years to 2017. This development was probably driven by more general developments in the housing market and in the labour market.

According to a recent analysis by the Vienna Chamber of Labour (AK-Wien 2017) consumer prices rose by 14.3% in Austria between 2008 and 2016, and the median equivalised disposable household income increased by 22.1%. During the same time the gross rent per square meter (incl. VAT) increased by 32.5% on average. This increase amounted to 41.8% in the private sector, 23.9% for dwellings rented from 'limited-profit housing associations'¹¹ (LPHAs) and 31.4% for municipal housing (ibid., 8). Furthermore, prices for rented dwellings in cities accelerated at an even higher pace than the national average. In Vienna the gross rent per square meter (incl. VAT) increased by 38% between 2008 and 2016. Here, the price increase in the private sector amounted to

⁹ More recent data, for October 2016, show a largely similar distribution (Statistik Austria 2018b, 95).

¹⁰ These clients represent a heterogeneous group, including people sleeping in night shelters and people living in different kinds of institutions for homeless people (for details see Riesenfelder et al. 2012, 263, Table 46).

¹¹ *Gemeinnützige Wohnbaugesellschaften*.

53.3%, for dwellings rented from LPHAs 25.8% and for municipal housing 20.5% (ibid. 18).

The total housing cost overburden rate, amounting to 7.1% in 2017, still appeared to be comparatively low by international standards (average of EU-28: 10.4%).¹² However, between 2006 and 2017 in Austria it increased by 2.1 percentage points, or 42%. For people at risk of poverty, the housing cost overburden rate in Austria increased from 29.1% in 2006 to 40.3% in 2017 (a rise of 38%), exceeding the EU-28 average (37.9%). The housing cost overburden rate was also generally high for young people in Austria. In the age range 15-29 it increased from 5.8% in 2006 to 10.4% in 2017, or by 79%, finishing just short of the EU-28 average of 11.9%. All these data indicate rising problems of housing affordability, especially as relatively low-cost housing became increasingly scarce over the last two decades – for more details see, for example, Kunnert (2016) and Streissler-Führer et al. (2015). The latter report mentions, *inter alia*, factors such as high immigration and an associated rising demand for housing, and additionally a trend towards upgrading existing low-cost dwellings via renovation.

The affordability of housing evidently depends on the income situation of households, which again is linked to issues of gainful employment and unemployment. The number of unemployed people (yearly average; Labour Force Survey data) in Austria rose from about 172,000 in 2008 to 223,000 in 2009 and then, after a short recovery in 2010 and 2011, rose further to 270,000 in 2016. After that it fell to 220,000 in 2018.¹³ The unemployment rate among those aged 15-64 increased from 4.2% in 2008 to 6.1% in 2016, and amounted to 4.9% in 2018.¹⁴ This – until recently – rather unfavourable development in all likelihood also contributed to rising homelessness. In a recent survey amongst the clients of homelessness assistance schemes in Vienna, 42% of respondents indicated that unemployment was one of the main causes of their homelessness (Fonds Soziales Wien 2016, 12). This was the cause most often indicated, followed by separation/divorce from their partner (32%).

2 Relevant strategies and policies tackling homelessness and housing exclusion

In Austria, **no national strategy** for tackling homelessness and housing exclusion exists. This is, *inter alia*, caused by the fact that the **responsibility** for policy areas that could be part of such a strategy is **dispersed** across the different layers of the political and administrative System, namely at national state level (government of the Federal Republic), and in the federal provinces and municipalities.

The Federal Republic is responsible for civil law regulation, including landlord and tenant law – among other things addressing the level of rent within parts of the private market, condominium law and basic regulations on LPHAs. Furthermore, the Federal Republic is responsible for tax law and determines jointly with the federal provinces the equalisation of tax revenue distribution between the different levels of government (including the earmarking of funds for specific purposes).

The nine provincial governments are responsible for different forms of housing-related subsidies. Their housing subsidy schemes cover aid for individuals in the form of cash transfers (housing benefit; *Wohnbeihilfe*), subsidies for bricks and mortar (housebuilding subsidies; *Wohnbauförderung*) and subsidies for renovation and refurbishment. The federal provinces also implement the law relating to limited-profit housing. Furthermore, the provinces are – in principle – responsible for legislation on and implementing the

¹² Source for data on housing costs overburden: EU-SILC; Eurostat database, indicator [ilc_lvho07a].

¹³ Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS); Eurostat database, indicator [une_rt_a].

¹⁴ Source: LFS; Eurostat database, indicator [lfsa_urgan].

minimum-income scheme. This issue has recently been made the subject of national framework legislation, after another model of national co-ordination came to an end in 2017 (see below).

The municipalities (partly together with the provinces) are responsible for implementing building law, planning regulation and policies on the use of land and its allocation for housing purposes. The allocation of social welfare dwellings (*Gemeindewohnungen*), is also one of the tasks assigned to the municipalities.

More specific social services to prevent homelessness and support homeless people are organised by the federal provinces and the municipalities, either through or in conjunction with their more general institutions of social welfare. However, very large variations appear to exist in such services between regions and partly also between different localities (Schoibl 2013; Schoibl/Stöger 2014; BAWO 2013).

Overall, this complex structure of competencies impedes an integrated strategy for promoting affordable housing, preventing homelessness and guaranteeing equal access to high-quality services for homeless people without major regional variations.

In order to understand issues of housing exclusion and homelessness in Austria it is important to present some basic facts about the Austrian **structure of housing**. In national terms, Austria exhibits a comparatively high share of **rented dwellings**, of which a comparatively large proportion is **municipal housing** and dwellings offered by **LPHAs**. In 2017, 37% of all dwellings used as main residences were owner-occupied houses and 11% owner-occupied flats. 18% were privately rented, 17% rented from LPHAs and 7% were municipal housing. Other arrangements accounted for the remaining 10% (Statistik Austria 2018b, 22).¹⁵ This means that limited-profit and municipal housing altogether accounted for about 24% of the total housing stock, and for 57% of the rental sector, which were high numbers by international standards (Housing Europe 2015). However, it has to be taken into account that housing structures show very substantial variations between federal provinces and between urban and rural areas. The capital city of Vienna stands out as, in 2017, only 7% of all dwellings were owner-occupied houses and 12% owner-occupied flats. Here, most dwellings were rented flats. 23% of all dwellings in Vienna in 2017 were provided by municipal housing, 20% by LPHAs and 34% by private landlords (Statistik Austria 2018b, 22). At the other extreme was the mostly rural federal province of Burgenland, where 70% of all dwellings in 2017 were owner-occupied houses, 2% owner-occupied flats, 12% LPHA dwellings, 5% rented from private landlords and only about 1% rented municipal housing. The other federal provinces were located between these two extremes, with usually around 50-60% of all dwellings being owner-occupied houses and flats, and 10-20% offered by LPHAs. Municipal housing here accounted for about 2-4% of all dwellings, and dwellings rented from private landlords accounted for 10-20% (ibid.).

At the same time, it is evident that rental dwellings generally play a more important role in urban than in rural areas. Apart from Vienna, the cities of Graz, Linz, Salzburg and Innsbruck have more than 100,000 inhabitants. In these cities (excl. Vienna) an average 11% of all dwellings are owner-occupied houses and 20% owner-occupied flats. 28% are rented from LPHAs, 4% from municipalities and 30% from private landlords (Statistik Austria 2018b, 23f.). Overall, it is apparent that it is especially in the **urban areas** that a concentration of roofless and houseless people exists (see above, Section 1). This coincides with a comparatively high share of dwellings being rented, prices for which, as sketched out above, increased at a much higher pace over the last decade than general consumer prices and median disposable household income (see Section 1 above). Here it should be noted that rents for municipal and LPHA housing also increased substantially over the last decade, contributing to an increasingly evident general lack of housing affordable by low-income households in urban areas. Overall, in many urban areas housing demand has increasingly outperformed supply and poorer-quality but affordable

¹⁵ E.g. cost-free dwellings owned by relatives or service accommodation.

apartments have almost completely disappeared due to widespread renovations and consolidations of small units (Kunnert 2016; Mundt/Amann 2015a and 2015b).

At the same time, it has become evident that **landlord and tenant law**, regulating parts of privately rented housing, is increasingly ineffective in preventing the acceleration in rental prices. Against this background, the previous government of Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the Peoples' Party (ÖVP), in office until December 2017, announced a reform of landlord and tenant law, with the goal of more transparent regulations and more affordable housing within the private rented sector (Republik Österreich 2013, 60f.). However, the negotiations on this issue did not lead to a concrete reform, due to different positions within the coalition government. Another point to note is the debates on the question of whether **funds for housebuilding subsidies** should in future once again be earmarked¹⁶ within the new Financial Equalisation Act, which became effective as from the beginning of 2017. However, such a decision was in the end not taken. The political agenda announced by the current national government of the ÖVP and the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), which entered office in December 2017, set a course towards the promotion of ownership and the easing of existing landlord and tenant law, instead of direct facilitation of affordable housing (Republik Österreich 2017).

As mentioned above, **LPHA** and/or **municipal housing** is of considerable importance in most urban areas in Austria. These sectors provide dwellings at rents that are usually lower than in the private sector. Here it should be noted that both limited-profit housing and municipal housing is accessible to a large part of the population since income ceilings are rather high. Furthermore, if a household's income rises later on this does not negate the right to remain in the dwelling. Overall, this means that social housing in Austria is not intended to house only low-income households, and this approach prevents social segregation. On the other hand, availability and accessibility may be de facto limited due to a lack of available dwellings and the resultant waiting lists; and for LPHA dwellings substantial entry costs may often apply.¹⁷

Another policy area with a direct impact on the affordability of housing and on homelessness is the means-tested **minimum-income schemes (MMI)** and **additional housing-related transfers** for low-income households. These benefits in principle fall within the responsibility of the federal provinces, but different attempts have been made in the past to achieve nationwide co-ordination of the MMI. Earlier national co-ordination of national minimum standards for these schemes via a so-called '15a treaty' came to an end in 2016, as the Federal Republic and the provinces could not reach a compromise on a renewed agreement. The current centre-right government then introduced a **national framework law on MMI**¹⁸ which, amongst other things, entails: i) maximum benefit levels to be taken into account by each federal province (instead of minimum levels stipulated by the earlier 15a treaty); ii) lower benefit levels for children (with substantially reduced benefits for every additional child in the household); iii) substantially reduced benefit levels for people with low skills in German or without very good skills in English (a stipulation that will negatively affect recognised refugees in particular); and iv) a general waiting period of five years for people who have newly migrated to Austria (apart from refugees; some of such migrants have up to now had access to the MMI). Overall, this reform will have a significant negative impact on the financial situation of families with more than one child; and families with three or more children, in particular, will get substantially lower benefits. Furthermore, the benefits

¹⁶ Such earmarking existed earlier, but was abolished in 2007.

¹⁷ When renting a flat from an LPHA, one usually has to pay a so-called financing contribution (*Finanzierungsbeitrag*), which often amounts to around €15,000 to €30,000, but which may even be much higher. Interest-free loans etc. may be available to cover such costs for very low-income households: nonetheless, entry costs are considered to reduce access to LPHA dwellings.

¹⁸ For details see: https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXVI/I/I_00514/index.shtml#tab-ParlamentarischesVerfahren.

granted to recognised refugees not showing sufficient language skills will be substantially reduced.

Regarding the coverage of **housing costs** via **MMI**, the 15a treaty left considerable discretionary powers with the federal provinces, which resulted in substantial variations in the related regulations (for an overview see Armutskonferenz 2012, 26ff.). Overall, benefits earmarked in MMI for housing, even taken together with additional means-tested housing-related transfers (which exist in most provinces according to different regulations), were in many cases not sufficient to cover actual housing costs (especially in urban areas), resulting in housing costs either being unaffordable or reducing the amount of household income available to meet other needs. The new **national framework law** on MMI came into effect on 1 June 2019, and the federal provinces will have to adapt their legislation for MMI by the end of 2019. Regarding housing costs, it stipulates that the provinces should follow the principle of covering them in the form of benefits in kind (*Sachleistungen*), for example by making payments of rent on tenants' behalf directly to landlords. Where housing costs are comparatively high, federal provinces *may* increase the maximum benefit levels stipulated by the national framework law by up to 30%, if they are provided in the form of such benefits in kind. However, in this case MMI cash benefits that are available to the household may only amount to a maximum of 60% of the general maximum benefit, thereby fixing the maximum resources available for other needs at a very low level. It remains to be seen how the provinces will actually translate these rules into their own related regulations. Overall, against the background of the above-mentioned general benefit cuts, these new rules are likely to imply that **housing will in future not be easier to afford** for many recipients of MMI and/or that **even fewer resources than currently** will be available in MMI households **for other needs**.

Other measures are explicitly aimed at **preventing homelessness** or **offering services to homeless** people (for details see Section 3 below).

Funding for services and other measures dealing with housing issues comes from the general tax yield. However, the federal provinces and the municipalities generally have only very low tax revenues of their own, which means that resources primarily come from national taxes distributed to the provinces and the municipalities via the so-called tax equalisation agreements, negotiated between the Federal Republic, the federal provinces and the municipalities. This transfer of finances currently lacks earmarked resources for measures and services related to housing and homelessness, leaving it to the provinces and municipalities as to whether they emphasise these issues or not. The result is a very substantial variation in services and municipal housing available across the country, and by international standards a generally rather low level of social spending explicitly dedicated to housing. Austria has recently only spent about 0.1% of its GDP on related measures, substantially lower than the EU-28 average (0.5% in 2018).¹⁹ EU funding (e.g. ESF, ERDF, FEAD²⁰) in Austria does not appear to play an important role in supporting services and other measures dealing with housing issues, because programming for these funds in Austria does not directly address housing issues.

Although no national strategy on homelessness and housing exclusion exists, the BMASGK within its yearly report on inclusion indicators (BMASGK 2018) is **monitoring** the development of registered homelessness (see above Section 1). This report also describes the development of EU indicators on housing cost overburden, overcrowding and of severe housing deprivation: however, it does not provide any further analysis, or make any proposals for measures to be taken.

¹⁹ Source: ESSPROS (European System of integrated Social PROtection Statistics); Eurostat database, indicator [spr_exp_fho].

²⁰ ESF = European Social Fund; ERDF = European Regional Development Fund; FEAD = Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.

3 Analysis of the current patterns of service provision and challenges in implementing Austria's responses to homelessness and housing exclusion

Regarding **services for homeless people**, and to some extent also measures aimed at preventing homelessness, very substantial **variations** appear to exist in **regional** and partly also in **local** terms. Such services in Austria, in principle, are within the responsibility of the federal provinces and municipalities, which organise such services either through or in conjunction with their more general institutions and measures of social welfare. Furthermore, in practice it is very often social NGOs and churches which provide such services, often in co-operation with, or co-financed by, public welfare institutions. Services available show a substantial variation among provinces and often show a concentration on urban areas in the first instance (see BAWO 2013 for an overview). There are indications that related services have been expanded in many provinces over the last decade, partly accompanied by attempts at more active and comprehensive planning. However, it must be stressed that no up-to-date and in-depth analysis of related issues, comparing and assessing the development and situation in the nine different federal provinces, is available at the time of writing.²¹ Still, it is possible to provide some basic insights.

Overall, not only legislation but also the extent and mix of services provided show substantial differences between the individual provinces. Vienna and Upper Austria in particular appear to provide a comparatively wide variety of services, thus targeting various types of homeless people. In both these provinces the services are part of broader explicit strategical planning. An explicit programme and comprehensive approach to reducing the number of roofless and houseless people also exists in Vorarlberg, which is the most western province of Austria. On the other hand, it appears that the provinces of Carinthia and especially Burgenland are lagging behind, with the first homelessness shelter in Burgenland being established only in 2012 (BAWO 2013). As a general principle, homelessness services first become available in urban areas; but the homelessness strategies of Vorarlberg and Upper Austria, for example, also show a strong attempt to ensure outreach to rural areas.

Traditionally, the most widespread service available for homeless people is **emergency accommodation** and **day centres**, which are mostly centralised in big cities. Such services are now available in all federal provinces. Most of them offer support-focused (i.e. not housing-focused) low-intensity services only. However, in some of these institutions a housing-focused medium- to high-intensity approach is also applied. For example, in Vienna, the three main existing emergency shelters recently provided a total of about 450 overnight places, of which around 300 were in new facilities called 'Chances Houses', where some medium-intensity support is also available and which are not closed during daytime. Additional overnight places were made available in Vienna during the period between November 2018 and April 2019 (c. 900 places). Here, only shared rooms were available and only low-intensity support. The accommodation could also be used by people who were not entitled to the regular Viennese homelessness shelters; that is, *inter alia*, people without social insurance or who had not become homeless in Vienna.

The latter point addresses a **general issue of accessibility of homelessness services** for specific groups. Usually access is in the first instance limited to Austrian and EU citizens, who had their legal residence (in the case of EU citizens for some minimum period) in the related federal province before becoming homeless. For people of other **citizenships**, further minimum durations of legal residence (often five years) and the precondition of an unlimited residence permit apply. These regulations substantially limit the accessibility of related services for people with a migration background, the results of

²¹ Such an analysis would be a research project on its own and evidently goes beyond the scope of this report.

which are visible in their over-representation in the group of roofless people not registered as living in institutions for homeless people.

Temporary accommodation in the form of transitional housing is available in most provinces and especially in bigger cities. This is usually organised by municipalities, partly in co-operation with NGOs; in most cases it is medium-intensity support-focused accommodation, and in some cases it is also housing-focused. For example, in Vienna places available in transitional housing increased from about 700 in 2007 to 1,980 in 2017. Nonetheless, it appears that the availability of transitional housing lags behind demand in many provinces.

Services for the homeless in Austria have traditionally followed a **staircase approach**, where homeless people have to fulfil certain requirements such as sobriety before the issue of housing is addressed. However, in recent times, **Housing First methods** have been increasingly implemented.

In 2010, the Viennese city government decided to restructure its homelessness services, paving the way for **Housing First** projects such as the one by the social NGO Neunerhaus, which has also released reports on the programme's progress (Neunerhaus 2015). Additionally, the city of Graz is providing Housing First services for women,²² and in Salzburg 5-10 apartments per year are provided for a Housing First programme.²³ Regarding the Neunerhaus Housing First pilot project in Vienna, it was reported that three years after its implementation 98% of the clients still had a valid tenancy, with only one eviction taking place within the programme (Neunerhaus 2015). Overall, it appears that in Vienna the growing implementation of Housing First has accelerated a shift towards a housing-led approach that had been underway since 2010. Increasingly, mobile support is combined with access to permanent apartments in both short- and medium-term services. More intensive services, in the form of 'socially supported housing', are also provided to former homeless people who want to live independently but who need continued support due to psychological problems or chronic illness (FEANTSA 2018b, 77f.).

A **related approach** is also followed in the province of **Vorarlberg**. Focusing on barriers to accessing private and social housing, the programme provides direct access to social housing and outreach support for homeless people with high support needs. This programme started in 2006 and shows very favourable outcomes (for more details see FEANTSA 2018a, 69).

It should be noted that **specific services** exist for **particular target groups**.

In 2018 3,284 people were living within 26 **women's shelters**, approximately half of them children. This number had stayed roughly constant over the previous decade (AÖF 2019).

For people **leaving penal institutions**²⁴ specific programmes such as 'New Start' (*Neustart*) exist, which provide help in the reintegration process. That also means offering help in finding a new home, or in emergency cases providing temporary shelter. New Start has 105 domiciles in Linz and Vienna for these instances, and in 2017 204 people accessed them (BMVRDJ 2018, 174).

Regarding the inhabitants of **shelters for refugees**, a large influx around 2015 led to an increase in the number of people in such institutions, rising from 16,445 in 2014 to 42,649 in 2016 (Statistik Austria 2018b).

²² <https://jaw.or.at/ueber-uns/standorte/einrichtung/s/housing-first>.

²³ <http://www.vinzi.at/vinzidach-salzburg>.

²⁴ For statistics on people in penal institutions, see: www.justiz.gv.at/web2013/home/strafvollzug/statistik/verteilung-des-insassenstandes~2c94848542ec49810144457e2e6f3de9.de.html.

One additional specific and important type of service for homeless people worth mentioning explicitly is **medical services**. Although coverage by health insurance is generally very high in Austria (*inter alia* due to the fact that recipients of MMI are also covered by health insurance), there is substantial specific demand by homeless people that is not met by the normal healthcare institutions. As a result, health services for uninsured people are provided by, in particular, social NGOs or hospitals following charitable principles. One well known example of the latter is the Hospital of the Brothers of Mercy (*Barmherzige Brüder*) in Vienna, which reportedly every year provides ambulatory health services to around 20,000-30,000 uninsured patients, and in-patient treatment to around 1,000-1,500 uninsured patients (LBI-HTA 2012, 50). Examples of health services organised by social NGOs for people without health insurance are AMBER-MED²⁵ and the Neunerhaus Health Centre²⁶ in Vienna or the Marienambulanz²⁷ in Graz. All of them offer medical, and also some dental, treatment to people without health insurance, as well as – to some extent – to insured persons who for different reasons (social anxiety, fear of additional costs that cannot be financed, etc.) do not want to consult a physician or specialist within the regular health system. Many – but by no means all – of the patients are homeless people or people without Austrian citizenship. AMBER-MED treated more than 3,500 patients in 2017; Neunerhaus medical services reported 3,699 patients in 2016 and provided 27,206 cases of treatment (of which 4,874 were dental treatments); and the Marienambulanz had 2,393 patients in 2016. One evident problem is that such services are only available in some of the biggest urban centres, and not in other geographic areas.

Prevention services to avoid evictions are prominently available in 6 out of 9 provinces; another 2 provide services mainly in their respective large cities and only 1 – Burgenland – has no prevention service yet (BAWO 2015, p35). Vienna has a varied set of eviction prevention services, with different institutions focusing on private, co-operative or social housing. The Fachstelle für Wohnungssicherung (FAWOS – Centre for Secure Housing) run by the social NGO Volkshilfe Wien has a focus on private and co-operative housing, working directly with tenants when they are in rent arrears or under threat of eviction by a court.²⁸ Tenants under threat of eviction from the city's own social housing are supported by the municipal landlord Wiener Wohnen,²⁹ which includes legal advice, conflict mediation, and support with rent arrears including help with budgeting. It appears that the phased strengthening of eviction prevention in Vienna has had positive effects, as over 10 years the number of eviction lawsuits that actually ended with an eviction declined sharply, from 1 in 4 to 1 in 8 (Stadt Wien 2015, 149).

To our knowledge, **no detailed long-term follow-up studies** of the effectiveness of other types of services for houseless people are available in Austria. Exceptions are the – very positive – results of different Housing First pilot projects or the above-mentioned programme implemented in Vorarlberg since 2006. On the other hand, there are some hints that the traditional staircase approach does not show favourable results, as indicated by the above-mentioned (Section 1) evidence of the effects of homelessness on mortality.

In general terms, one **major issue causing problems** regarding homelessness and housing is the above-mentioned **dispersion of responsibilities** for relevant policy areas across the different layers of the political and administrative system. This means that housing exclusion and homelessness, and the structural causes of the latter, are not addressed in an inclusive manner. The latter would imply taking measures to: i) **prevent rising housing costs**; ii) **safeguard affordability** via **adequate transfers to low-**

²⁵ See <http://www.amber-med.at>.

²⁶ See <http://www.neunerhaus.at/organisation/jahresberichte>.

²⁷ See <https://www.caritas-steiermark.at/hilfe-angebote/menschen-in-not/gesundheit/marienambulanz-medizinische-erst-und-grundversorgung>.

²⁸ See <https://www.volkshilfe-wien.at/wohnungslosenhilfe/fawos>.

²⁹ See <https://www.wienerwohnen.at>.

income households; and iii) **provide high-quality services** for people who became homeless.

These points at the same time address the main systemic factors limiting effective and sustainable ways out of homelessness.

As outlined in this report, rising housing costs in Austria are caused by a number of factors. Demand has increasingly been surpassing supply (especially in urban areas); and landlord and tenant law, regulating parts of private rental housing, is increasingly ineffective in preventing the acceleration in prices. At the same time, the availability and accessibility of municipal housing and housing offered by LPHAs may be *de facto* limited due to a lack of available dwellings and the length of waiting lists; and in the case of LPHAs, substantial entry costs may often apply.

Regarding transfers to low-income households, there is evidence that these transfers are often not adequate to ensure the affordability of housing costs, and the recently decided reform of the MMI scheme will in all likelihood further amplify this problem.

Regarding services for people who become homeless, regional variations, together with a lack of integrated strategies in some federal provinces, are a major issue. One other systemic problem in this area is that access to such services is in many cases denied to people without Austrian citizenship and/or people who cannot provide proof of legal residence in the related federal province for a specific minimum duration. This means that many services are not accessible for a large share of homeless people.

The most important innovation in the provision of homelessness services within the last five years is the increased orientation towards Housing First methods. Related projects show very good results, but a further extension of such programmes would have to face real challenges, namely increasing housing prices and limited welfare budgets (FEANTSA 2018b, 50).

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Annex

Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Austria

Operational category		Living situation		Definition	Defined as homeless in Austria
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	Living on the streets or in public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters	YES
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation	YES
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homelessness hostels	Where the period of stay is time-limited and no long-term housing is provided	YES
		4	Temporary accommodation		YES
		5	Transitional supported accommodation		YES
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation		NO
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing No housing available prior to release	NO
		8	Penal institutions		
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	NO
		10	Non-conventional buildings		
		11	Temporary structures		
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	NO

Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless in Austria

Operational category		Living situation		Most recent number	Period covered	Source
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	Registered roofless (may include people in emergency accommodation): 13,926	2017 (total number; all days)	National inclusion indicators; BMASGK (2018)
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	See 1 above		
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homelessness hostels	3.3 + 3.4 + 3.5: Registered homeless in institutions: 8,688	2017 (total number; all days)	National inclusion indicators; BMASGK (2018)
		4	Temporary accommodation			
		5	Transitional supported accommodation			
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	3.6: 3,284	2018	AÖF (2019)
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions			
		8	Penal institutions	39,490	1 April 2019	Statistics on the penal system ³⁰
5	People living in non- conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
		10	Non- conventional buildings			
		11	Temporary structures			
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

³⁰ <https://www.justiz.gv.at/web2013/home/strafvollzug/statistik/verteilung-des-insassenstandes~2c94848542ec49810144457e2e6f3de9.de.html>.

