THE FINNISH NATIONAL PROGRAMME TO REDUCE LONG-TERM HOMELESSNESS

HELSINKI, 2–3 DECEMBER 2010

SYNTHESIS REPORT

PEER REVIEW
IN SOCIAL PROTECTION
AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
2010

THE FINNISH NATIONAL PROGRAMME TO REDUCE LONG-TERM HOMELESSNESS

VOLKER BUSCH-GEERTSEMA
ASSOCIATION FOR INNOVATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH AND SOCIAL
PLANNING (GISS, BREMEN, GERMANY)

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SYNTHESIS REPORT

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A.   Policy Context at European Level

Policy framework and important policy developments

The main instrument for the development and implementation of social policy at EU level is the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. Since the Social OMC was launched in 2000, homelessness has been highlighted as an important issue for policies against poverty and social exclusion. While "access to decent housing" and "ensuring good accommodation for all" as well as the prevention of homelessness were mentioned as important objectives in the first publications of the Commission on the social inclusion process (see Frazer et al, 2010; Frazer, 2009), it took some time before homelessness and housing exclusion reached a more prominent place in the debate on social policies at EU level, and were defined as key priorities in the Social OMC (Spinnewijn, 2009 and Calandrino, 2010).

One of the key features of the Social OMC is the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, which is published annually by the European Commission in cooperation with the Social Protection Committee of the European Council. This report reviews recent trends in social protection and social inclusion across the EU Member States. In 2009, the Joint Report stated that "sustained work is required to tackle homelessness" (Council of the European Union, 2009: 2) and in 2010 homelessness and housing exclusion were selected as a special focus of the Joint Report, and the national reports of EU Member States on which it is based. The 2010 Joint Report, adopted in March 2010 by the European Commission and the Council of Ministers, called on Member States to develop "strategies to address housing exclusion and homelessness". The report mentioned a number of important elements for effective strategies (Council of the European Union, 2010: 8–9), including:

- effective governance (involving all relevant stakeholders);

- an evidence base of information and evaluation (including accurate and consistent data on homelessness);

- clearly formulated targets (such as on the prevention of homelessness, a reduction of its duration, targeting the most problematic cases of homelessness, improving the quality of services for homeless people or on increasing the supply of affordable housing);

- integrated policies (combining financial support for individuals, effective regulation and quality social services which are easily accessible for homeless people);

- the role of social and public housing as one of the main solutions for homelessness;

- and the adaptation to new risk groups (including migrant and mobile workers).

In June 2010, the European Council adopted the new Europe 2020 strategy setting priorities for the next decade. The new EU poverty target is defined as "promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty, by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion"[1]. No specific target concerning homelessness has been set, but the proposal by the Commission for Europe 2020 includes a European Platform against Poverty, which will "transform the open method of coordination on social exclusion and social protection into a platform for cooperation, peer-review and exchange of good practice, and into an instrument to foster commitment by public and private players to reduce social exclusion, and take concrete action". One of the tasks for Member States mentioned in this context is "to define and implement measures addressing the specific circumstances of groups at particular risk" and the homeless are explicitly mentioned as one of these groups.[2]

The EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion produced a report on homelessness and housing exclusion in the EU Member States at the end of 2009 which included 15 concrete suggestions for addressing

1   For the conclusions of the European Council see http://www.consilium.europa.eu/App/NewsRoom/loadDocument.aspx?id=339&lang=en&directory=en/ec/&fileName=115346.pdf

2   See http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf, pp. 17-18.

the key barriers, both at the national and EU level, in the fight against homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE); it noted: "insufficient political commitment, lack of understanding of HHE and lack of agreement on definitions and appropriate indicators, absence of or inadequate data sources, and inadequate (if any) monitoring and reporting" (Frazer and Marlier, 2009: 2).[3] One of these suggestions relates to the development of integrated strategies to prevent and reduce homelessness and housing exclusion.

Further important developments influencing the policy framework at EU level in recent years have been the following:

- The written declaration on ending street homelessness, which was adopted by the European Parliament in 2008. The declaration calls on the Council to agree on an EU-wide commitment to end street homelessness by 2015 and calls on the Commission to provide annual updates on action taken and progress made in EU Member States towards achieving this goal.[4]

- The European Parliament adopted another written declaration calling for an ambitious EU homelessness strategy on 16 December 2010. It calls on the European Commission to support Member States in developing effective national strategies and mentions a number of priorities for action, such as "no one sleeping rough; no one living in emergency accommodation for longer than a period of 'emergency'; no one living in transitional accommodation longer than is required for a successful move-on; no one leaving an institution without housing options; no young people becoming homeless as a result of the transition to independent living."[5]

3   See http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/network-of-independent-experts/2009/homelessness-and-housing-exclusion
4   See http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?reference=P6_TA%282008%290163&language=EN
5   See http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2010-0499&language=EN

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- The European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010 addresses the needs of homeless people and recognises it as a priority policy area.

- The Committee of the Regions (2010) adopted a number of recommendations on combating homelessness at its plenary session on 5 and 6 October 2010. These included: "that combating homelessness must remain a priority among the EU's social inclusion policy measures", and that "It cannot be emphasised enough that lack of housing is a problem in itself. More consideration should be given to the positive results of experiments with the Housing First approach, provided that homeless people are offered not only housing but also support, in order to address the other problems that go hand in hand with homelessness." The Committee also recommended using the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) definition of homelessness as developed by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)[6] and calls for increased information exchange at European level on models of good practice in tackling and preventing homelessness.[7]

- A European Consensus Conference on Homelessness was hosted by the Belgian Presidency and the European Commission on 9–10 December 2010, following the example of the national consensus conference on homelessness in France in 2007 (see Loison-Leruste, 2008). Two of the six questions discussed at the Consensus Conference were of special interest in the context of this Peer Review ("'Ending Homelessness': A realistic goal?" and "Are Housing led policy approaches the most effective methods of preventing and tackling homelessness?") and Finland was presented as a positive example of tackling homelessness by various speakers.[8] The policy

6   See http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?page=484 and Edgar (2009).

7   See http://coropinions.cor.europa.eu/viewdoc.aspx?doc=\\esppub1\esp_public\cdr\ecos-v\dossiers\ecos-v-001\en\cdr18-2010_fin_ac_en.doc

8   See link should be http://www.mi-is.be/be-nl/europa/consensusconferentie-dakloosheid and http://feantsa.horus.be/code/EN/pg.asp?Page=1301 for further information. For the experts' contributions see http://www.feantsa.org/files/freshstart/Consensus_Conference/Jury/Experts%20Contributions%20Consensus%20Conference%20on%20Homelessness.pdf

recommendations of the Jury, published in early February 2011[9] state that "ending homelessness is a realistic objective" and that "the provision of adequate support as required can provide sustainable solutions for all homeless people, including people who have experienced long-term homelessness and have complex support needs" (European Consensus Conference Jury, 2011: 11). Furthermore "the jury calls for a shift from using shelters and transitional accommodation as the predominant solution to homelessness towards 'housing led' approaches. This means increasing access to permanent housing and increasing the capacity for both prevention and the provision of adequate floating support to people in their homes according to their needs" (ibid: 2).

Transnational research networks, exchange projects and targeted studies

The European Commission has funded a number of transnational research networks and exchange projects focusing on different dimensions of homelessness. The first such project was the EUROHOME-project,[10] which was followed by EUROHOME-IMPACT (The Housing Dimension of Welfare Reforms).[11] In the CUPH (Constructing Understanding of the Homeless Population) project research teams from seven countries discussed different theoretical and methodological approaches to analyse homelessness.[12] The "COOP" project focused on "Integrated forms of co-operation in housing stock policy — housing provision for risk groups".[13] A recent study on "*Housing Exclusion: Welfare Policies, Housing Provision and Labour Markets*", funded by the PROGRESS programme (the EU's employment and social solidarity programme), analysed the interaction between welfare regimes and housing systems in six European countries, particularly with

9   See European Consensus Conference Jury (2011), http://www.feantsa.org/files/freshstart/ Consensus_Conference/Outcomes/2011_02_16_FINAL_Consensus_Conference_Jury_ Recommendations_EN.pdf

10 For results see Avramov (1999); this volume also contains a detailed analysis of the annual survey on homelessness in Finland (Kärkkäinen, 1999a) and on Finnish homeless policies by that time (Kärkkäinen, 1999b).

11 For results see http://www.iccr-international.org/impact/downloads.html

12 See http://www.cuhp.org/

13 See http://www.srz-gmbh.com/coop/project/index.html

respect to the generation and amelioration of housing exclusion.[14] Another recent research project concentrates on young homeless people in four EU countries.[15]

The most important European research network on homelessness, which has been publishing and disseminating transnational research on a variety of aspects of homelessness since 1990, is the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH). The EOH is organised by FEANTSA and financed by the PROGRESS programme. It has published a wide range of transnational reports and studies, most of which are available at http://www.feantsaresearch.org.[16] Since 2007 one of the regular annual outputs of the EOH has been the publication of a volume of the European Journal of Homelessness (from 2011 two issues per year will be published). In fact, from the beginning national homelessness strategies have been an important theme for articles and policy evaluations in this journal. For example, the 2009 edition contains an analysis of the Finnish homeless strategy (Tainio and Fredriksson, 2009).

Defining and measuring homelessness and housing exclusion — approaches at EU level

Substantial progress on defining homelessness has been made at EU level. The ETHOS was developed as part of the EOH's work, in close cooperation with FEANTSA members. Today this *conceptual framework* is widely accepted in almost all European countries, and has even been selected as the framework for a new definition of homelessness in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2009).

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14 See http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/Projects/euexclusion.htm and Stephens et al (2010)

15 "Combating social exclusion among young homeless populations (CSEYHP)", see www.movisie.nl/homelessyouth

16 A recent publication of the Observatory provides a comprehensive overview of the results of European research on different aspects of homelessness during the last 20 years and of the remaining research gaps (see O'Sullivan et al, 2010). Members of the Observatory have also produced a background document for the Consensus Conference on the "lessons from research" concerning homelessness and homeless policies in Europe (Busch-Geertsema et al, 2010).

Not all European governments agree with all the ETHOS categories or accept all the different groups mentioned in ETHOS should be included as part of the 'homeless' population. However national definitions are discussed in relation to ETHOS in most EU countries nowadays, and it is easy to see which of the subgroups mentioned in ETHOS are included in homelessness definitions on the national level and which are not.[17] In its most recent version, ETHOS defines 13 different operational categories and 24 different living situations, which are related to one of the four broader categories: "roofless", "houseless", "insecure housing" and "inadequate housing" (see Edgar, 2009 and Appendix, Table A.1).

A study on the "*Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level*" (Edgar et al, 2007), commissioned by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, reviewed methods of data collection on homelessness in Europe. The report proposed a harmonised version of the definition of homelessness, mainly for data collection purposes. This version is sometimes called "ETHOS light" because it contains less categories and omits some of the situations of housing exclusion which are classified in ETHOS as insecure and inadequate housing (see Appendix, Table A.2).

The report sets out a methodology for developing homeless monitoring systems (as part of homeless strategies) and makes recommendations applicable to the EU level as well as the national level on how to improve the measurement of homelessness. Most of the categories of homelessness listed in "ETHOS light" are included in the Finnish definition of homelessness, with the exception of people in transitional supported accommodation and those living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing.[18] As in some other Nordic countries, persons sharing with friends and relatives make up a large proportion of homeless people in Finland.

The MPHASIS project (Mutual Progress on Homelessness Through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems) was funded by the

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17 For a comprehensive discussion of other approaches to define homelessness on the European level, including the INSEE study for EUROSTAT (Brousse, 2004) and the recommendations of the UNECE/Conference of European Statistician for the European wide census 2010 (UNECE/EUROSTAT, 2006), see Edgar et al (2007), chapter 3.

18 It is also unclear from the documents available to what extent women in women's shelter or refugee accommodation are counted as homeless in Finland.

PROGRESS initiative between 2007 and 2009. The main objective of the MPHASIS project was to improve the monitoring of homelessness and homeless policies in 20 European countries in a coordinated manner based on the recommendations of the earlier study on the "*Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level*" (see above). Finland was one of the participating countries and the documents provided at the national meeting in Helsinki, as well as general conclusions and lessons learned from the project, are available from the MPHASIS homepage.[19]

Previous Peer Reviews

Homelessness has been the subject of five previous Peer Reviews between 2004 and 2010:

- 2004: UK — The Rough Sleepers Unit, England[20]
- 2005: Denmark — Preventing and Tackling Homelessness[21]
- 2006: Norway — National Strategy — Pathway to a Permanent Home[22]
- 2009: Austria — Counting the Homeless — Improving the Basis for Planning Assistance[23]
- 2010: Portugal — Building a Comprehensive and Participative Strategy on Homelessness[24]

The most relevant Peer Reviews in the context of this Peer Review are those focusing on national strategies to prevent and reduce homelessness, namely the Danish, Norwegian and Portuguese Peer Reviews, though Denmark also developed and published a new Homelessness Strategy in 2009.[25]

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19 See http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/
20 See Vranken (2004)
21 See Meert (2005)
22 See Edgar (2006)
23 See Edgar (2010)
24 See Fitzpatrick (2010)
25 See Hansen (2010). An English version of the Danish Homelessness Strategy is available from http://www.feantsa.org/files/freshstart/National_Strategies/Danish_strategy_Pjece%20om%20hjeml%C3%B8sestrategien_EN.pdf

As one of the first national homelessness strategies with explicit performance targets, the Norwegian Strategy is of particular interest. It outlined the following goals: a reduction of eviction cases by 50 percent and of actual evictions by 30 percent; nobody should have to seek temporary accommodation after release from prison or treatment institutions; and a limit of three months for stays in temporary accommodation. Another important aspect of the Norwegian Strategy concerns issues of governance; local authorities in Norway — similar to those in Finland — are entrusted with the responsibility for tackling homelessness and also have considerable autonomy. Thus, the implementation of the strategy and the cooperation between central government and local authorities in Norway is relevant in informing practice in other European countries.

The development of the Portuguese homelessness strategy also stands out because most of the national homelessness strategies adopted so far have been found in northern Europe, Portugal is the first country among the southern EU Member States to develop a national homelessness strategy. Furthermore, Portugal's homelessness strategy, launched in March 2009, was not only designed by a large group of public and private stakeholders, it also involved them in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases. Although it is based upon a strict definition of homelessness, local networks were encouraged to develop their own homelessness diagnoses and action plans within a broad framework that includes prevention, intervention and follow-up measures. An important conclusion of the Peer Review was that "the experience of developing the Portuguese Strategy was felt to provide a useful model for other Member States, particularly those which do not as yet have a national strategy on homelessness" (Fitzpatrick 2010: 32).

B. The Finnish Programme to Reduce Long-Term Homelessness

Background

In 2007, the so-called Group of the Wise (consisting of the director of Helsinki's social services, the managing director of the Y-Foundation, a Member of Parliament and the Bishop of Helsinki) presented a report, on behalf of the Ministry of Environment, outlining a programme to halve long-term homelessness by 2011 and eliminate it entirely by 2015 — together with a series of other measures based on the 'Housing First' principle. From this outline the details were developed by another working group, and the main principles and policies of the current homelessness reduction programme were decided by the Finnish government in February 2008.

Despite a general tendency for EU Member States to develop national homeless strategies in recent years (at least in the northern and western European countries, but with first initiatives also realised in the south — Portugal — and proposed in eastern Europe — Hungary and Slovenia),[26] the Finnish programme stands out as a particularly ambitious programme, envisioning the elimination of long-term homelessness by 2015. Finland's strategy does, however, exemplify a more general "paradigm shift" in tackling homelessness which has become visible in large parts of Europe. Overall, much greater emphasis is placed on the prevention and reduction of homelessness than on developing support structures outside the regular housing market, such as shelters and temporary accommodation.[27] Under the Finnish programme traditional shelters are reconverted into small apartments, which can be rented with normal tenancies for permanent occupation.

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26 See Edgar (2009) for an overview. For a more in-depth comparison of national homelessness strategies in the liberal and social democratic welfare regimes see Benjaminsen et al (2009).

27 For a critique of the traditional staircase approach see Sahlin (1998 and 2005) and Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin (2008).

Finland has a history of pioneering strategies for measuring and reducing homelessness. As early as 1987, an annual survey of homelessness was introduced as part of the housing market survey (Kärkkäinen, 1999a) and the same survey is still used to provide an indicator of trends of homelessness. Although it relies in part on municipal estimates and there seems to be some variation in municipal enumeration methods, it is one of the early proofs that the annual production of national data on homelessness is not only possible but also crucial to evaluate the effects of targeted policies.

The current reduction programme was preceded by other programmes aimed at reducing homelessness in Finland. In the 1990s, and again between 2001 and 2005, programmes were successful in reducing homelessness (of single homeless people) from almost 20,000 in 1987 to less than 10,000 in the mid 1990s and — after a period of slight growth — further, to under 7,500 by 2005 (Kärkkäinnen, 1999b and Luomanen, 2010, see table 1).

However, the earlier measures focused on increasing access to housing for those in greatest need, and are not believed to have helped long-term homeless people who are seen as representing the 'hard core' of homelessness, given that many of them suffer from mental health and addiction problems (Tainio and Fredrikkson, 2009).

The Y-Foundation, founded in 1985, works to ensure access to housing for single homeless people in Finland which has a large proportion of owner occupied housing stock[28]. This organisation operates nationwide, buying small apartments dispersed in the owner occupied housing stock and letting them to local authority social services and other partners, who in turn re-let them to people in need of accommodation, mostly single homeless people. Recently the Y-Foundation has also been involved in managing and building large housing estates with a greater concentration of apartments. Today the Y-Foundation owns some 6,000 flats all over the country; over 4,500 of them are spread in the privately financed housing stock, and 1,500 provide congregated housing in buildings owned entirely by the Y-Foundation. Usually these houses have between 20 and 25 flats, but the biggest block,

28 60 per cent of the Finnish Housing stock is owner occupied and about 15 per cent is rental social housing (Luomanen, 2010: 5).

Table 1: Homelessness in Finland from 1987–2009

Year	Outdoors/ Shelters	Institutions	Relatives/ friends	Single	Families
1987	4,700	4,760	7,650	**17,110**	1,370
1988	4,400	4,000	7,600	**16,000**	1,200
1989	4,170	4,400	7,620	**16,190**	870
1990	3,610	3,690	7,950	**15,250**	800
1991	3,370	3,340	7,390	**14,100**	700
1992	3,030	3,030	6,820	**12,880**	570
1993	2,560	2,410	6,700	**11,670**	250
1994	1,760	2,170	6,630	**10,560**	380
1995	1710	2,110	6,610	**10,430**	560
1996	1,720	2,110	5,780	**9,610**	360
1997	1,720	2,450	5,650	**9,820**	600
1998	1,770	2,350	5,870	**9,990**	820
1999	1,750	2,390	5,850	**9,990**	780
2000	1,790	2,420	5,790	**10,000**	780
2001	2,160	2,080	5,720	**10,000**	780
2002	2,060	2,080	5,420	**9,560**	770
2003	1,990	1,640	4,560	**8,190**	420
2004	1,910	1,550	4,190	**7,650**	360
2005	1,620	1,560	4,250	**7,430**	360
2006	1,650	1,570	4,180	**7,400**	300
2007	1,480	1,590	4,460	**7,530**	300
2008	1,520	1,640	4,800	**7,960**	300
2009	1,460	1,490	5,200	**8,150**	320

Source: ARA, Local Authorities' housing market surveys, see Luomanen (2010: 45).

which was built recently, has 100 units and is operated by the Salvation Army. The Y-Foundation director commented during the Peer Review that the approach of his Foundation was actually an early Housing First initiative in all but name. While — as will be reported further below — the programme under review here covers a number of bigger construction projects creating larger units with congregated housing and on-site support for formerly long-term homeless persons, the original approach of the Y-Foundation has been dedicated to organising affordable housing for homeless people spread in the regular stock for a long time (mostly located in regular neighbourhoods near to the city centre, with off-site support available when necessary) and

has been extremely successful — over the past 25 years fewer than 5 per cent of tenants of the Y-Foundation stock have been evicted.

The goals, target groups and measures of the programme

Two broad objectives are mentioned in the programme, they are:

- to halve long-term homelessness by 2011, and
- to find more effective measures to prevent homelessness.

Specifically, the programme set a quantitative target to create 1,250 "new dwellings, supported housing or care places" targeting long-term homeless people between 2008 and 2011. Of these units 750 should be in Helsinki, 125 each in Vantaa and Espoo and a total of 250 in Tampere, Turku, Lahti, Kuopio, Jensuu, Oulu and Jyväskyla.

The programme foresees shelters and "residential homes" for long-term housing of homeless people gradually being "abandoned in favour of residential units which allow for independent, subsidized and supervised living". Funds were set aside to provide grants "to eligible associations, organisations or foundations responsible for residential homes, for basic renovation work and for converting them into subsidized dwellings".

There has been some discrepancy in defining long-term homeless people over time. Long-term homeless people were defined by the Group of the Wise as "a group of homeless people whose homelessness is classed as prolonged or chronic, or threatens to be that way because conventional housing solutions fail with this group and there is an inadequate supply of solutions which meet individual needs." Previously, the operational definition for the statistics was the following: "A person whose homelessness has become prolonged and chronic, or is threatening to become chronic (over 1 year of homelessness or repeatedly homeless during the last three years) due to social and health problems". (Obviously the difference in these definitions left much room for interpretation; this will be discussed further below.)

Those responsible for developing the programme realised that any sustainable effort at reducing long-term homelessness cannot solely aim to provide long-term homeless people with permanent housing and adequate support; it needs to actively prevent new groups from becoming long-term homeless. Therefore, the target groups of the project include — in addition to long-term homeless persons — young people, people released from prison and people at imminent risk of eviction. The measures for these groups included subsidised housing projects for young people, the procurement of subsidised housing for recently released prisoners and the development of better services to prevent homelessness after release from prison — as well as new national guidelines and local services for the prevention of evictions.

In terms of funding, between 2008 and 2011, €80m was set aside by the government for investment grants and another €10.3m was dedicated to covering up to 50 percent of the salary costs of additional support personnel with direct customer contact with long-term homeless persons in the newly developed projects. Co-funding of the same amount is required from the municipalities involved in the programme. In addition, the Finnish Slot Machine Association (RAY) set aside €18m for financial assistance, and earmarked a further €2.5m for the acquisition of supported housing for newly released prisoners. In sum, including the provision of another €80m for subsidised interest rate loans by the government, the total budget for the programme from 2008–2011 amounts to €201.1m.

The programme was implemented by letters of intent between State authorities and the ten largest Finnish cities, in which detailed agreements where laid down on the concrete projects planned and funded in the relevant city. Clear responsibilities were defined on the level of the central government (involving the Ministry of Environment, responsible for housing policies and lead coordinator of the programme, the Ministry of Health and Social Services and the Ministry of Justice and a number of national agencies responsible for funding of housing and other services and for the criminal sanction system) and the municipalities.

First results

According to the Ministry of Environment the programme has proved to be successful for a number of reasons.

In terms of funding: the overall funding of the programme was sufficient and the funding model was effective. The quantitative targets regarding the production of different types of accommodation have been met or even exceeded in some areas (by the end of 2011 a total of 1,650 new dwellings/supported dwellings should be in use). However, in some of the municipalities additional housing capacities (and an increase in the target) seemed necessary to reach the goal of halving long-term homelessness.

The conversion of dormitory accommodation got underway in Helsinki and Espoo. In Helsinki, which is where half of the country's homeless people live, it took some time to persuade some of the NGO service providers, especially those with leadership from abroad, like the Salvation Army, to get on board, but eventually they did. When the programme is complete, in 2012, "there will be no more shelters and hostels designed for temporary housing of the homeless in the metropolitan area. They have been replaced by supported housing units based on tenancy agreements" (Kaakinen, presentation at Peer Review meeting). In other municipalities participating in the programme the conversion of shelters was not as advanced as in Helsinki, and similar conversion programmes still need to be developed. Some temporary accommodation is still provided in Helsinki; in the capital a new service centre has been established and half of its 104 places are for crisis accommodation for a maximum of six weeks before a permanent solution is found. On their biggest day, the premises provided temporary accommodation for 175 people, which led to the opening of second premises for winter months.

The impact of the "Housing First" principle for long-term homeless people facing multiple problems was reportedly positive. It was stated that the arrangement of permanent housing has awakened the motivation for rehabilitation and that this has led to "an appreciable reduction of alcohol consumption" (Luomanen, 2010: 37). Evictions were reportedly rare and exclusively caused by client violence. Given the international debate about

these effects, it would of course be helpful to collect more robust data about them.

Preventive measures were also reported to have positive effects: housing advice services have been expanded and made more effective, eviction prevention instructions have been drawn up in all cities and progress has been made in improving access to housing for newly released prisoners. However, clearer targets and an improvement of the measurement of homelessness caused by eviction and release from prison are needed.

The Finnish Youth Housing Association has generated a new type of "multidisciplinary service chain of workshop activity and housing for young people" which was implemented in most municipalities participating in the programme.

Progress in achieving the main target of the first phase of the programme (to halve long-term homelessness) was limited, and according to the background paper provided for the Peer Review it will not be achieved by the end of 2011. In fact, between 2008 and 2009, the total number of homeless people in Finland actually increased slightly (going from 7,960 to 8,150 homeless single persons and from 300 to 320 homeless families). In more than half of the programme cities (Vantaa, Lahti, Kuopio, Joensuu, Jyväskylä, and Espoo), the number of people defined as long-term homeless also increased despite efforts to reduce them. In the remaining four cities fewer long-term homeless persons were counted in 2009 compared to 2008. This is also reportedly the case in Helsinki, although the total number of homeless people had increased considerably in the capital. The impact of the newly created housing units is expected to be higher for the homelessness statistics of 2010 and 2011 because by the end of 2009 only 22 percent of the original target (1,250 units) had been completed.

In addition, there was the problem of what qualifies as long-term homelessness (there are plans to refine the definition). To illustrate the fact that the definition of long-term homelessness left too much room for interpretation, see the extreme variation in the proportion of long-term homeless people among all people estimated to be homeless in different municipalities: "In Joensuu, for example, of all the homeless (118), 95 %

are long term homeless according to the statistics, while in Tampere the proportion of long term homeless is 25 %" (Luomanen, 2010: 32). More generally, the overall average proportion of long-term homeless people turned out to be 42 percent, which was considerably higher than it was assumed before implementing the programme (when their share was estimated to make up a third of the total homeless population).

The Ministry of Environment is committed to eliminating long-term homelessness by 2015 and states: "In spite of being ambitious, a significant reduction in long-term homelessness and its ultimate elimination remain the consistent objective of the second phase of the programme" (Luomanen, 2010: 39).

Plans for a second phase of the reduction programme got underway in December 2010. The Peer Review plays an important part in getting a clearer view on necessary changes and new elements of the next programme. For example, it was obvious after quite substantive (and costly) redevelopment projects creating large units with intensive staff support that the next phase should take better account of the existing stock. It should also pay more attention to education, training and employment issues, and further reintegration of the target group in general. The belief that the 'hard core' homeless (with multiple problems) would need constant support was not found to be the case in practice. There was, however, an obvious need for greater flexibility of support and some groups would need greater attention in the next phase, such as homeless persons released from prison who are reluctant to use the services offered to them, young people with serious health and drug problems, immigrants and homeless people with a history of debts who have accumulated rent arrears in the past and face barriers in accessing social housing.

C. Policies and Experiences in Peer Countries and Stakeholder Contributions

Representatives from Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Latvia, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden and the Netherlands attended the Finnish Peer Review. Stakeholder comments were provided by FEANTSA and by Eurocities (the network of major European cities).

The peer countries

National comment papers contained an array of questions, which the hosts were keen to answer during the Peer Review (see below).

Peer comments from central and eastern European Member States (Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia and Slovenia) were critical of the absence of a comprehensive national strategy to reduce homelessness in their countries — though in Slovenia and Hungary there have been attempts by NGOs to initiate a strategy, and there have been attempts to agree on a definition of homelessness at national level. The proposed definition focuses on certain subgroups listed by the ETHOS typology, but is often only a selection of the more severe cases of housing exclusion such as those living rough and sleeping in shelters. In all of these countries awareness of the problem of homelessness has been growing in recent years and the increasing engagement of NGOs in this field is an important development. The lack of affordable housing was mentioned in all four of these countries' comment papers. It is considered a massive barrier demanding to improve the prevention of homelessness because the chances of homeless households being re-housed into permanent housing were very limited. Services in these countries concentrate on emergency provision and temporary accommodation. The Housing First approach towards reducing homelessness was deemed unrealistic for several eastern European countries (at least in the near future). Having said that, some steps towards favouring more permanent housing solutions from shelters have been taken in the capital of Slovenia (Ljubljana) and for some pilot projects in Hungary.

All other countries involved in the Peer Review were in the process of implementing their own national homelessness strategy (in the case of the Netherlands the action plan was developed for the four largest cities), or had gone through this process already (Norway and Sweden) when the Peer Review took place. All of them referred to the Housing First approach, to an increased emphasis on prevention, and to the general aim of reducing homelessness. In France as well as in Portugal, Sweden, and the Netherlands (Amsterdam), the Housing First approach was seen as an innovative method to be tried and tested in a selected number of relatively small projects which target long-term homeless people with severe problems (mental illness and addiction) and which should more or less follow the model of Pathways to Housing in New York.[29] The first positive results were reported in Lisbon and in Amsterdam where it was stated that "the importance of Housing First is bigger in Amsterdam than it first seems at first sight. Although it is still a small, experimental project, it has affected the way we now think about what effective and appropriate programmes for homeless people/psychiatric patients are. We have already decided to give Housing First a prominent position in how we house vulnerable groups in the near future" (Kamp and Jurgens, 2010: 4).

The paper from the Netherlands, authored by staff of the Amsterdam municipal authority, included the following reflection on their experience of project visits in New York and Helsinki: "When we came to Finland, we expected to see hundreds or thousands of formerly homeless people housed in apartments, spread throughout the city, much like what we saw in New York. We were initially disappointed in what we saw. The institutions were still there, but they were being renovated. Instead of dormitories, private apartments were built in the old institutions. At first sight, it was not very different from how homeless institutions are set up in our city. But then we

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29 For more in-depth information on Housing First in the United States and its relevance for Europe see the discussion paper for this Peer Review (Busch-Geertsema, 2010a) and the papers by Atherton and McNaughton Nichols (2008), Pleace (2008 and 2010) and Johnsen and Teixeira (2010). A book article and a "Housing First Manual", both authored by the founder of Pathways to Housing, Sam Tsemberis (2010a and b), provide the most up-to date first hand information on this model.

realised that Finland had reinvented Housing First" (ibid: 3).[30] The authors see the primary innovation of the Housing First principle, as it is realised in Finland, coming from a philosophical change; homeless persons are treated as regular people rather than clients or patients, they have control over their apartments and over the everyday aspects of their lives. The authors also emphasise the radical element of Housing First in Finland: "It is not a model that runs parallel with others, it is the only model. All night shelters and dormitories are abolished" (ibid: 4).[31]

Housing First can be seen as a distinct approach for a specific group of homeless people with complex needs, but also as a broader policy approach aiming at providing normal housing to *all* homeless people as quickly as possible (with adequate support if needed). The latter can perhaps more adequately be termed "housing-led policy" and has been dominating policies for the bulk of homeless people in Finland for many years and has gained importance in a number of other EU countries in recent years. Explicit reference to this development has been made in comment papers from Norway, France, Sweden, and the Netherlands (with caveats). The Swedish comment paper emphasised the importance of "the own contract" as criterion for a Housing First approach and stated: "In Sweden, there is still temporary accommodation. The goal must be that as few people as possible live there as short a time as possible. Finland's approach inspires raising the goal." (Remaeus and Knutagård, 2010).

The main other issues raised in the comment papers were the following:

- Funding: various comments noted the fact that the resources available in Finland (thanks to the government) for the programme were substantial and that a certain amount of money would have to be available to successfully re-house the relatively small group of

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30 It should be mentioned at this stage that while the current Finnish programme is using more congregated housing, partly in converted shelters, for re-housing long-term homeless persons, the authors would have also had a chance to see the expected "hundreds or thousands of formerly homeless people housed in apartments, spread throughout the city" because this has been done with other parts of the homeless population for many years in Finland, i.e. in the stock of the Y-Foundation (see above).

31 However, the Peer Review clarified that some temporary accommodation (mainly with a clearing function) remains and that in practice the Housing First projects still run parallel to more traditional approaches following a staircase model of reintegration in stages.

homeless people with high and complex support needs. On the other hand, this group also tends to rely on a great deal of the traditional system's resources such as emergency medical support, psychiatric hospitals, police and prison systems, etc. The money spent on organising proper housing and support might potentially be saved elsewhere but undoubtedly involves a large financial commitment in the first phase.

• Adequate types of housing and support for long-term homeless people: access to affordable and available housing was seen as a key issue in most of the comment papers. Various papers pointed to the benefits of scattered housing with optional individual support and to the risk that large housing projects for specific groups will generate more problems than they were intended to solve. But some statements also pointed out that for "some homeless people" needs could be met by long-term supported housing (congregated and with support on-site) and that there was still a lack of more robust scientific evaluations of different types of support and housing. Case management and the development of individual support plans were necessary for effective support. The need for collaboration between different specialist service providers, NGOs and municipal services might be even more important for countries where NGOs play a greater role and the specialisation of services is more advanced than in Finland.

• Focus and target of the programme: it was generally considered appropriate to focus on long-term homeless people, prevention and young people. The goal of halving and finally eliminating long-term homelessness was seen as very ambitious. In a number of other EU countries targets set in their homeless strategies involved other goals such as for example "no children evicted" (Sweden), reducing homelessness arising from evictions and discharge from institutions (Norway, Portugal, the Netherlands) or limiting the time of stay in temporary accommodation (Norway).

- Governance issues: the involvement of all relevant actors and close cooperation between national and local authorities were generally seen as crucial and a well-developed feature of the programme in Finland. Several comment papers emphasised how important it was to involve service users in the development and implementation of national homelessness strategies. Focusing on the ten cities with the highest numbers of homeless people was deemed appropriate. The letters of intent signed by the national government and the municipalities involved were seen as an alternative instrument to steer the process. In the peer countries we can find a variety of approaches for developing and implementing Homeless Strategies, ranging from legislation (Right to Housing in France) to project funding after a more traditional tendering process (Sweden) and assigning the lead responsibilities at national level either to a Ministry or to large working groups, departments of the national social administration or a large national funding organisation (Husbanken in Norway). Finally, in order to plan and evaluate the effects of national homeless strategies continuous monitoring of homelessness is essential.

- Some participants of the Peer Review saw a need to provide a better analysis of gender specific needs and answers to the needs of homeless women.

The stakeholders

The comment papers of the two European stakeholders involved in the Finnish Peer Review were mostly positive about the programme under discussion. Eurocities noted the elements of the Finnish programme which were relevant to most European countries: adequate structure, the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, well-developed responsibilities, sufficient funding, sound common philosophy, the use of measurable targets and a focus on the ten biggest cities and target groups (long-term homeless and young people). One weakness of the programme was singled out: "There are no special systems or properties for homeless women within the programme. However the situation for homeless women — e.g.

motherhood, exposure to violence and abuse — calls for special attention and maybe also special systems." (Nilson, 2010: 2).

The director of FEANTSA, Mr Freek Spinnewijn, stressed that "the Finnish policies to address homelessness are amongst the most advanced in Europe. Finland is one of the few countries that have managed to consistently reduce the number of homeless people during the last two decades. It is also one of the few countries that retains its ambitious policy targets on homelessness in spite of the current economic crisis" (Spinnewijn, 2010: 1). FEANTSA's comments on the homelessness programme to end long-term homelessness were based on the organisation's toolkit for effective homeless strategies,[32] which recommends that Homeless Strategies should be evidence-based, use a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach, be based on rights, involve all stakeholders in the strategy design and implementation, be enshrined in statutory legislation, and use a sustainable, needs-based, pragmatic, bottom-up approach. Most of these requirements were met by the Finnish strategy, according to FEANTSA.

Mr Spinnewijn reflected on the transferability of Finnish choice to convert all traditional night shelters into supported housing and reduce the use of emergency accommodation to an absolute minimum: "It should be noted that such an approach might not currently be possible or beneficial in all EU Member States. In some countries the most urgent need is to make sure that there are sufficient places in emergency accommodation to make sure that people are not forced to live on the street or in structures not intended for habitation" (Ibid: 1). He also drew attention to the fact that in some countries a lot of undocumented migrants and failed asylum seekers are using the shelter accommodation of services for homeless people and that such accommodation might be the only realistic provision for these groups for the time being.

With respect to the substantial funding provided for the programme (which played a role in convincing NGO service providers to adopt the new philosophy), Mr Spinnewijn questioned whether such high levels of funding would be viable in the future, given the impact of the economic crisis. He highlighted

32 See http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?Page=797

the fact that new regulations for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) state that three per cent of the funding available can be used for housing marginalised groups. In his conclusion the FEANTSA director referred to EU recommendations to all Member States to develop integrated strategies against homelessness and asked the European Commission to develop a framework for European cooperation of public administrations to foster exchange and mutual learning; the Commission should promote the Housing First approach across Europe and build on the expertise of Finland and some other EU countries for the implementation of the approach. Finally, he pleaded for an EU initiative to improve the quality of services for homeless people, and use current staff training programmes on EU level for this sector as well.

D. Discussions at the Peer Review Meeting

The Peer Review's hosts provided a lot of additional information by answering the extensive list of questions brought forward by the participants. The questions proved there was great interest in learning the details of the programme for all representatives involved in the review. The discussion is summarised here.

The hosts explained that when the Finnish programme was developed the inaugurators were oblivious to the success of Housing First projects in the United States. They read about the term "Housing First" for the first time in a paper from Sweden discussing alternatives to the staircase approach. Then they interpreted the term for their purposes. They wanted to abolish their (staircase) system which was ineffective and resulted in homeless people having to stay in temporary accommodation and supported group homes before moving into permanent housing when they had shown they were "housing ready". There is no longer a need to climb up a ladder of different kinds of accommodation before receiving a permanent contract for a self-contained dwelling and the conversion of shelters into supported housing will help to reduce the level of homelessness.[33] It was deemed important that former homeless people have their own rental agreement and that they can put their name on the door of their apartment.

The economic effects of "Housing First" projects reported in a study by the research team, which carried out the evaluation in Tampere, showed that intensified supported housing generates significant savings as the use of other costly services decreases. In the Tampere project, the uptake of social and health care services halved compared to during homelessness. This was estimated to equate to 14,000 euros of savings per resident. The total annual savings for 15 residents in the unit in question amounted to around

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33 It is important to note here that persons in supported housing are not defined as homeless people in Finland anymore. This may not be the case in every European country, though the fact that normal tenancy contracts (sometimes with a few additional conditions) are provided with no time limit for the tenancy, is an important argument for not defining the tenants concerned as homeless. Furthermore most of the newly created flats are self-contained and there is no need to share common kitchen or sanitary facilities. Some exemptions are made for people judged in need of very intensive support and "assisted housing" because of serious health problems and disabilities.

220,000 euros. Positive effects on (increasing) well-being and (decreasing) substance abuse were also reported by the Finnish government. The success rate of newly created tenancies was described as "quite remarkable", and new services for homeless people have also been influencing other social welfare and health services, especially the treatment of substance abusers.

Existing evidence is very relevant for the transnational debate on Housing First approaches. Critics have questioned whether Housing First in Europe will really result in fewer costs than existing provisions (Pleace, 2008)[34] and up to now evidence on the decrease of drug and alcohol use in Housing First projects on an international scale has been limited. Some experts have argued that Housing First might not be the most effective approach for active addicts[35] and that, since alcohol abuse may be more relevant among homeless people in Finland than for example in the US, this limits any comparisons. The evaluation of the programme in Finland showed some social workers criticised the Housing First approach, calling it "Bottle First", and argued that by following a harm reduction philosophy it fostered "supported drinking" rather than supported housing. The programme was repeatedly accused

34 Recent evidence from the US has confirmed substantial cost offsets created by using the Housing First approach for persons with serious mental illness. "However, because persons with substance use issues and no recent history of mental health treatment used relatively fewer and less costly services, cost neutrality for these persons may require less service-intensive programmes and smaller subsidies" (Poulin et al, 2010: 1093). As Rosenheck (2000: 156) has rightly pointed out, even if effective services for homeless persons will cost more than less effective provisions in some cases, "their value ultimately depends on the moral and political value society places on caring for its least well-off members"

35 For the US see Kertesz et al (2009). However, there is strong evidence that addiction does not deteriorate in Housing First projects and more recent evidence from the US also suggests that some positive change over time may be achieved simply by providing high frequency substance users with ordinary housing. The authors of a recent 24 month follow-up study comparing housing stability and level of drug and alcohol abuse among individuals with and without active drug or alcohol use at the time of entry into Housing First projects in the US, show equal two-years success in housing for both groups and a limited decrease of substance abuse among high frequency users: "This finding may lend support to the hypothesis that housing alone may motivate reduced substance use. However, caution is warranted given high rates of past-30-day drug use and days intoxicated throughout follow-up. To be explicit, stable housing is not substance use treatment" (Edens et al, 2011: 177). A recent evaluation of a large rehousing project in Glasgow, Scotland, also provides quite strong evidence that drugs/alcohol problems lessen (though not disappear) when people move from congregate/hostel environments into ordinary housing. To some extent, the very excessive alcohol/drug use often was to help them cope with life in the hostel and when they are in ordinary communities they don't 'need' as much. (Fitzpatrick et al, 2010)»

of undermining the major efforts to develop intoxication treatment, often based on providing permanent housing as a reward for a successful period of treatment and abstinence. In light of this debate, it is extremely important to provide robust evidence on the effects of the Finnish programme, not only on the national level but also to inform those responsible for policies and practices in other European countries and indeed internationally.

Project visits at the Peer Review meeting helped provide a better understanding of some of the supported housing projects created under the current programme. While in Finland a large number of scattered site apartments have been made available for re-housing homeless people by organisations like the Y-Foundation, the project visits were dedicated to three projects which are on a single site next to each other and in an area which is dominated by institutional buildings (like the Helsinki Diaconia Institute Hospital, the Helsinki Diaconia College, the Helsinki Deaconess Institute Museum and a church; a number of additional "assisted living units" provide accommodation for senior residents with a history of substance abuse, for HIV-positive persons and AIDS-afflicted persons and other accommodation for homeless men and women is also provided on the same ground). The Peer Review project covered an accommodation unit with 28 flats for formerly long-term homeless women and another project for 25 long-term homeless men run by a self-help organisation ("No Fixed Abode"), which has rented and sublet apartments in the same block as the accommodation unit for women (on separate floors with separate entrances). Next to this block, a new (reconstructed) building (Aurora House) was just ready for moving in, offering 125 apartments for long-term homeless people. Most apartments have a shower and a kitchenette, but two storeys of the building (a former hotel) are dedicated to "assisted living" and offer common kitchen facilities only. While all apartments are let with a long-term tenancy contract, there are special conditions regarding visitors in the apartment and porters control the entrances of the different units. Support is available on-site and the support staff are exclusively assigned to an apartment/block, they are not involved in provision of floating support in scattered housing outside the area. Inhabitants can make use of the support in their own time. Drinking is allowed in the flats but not in common areas. Rules regarding visits and other issues are decided in regular house meetings.

Participants of the Peer Review noted how the buildings resemble traditional hostel provision, but they also had the impression that their location and concentration resembled a ghetto situation — where housing was segregated and concentrated in certain areas. The well-known "not in my back yard" attitude has meant it has been easier to create places on the premises of the Deaconess Institute. And new buildings, like the Aurora House development, will need require accommodation capacities and staff resources, which act as a barrier in the "normalisation" of the housing situation for the long-term homeless.

While it is true that in 2009 there were 2,280 independent flats available for homeless people in Helsinki and only 223 flats with support on-site plus a further 180 in supported group homes,[36] it is clear from the projects and plans presented that the congregated flats in larger buildings with on-site support will be considerably increased by the programme. One reason for this was that doubts remained, underlined by negative outcomes of a pilot project, whether the target group (long-term homeless people with severe mental health and addiction problems) would cope in scattered housing. Congregated flats in one building with on-site support facilitate supervision and a certain degree of control over those persons who risk getting into trouble were seen as better suited for this target group. It was hoped that they might also provide the potential to tackle widespread problems of social isolation and boredom after being re-housed (but common activities are then narrowed for a specific milieu of ex-homeless people). However, the practical experiences with the Housing First approach in the US which targeted the same group of people — or those with even more severe problems — have provided robust evidence that it is in fact possible to re-house this group in scattered housing with off-site support.[37]

36 In contrast 518 places in shelters remained in Helsinki in 2009. The number had decreased from 2,351 in 1980 to 1,403 in 1990 and 906 in 2000 and will decrease dramatically with the current conversion programme. Critics in Finland complained that by the conversion of dormitory shelters much less apartments are created for homeless people than beds available for them before. Note that under the programme a lot of new flats are created in addition to those in former shelters.
37 See the evidence cited in the discussion paper for this review and new evidence published recently, for example in Edens et al (2011). For Europe see also Busch-Geertsema (2002 and 2005) and Dane (1998).

Another argument in favour of building projects with larger numbers of units relates to the sheer quantity of new apartments to be made available under the Finnish programme. Between 2,500 and 3,000 long-term homeless people shall be re-housed in the relatively short period of eight years (including the second phase of the programme which should last until 2015). In Helsinki especially, which has a very tight housing market, it is very hard to procure access to an additional number of several hundred or even 2,000 new apartments spread all over the city. In comparison with Pathways to Housing in New York (the pioneer of Housing First in the US)[38], the number of long-term homeless people to be provided with permanent housing and support in Helsinki is considerably higher and there is less time to build up a stock of available flats for them.

On the other hand, the fact remains that newly constructed large blocks exclusively inhabited by the formerly-homeless usually have a number of disadvantages, including but not limited to: segregation from a normal neighbourhood, stigmatisation of their address, extremely high concentration of households with severe problems, probability of conflicts arising from this concentration, special and costly security regulations, and restrictions on tenant's freedom and autonomy. One way of describing the situation would be to say this approach does not really end homelessness but modernises provisions for homeless people creating built structures which will influence (if not dominate) the provision for homeless people in Finland for many future years and will imply their own inherent necessities. In Sweden the approach to convert former transitional housing in permanently occupied houses for specific categories of homeless people has been criticised: "In transforming the special-housing units into a permanent living arrangement, the new model fails to provide a mechanism by which homeless clients can re-establish themselves on the *regular* housing market, offering no real pathway out of homelessness." (Hansen Löfstrand, 2010: 29).

38 All in all Pathways to Housing in New York serves about 450 clients at a time (see Pearson et al, 2007) for whom the housing stock, rented by the organisation and sublet to the clients has been built up over a period of several years, while more than 900 new flats for long-term homeless people were planned under the first phase of the Finnish programme in Helsinki by 2012 (Luomanen, 2010: 26).

Since flexibility of support is repeatedly emphasised as an important requirement for a successful re-housing strategy, one improvement to the current system would be to enable support staff who primarily work on-site in large blocks to take responsibility for a few scattered apartments as well.

A researcher who is responsible for the scientific evaluation of the Finnish programme on the national level (Marko Kettunen) graded some of the projects realised in Finland based on four of the basic principles for Housing First as developed by the Pathways to Housing project in New York:

- Consumer choice (including no evaluation of housing readiness);
- Separation of housing and services;
- Recovery-oriented services;
- Community Integration.

The scores for the four indicators varied considerably between the Finnish projects presented and one of the objectives of the research will be to evaluate the relevance of these principles for different projects, the clients served and the success achieved.

Most Peer Review participants were in favour of realising the Housing First approach through scattered housing. Long-term contracts, their own key, privacy, a normal neighbourhood and the provision of personalised support were also emphasised as key elements of Housing First.

Assessment of needs and personal resources are of great importance if flexible support measures are going to be adjusted according to what people need (which may vary greatly over time) and if the provision is too intensive or too costly services will be put on hold. Representatives from Amsterdam presented an independency matrix which helps them to decide who will profit from Housing First projects and who will not. They found that such projects should be reserved for the top priority groups — long-term homeless persons with severe problems — and that people with sufficient resources (friends and relatives, ability to work, etc.) should not qualify.

Other issues debated during the Peer Review meeting were the role of individual responsibility and of initiatives to activate and empower the target group and encourage the formerly homeless people to participate in education, training and employment. Tackling boredom and social isolation is another wide-spread challenge in the integration process. Peter Fredriksson, the government representative, assured people that these would be important themes for the development of the second phase of the programme (2012–2015).

The role of social housing and private rented sector for re-housing homeless people was another important topic of discussion. In Finland the more traditional non-profit social housing providers are reluctant to take homeless persons, as are private owners. This was one of the reasons why the Y-Foundation was created and has such an important role. In other EU countries both sectors have the potential to house homeless people if incentives and guarantees are provided and there is social support for those persons in need of it. More should be done to put some public pressure on

housing providers receiving public subsidies to provide priority access for those groups most in need of housing.

The focus on the ten biggest cities seems an adequate approach for Finland. However, this approach will increase the movement of homeless people from rural regions to those cities where services are available; rural homelessness is more significant in some of the peer countries and homeless strategies have to take adequate account of that.

Effective prevention is critical for sustainable reductions of homelessness. The Finnish programme includes some prevention measures and progress has been made, but there is still room for improvement, for example specific legal provisions outlining the necessity of a good information flow on households threatened with eviction and an integrated system for the prevention of evictions because of rent arrears (which have been increasing in Finland in recent years) would be good starting points. More concrete targets in the field of prevention might aid future homeless strategies, including the Finnish one.

Last but not least the participation of homeless people in the development and implementation of homelessness strategies was reiterated; their participation is indispensable, not only on the national level but also on the local level and on the level of specific projects implementing the programme.

E.   Conclusions and Key Lessons

Effective strategies to tackle homelessness have to be evidence-based, comprehensive, multidimensional, participatory, sustainable, means-tested, pragmatic, and include all stakeholders. They require political will and a mechanism between central and local government. Measurable objectives should be set and mechanisms have to be in place to collect the data needed. Here, the EU has made an effort to improve national capacities to develop such measuring mechanisms, but there is still room for improvement.

The Finnish example meets most of the EU's requirements, of which only a selection is presented here:

- It is based on a clear political will, parliamentary decisions at the national level and it involves the relevant Ministries (though in Finland the involvement of other stakeholders, especially NGO service provider associations might have been less relevant as in many other European countries, where they play a much greater role in service provision for homeless people).

- Responsibilities on the national level and the role of a coordinator are clarified; in Finland the Ministry of Environment is responsible for housing policy.

- Mechanisms for local delivery of the policy have been set; in Finland these are the financial incentives provided by the state and the concrete letters of intent which fix tasks and obligations of national and local government in the ten largest cities.

- Objectives and a clear quantitative target have been defined and mechanisms are available to measure whether the target will be met (in Finland the only quantitative target concerns the reduction of long-term homelessness, and the number of additional accommodation units to reach this aim, and improvements in measurement mechanisms are needed).

- Sufficient funding has been set aside to finance the programme, though more housing capacities may be needed to achieve the original goal.

- The evidence base is well developed in Finland. In Finland the 'Group of the Wise' have had the responsibility to prove the evidence and to develop innovative ideas on this basis with the background of their own experiences in the field. Some of the main elements of the strategy are clearly justified by research at the European and international level, though more robust research might still be needed to evaluate concrete measures and their effects.

It seems obvious that in order to reduce long-term homelessness preferential access to appropriate housing has to be made available to this target group. Finland is one of the leading countries in providing targeted programmes to house homeless people. The more recent strategies emphasise the importance of providing adequate support to match the needs of the target group and on intensifying prevention measures. Of course, that does not mean there is not still room for improvement.

Finland's ambitious objective to eliminate long-term homelessness by 2015 and convert shelters into permanent housing, is pertinent for other EU countries, which have also decided to follow a "Housing First" approach — but the question is to what extent the use of shelters and transitional accommodation may be reduced without risking that people end up on the street with no provision at all. For those countries which are still developing new (or extending existing) staircase systems, Finland's example provides an alternative. Now, they might consider refraining from implementing the staircase system and re-direct efforts to providing permanent housing and adequate social support for potentially homeless people.

The discussion at the Peer Review meeting can be summarised as follows:

- There is increasing consensus that the aim of homeless strategies should be to reduce, solve and prevent homelessness instead of administering it. It is always cheaper and better, even for countries

which are not particularly wealthy, to keep homelessness as low and short as possible.

- Housing First, however it is interpreted and despite different opinions on its essential elements, is an interesting concept. It should be tested and implemented more frequently in different countries. There is a role for the European Commission to look at the different projects, share experiences and examine the risks and the various strategies to tackle related problems.

- Housing First is not just about housing, it is about combining access to housing with different kinds of support for those in need. While it is important to keep in mind that not all re-housed homeless people need support, it is fair to assume that housing is the common need among all homeless people. It is important to assess those who do need extra support. The proportions will differ. Wealthy countries with well-developed services will have a smaller number but a greater share of homeless people who need support than those with less developed or less generous welfare states (Stephens et al, 2010). Homelessness does not affect just those with drug dependency or very complex problems.

- Housing First contains certain common elements. It includes a permanent tenancy, privacy, having one's own door key, reducing shelters, and providing individually-tailored support for those who need it. There is scope for both high and low intensity support. The former can be provided in various settings, but there is still a debate about which is the most appropriate type of provision for different homeless groups and on the respective merits of off- and on-site support. There should be more debate on the role of choice and how best to develop personal resources.

- Questions remain about the most effective type of housing for specific groups (scattered housing, permanent supported housing etc.) and about the adequacy and effectiveness of different types of support (like assertive community treatment, case-management, critical time intervention, less intensive and more flexible types of floating

support, peer support etc.). There is room — including in Finland — to test scattered housing with off-site support for homeless persons with complex support needs, following the examples in the US and in some European cities.

More and more EU Member States are developing strategies to tackle homelessness. While more of these are still in the wealthier northern European countries, the achievements and initiatives in southern and Eastern Europe are promising.

Finland's experience in addressing homelessness confirms that the three most important elements are: access to housing, social support provision and sufficient financial resources, either from employment or the welfare system, to be able to pay for their housing and living costs.

The Peer Review showed that there is an appetite for more exchange of information on strategies to address homelessness. The European Commission could encourage sharing knowledge on issues such as staff training, exploration of Housing First approaches in different countries, examination of costs and benefits comparisons and promotion of exchanges between public administrations.

While the Finnish programme is a very advanced example in Europe, the Peer Review process was a very useful opportunity for Finland to receive feedback on their strategy and for the Peer Review participants to learn from the Finnish approach.

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Annexes

Table A.1 ETHOS — European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

Conceptual Category		Operational Category		Living Situation
ROOFLESS	1	People Living Rough	1.1	Public space or external space
	2	People staying in a night shelter	2.1	Night shelter
HOUSELESS	3	People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless hostel
			3.2	Temporary Accommodation
			3.3	Transitional supported accommodation
	4	People in Women's Shelter	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation
	5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1	Temporary accommodation / reception centres
			5.2	Migrant workers accommodation
	6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1	Penal institutions
			6.2	Medical institutions
			6.3	Children's institutions / homes
	7	People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1	Residential care for older homeless people
			7.2	Supported accommodation for formerly homeless persons
INSECURE	8	People living in inse	8.1	Temporarily with family/friends
			8.2	No legal (sub)tenancy
			8.3	Illegal occupation of land
	9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1	Legal orders enforced (rented)
			9.2	Re-possession orders (owned)
	10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police recorded incidents
INADEQUATE	11	People living in temporary / non-conventional structures	11.1	Mobile homes
			11.2	Non-conventional building
			11.3	Temporary structure
	12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Occupied dwelling unfit for habitation
	13	People living in extreme overcrowding	13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding

Source: Edgar (2009), p. 73

Table A.2 ETHOS Light — Harmonised Definition of Homelessness from the Study on "Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level"

Operational Category		Living Situation		Definition
1	People Living Rough	1	Public space / external space	Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight Shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless Hostels	
		4	Temporary Accommodation	Where the period of stay is less than one year[1]
		5	Transitional Supported Accommodation	
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	
4	People living in institutions	7	Health care institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing
		8	Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release
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
		10	Non-conventional building	
		11	Temporary structure	
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

1   The period of one year is chosen to allow consistency with UNECE/EUROSTAT recommendations for the Census 2010.

Source: Edgar et al, 2007, p. 66.

Table A.2 ETHOS Light — Harmonised Definition of Homelessness from the Study on "Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level"

Operational Category		Living Situation		Definition
1	People Living Rough	1	Public space / external space	Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters
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3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless Hostels	Where the period of stay is less than one year[1]
		4	Temporary Accommodation	
		5	Transitional Supported Accommodation	
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	
4	People living in institutions	7	Health care institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing
		8	Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release
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
		10	Non-conventional building	
		11	Temporary structure	
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

1 The period of one year is chosen to allow consistency with UNECE/EUROSTAT recommendations for the Census 2010.

Source: Edgar et al, 2007, p. 66.

The Finnish National Programme to reduce long-term homelessness

Host country: **Finland**

Peer countries: **Bulgaria, France, Latvia, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, Hungary**

In February 2008, the Finnish Government adopted a programme aimed at halving long-term homelessness by 2011.

Based on the "housing first" principle, which considers that appropriate accommodation is a prerequisite for solving other social and health problems, the programme includes an ambitious goal to convert all traditional short-term shelters into supported housing units that facilitate independent living.

A total of 1,250 additional homes, supported housing units or places in care are expected to be made available. What's more, the programme includes projects aimed at providing supported housing for recently released prisoners, reducing youth homelessness and preventing evictions, e.g. by providing and expanding housing advisory services.

The programme is based on a comprehensive partnership approach between the central government, which provides 50% of the programme's financing, and the country's ten largest cities affected by homelessness, which fund the remaining half. Financial support for the basic renovation of shelters and their conversion into supported housing units is also provided by the Finnish Slot Machine Association.

The Peer Review will seek to assess the programme's success and to exchange experiences with countries that are implementing or preparing similar national programmes or strategies to reduce long-term homelessness.