



PEER REVIEW
IN SOCIAL PROTECTION
AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
2010

BUILDING A COMPREHENSIVE AND PARTICIPATIVE STRATEGY ON HOMELESSNESS

LISBON , 4. - 5.11.2010

SYNTHESIS REPORT



On behalf of the
European Commission
Employment, Social Affairs
and Inclusion



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ON HOMELESSNESS

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A. Policy Context on the European Level

The “Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion and Assessment in Social Inclusion” Programme is carried out in the context of PROGRESS — the EU’s Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity. PROGRESS has as its overall aim to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in employment, social affairs and equal opportunities, as set out in the Social Agenda. The PROGRESS programme supports the implementation of the EU Open Method of Coordination in the field of social protection and social inclusion (Social OMC) by — among other things — organising exchanges on policies and good practice and promoting mutual learning in the context of the social protection and inclusion strategy. It has as one of its objectives capacity building amongst key social actors and the promotion of innovative approaches. Homelessness has been identified as a key issue for European analysis, learning, exchange and the development of innovative approaches.

This Peer Review hosted by Portugal has as its central aim the promotion of mutual learning and exploration of good practice with respect to the development of national strategic approaches to addressing homelessness. Homelessness is now firmly established on the EU agenda as a political priority. In 2008, the European Parliament adopted a Written Declaration on Ending Street Homelessness. The Declaration calls on the Council to agree on an EU-wide commitment to end street homelessness by 2015, calls on the Commission to provide annual updates on progress made in EU Member States towards ending homelessness, and urges Member States to devise “winter emergency plans” as part of a wider homelessness strategy. In 2009, the Joint Report of the European Commission and Council on Social Protection and Social Inclusion stated that “*sustained work is required to tackle homelessness as an extremely serious form of exclusion.*” The Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion were charged with analysing the “social and economic inclusion of homeless people” and “access to adequate housing” across Member States, and the resulting synthesis report put forward 15 suggestions for addressing the key barriers



to making progress at both national and EU levels in the fight against homelessness and housing exclusion¹.

Most significantly, the 2010 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion² calls on Member States to develop integrated policies to tackle homelessness, and provides detailed guidance on how to do this, placing a strong emphasis on effective governance, monitoring and evaluation, and the setting of specific targets:

*“Tackling housing exclusion and homelessness... requires **integrated policies** combining **financial support to individuals, effective regulation and quality social services**, including housing, employment, health and welfare services. More attention needs to be paid to the quality standards of social services and the specific obstacles the homeless face in accessing them.”*

(European Commission and the Council, 2010, p.10, emphasis in original).

This 2010 Joint Report stresses the importance of housing vulnerability in the current economic crisis, especially with respect to mortgage arrears and repossessions, and increased demand for support with housing costs and for social housing. The key role that housing (un)affordability plays in the generation of homelessness is outlined, particularly with regard to those homeless groups which do not exhibit complex personal problems. In the EU as a whole, housing costs bear far more heavily on poor than on non-poor households, relative to their income, significantly increasing their vulnerability to homelessness. Low income people are also far more likely to live in overcrowded and poor quality housing than non-poor people (see also Stephens et al, 2010). The Joint Report also acknowledges that being without a roof, or having to live in emergency shelters and temporary accommodation, is the most extreme form of homelessness, and indeed of poverty and social exclusion. It summarises the complex causes of homelessness, with relevant factors often operating at the structural, personal and institutional levels. Groups at particular risk of homelessness include those at margins of the labour market, young people facing particular challenges in accessing adequate housing, and vulnerable migrants and mobile workers. Measures

- 1 <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/network-of-independent-experts/2009/homelessness-and-housing-exclusion>
- 2 <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=757&langId=en>



to improve housing quality and affordability (including housing-related benefits), to increase the supply of social and public housing, and to improve access to employment, health and social services, are all strongly encouraged.

The Joint Report urges Member States to develop comprehensive homelessness strategies which focus on:

- prevention as the most cost-effective way of combating homelessness. There is a particular emphasis on reducing evictions, and on minimising the instances of people leaving institutions with no home to go to.
- moving beyond the provision of simply temporary/crisis accommodation, to more comprehensive progression policies designed to help people move on to supported and/or permanent accommodation.
- a “Housing First” approach, which offers individuals stable accommodation as a first priority, though it cautions that this should not be a ‘housing only’ approach in circumstances where people have additional support needs.
- improved governance, with key elements likely to include: strong leadership by the main relevant public authority; effective participation of all key stakeholders; and consensus on the agreed strategy.

There are a number of other recent EU-level initiatives relevant to homelessness, including a series of earlier and ongoing Peer Reviews. These are outlined briefly below. In combination, these EU-wide initiatives have played an important role in the development of the Portuguese National Strategy on Homelessness.



Relevant EU-level Initiatives

ETHOS

The ETHOS typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion has become the basis for the discussion of the definition of homelessness for policy and data collection purposes in a number of countries across Europe (Edgar & Meert, 2005; see Appendix 1 for a summary version)³. This ETHOS typology was adopted by the European Commission and the Council in the 2010 Joint Report. It was also fundamental to the development of the Portuguese National Homelessness Strategy as discussed further below.

Study on the Measurement of Homelessness at European Union Level

This report, commissioned by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, reviewed the methods of data collection on homelessness in Europe (Edgar et al, 2007). The report sets out a methodology for developing a homeless monitoring information system and makes a number of recommendations to the European Commission and national governments⁴. Again, this report was highly influential in the development of the Portuguese National Homelessness Strategy.

MPHASIS Project (2007–2009)

This project, funded under PROGRESS, was entitled Mutual Progress on Homelessness Through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems. The main objective was to improve the capacity for monitoring information on homelessness and housing exclusion in 20 European countries on the basis of the recommendations of the previous EU study on the Measurement of Homelessness (see above). This was undertaken through transnational exchange and was supported by action-oriented research which directly fed into the European and national discussions on monitoring homelessness within MPHASIS⁵. Portugal was an active participant in the MPHASIS project

3 <http://www.feantsa.org/files/freshstart/Toolkits/Ethos/Leaflet/EN.pdf>

4 The report can be downloaded at http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/homelessness_en.htm

5 The final report and other documents associated with this project can be downloaded at <http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/mphasis/>



and one of the key background papers provided for this Peer Review is the National Position Paper on Portugal produced for the MPHASIS project (Caeiro, 2009).

Study on Housing Exclusion: Welfare Policies, Housing Provision and Labour Markets

This project, also funded under PROGRESS, analysed the interaction between welfare regimes and housing systems, particularly with respect to the generation and amelioration of housing exclusion (Stephens et al, 2010)⁶. One key objective of this research was to investigate the impact of welfare regimes and housing systems on the scale, causes and nature of homelessness, and to review policy responses to particular groups at high risk of homelessness, such as single men with support needs, young people, women fleeing violence, and immigrants. Portugal was one of six participating Member States in this study, and the evidence provided by the Portuguese national team in the Housing Exclusion study has informed this Peer Review (Baptista & Perista, 2010)⁷.

Mutual Learning on Social and Housing Exclusion

Organised by the European Commission, this conference brought together policy-makers, stakeholders, researchers and representatives from projects across the EU. It focused on two priority topics, one of which was homelessness and housing exclusion (the other was the EC active inclusion strategy.) The conference disseminated the 2010 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, along with the results of a number of social inclusion projects funded through PROGRESS, and the findings of the 'Study on Housing Exclusion' conducted by Stephens et al (2010).

European Consensus Conference on Homelessness

The European Consensus Conference on Homelessness, which took place in Brussels on 9–10th December 2010, sought to establish common

6 The final report can be downloaded at <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/publications/PDF/EUExclusion/HOUSING%20EXCLUSION%2026%20May%202010.pdf>

7 The Portuguese national report published as part of this study can be downloaded at <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp/publications/PDF/EUExclusion/Portugal.pdf>



understandings on fundamental questions about homelessness, in order to provide a basis for future policy progress. Originating from the health and technology sectors, consensus conferencing is a tool for facilitating progress on issues where a lack of shared understandings blocks policy progress. The European Consensus Conference on Homelessness was the first consensus conference on a social issue at European level. It was an initiative of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council, co-organised with the European Commission. FEANTSA coordinated the process and the French Government was a key partner⁸.

Relevant Peer Reviews

Four previous Peer Reviews and a concurrent (2010) Peer Review have particular relevance to this Peer Review on the Portuguese National Homelessness Strategy⁹.

UK- The Rough Sleeping Strategy, England (2004)¹⁰

The Rough Sleeping initiative in England aimed to substantially reduce the number of people sleeping rough and to reintegrate former rough sleepers into sustainable housing and into wider society. The strategy has developed since the Peer Review in 2004, but crucially its success has continued in that the numbers of rough sleepers in England have been maintained at a low level relative to the baseline figure in 1998. However, the methods used to count rough sleepers in England have been subject to widespread criticism and the recently elected Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government has launched a consultation on a revised methodology for rough sleeper counts in England¹¹.

8 http://www.feantsa.org/files/freshstart/Consensus_Conference/Leaflets/FEA%20014-09_EN.pdf

9 In addition, a 2007 peer review of France's 'National Action Plan against Substandard Housing' also covered homelessness to some extent. <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2007/national-action-plan-against-substandard-housing>

10 <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2004/the-rough-sleepers-unit-england>

11 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/evaluatingroughsleeping>



Denmark — Preventing and Tackling Homelessness (2005)¹²

In 2002 the Danish government introduced a programme called “Our Common Responsibility” targeted at the most socially marginalised people in Denmark, including homeless people, people with alcohol or drug problems, prostitutes, and people with mental disabilities. The programme focused on homeless people who were difficult to reintegrate into normal living situations, and older homeless people who required some measure of residential care but who, because of their homeless experience and behavioural issues, could not be accommodated in mainstream residential care homes. The Danish Government established special nursing homes and also, under the unfortunate slogan “freak houses for freak existences”, provided unconventional small dwellings, and help in maintaining them, for those who wished to live independently. In these “freak houses” residents could behave differently from the norm without having to confront hostile reactions from other people. The programme also offered emergency provision, such as night shelter cafés. The project was implemented by municipalities, which receive earmarked funding from the central government to pay for it.

Norway — National Strategy — Pathway to a Permanent Home (2006)¹³

Backed by the Norwegian Parliament, this national strategy to prevent and tackle homelessness aimed to: prevent people from becoming homeless; contribute to adequate quality in overnight shelters; and to help ensure that homeless people received offers of permanent housing without undue delay. There were five performance targets, including an aim to reduce evictions by 30%, and an undertaking that nobody should have to seek temporary accommodation after release from prison or other institutions. The strategy was coordinated by the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development in cooperation with other ministries, the Norwegian State Housing Bank, and the county and local authorities. Local authorities, together with the voluntary sector, have the main responsibility for meeting

¹² <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2005/preventing-and-tackling-homelessness>

¹³ <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2006/national-strategy-to-prevent-and-tackle-homelessness>



the Strategy's goals. It was suggested that this scheme was a good example of how central and local government can work together to meet relevant goals in addressing homelessness.

Austria — Counting the Homeless — Improving the Basis for Planning Assistance (2009)¹⁴

Vienna has had a programme for the reintegration of homeless people for twenty years. Despite this long-term policy commitment, there was said to be not enough practical experience in Vienna with respect to instruments for monitoring and assessing homelessness in order to inform policy and service planning. The availability of both quantitative and qualitative data on homelessness was thought crucial in enabling Vienna to adapt and improve local social planning in line with needs and, ultimately, to better integrate homeless people into the regular housing market. Hence it was hoped that the knowledge generated through the Peer Review would allow Vienna to improve their evidence base for policy development and evaluation. More broadly, this Peer Review sought to examine approaches to improve data collection on homelessness at the municipal level of government across EU Member States.

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Finland — The Finnish National Programme to Reduce Long-term Homelessness (2010)¹⁵

In 2008 the Finnish Government decided to implement a national programme to reduce long-term homelessness for 2008–2011. The objective of the programme is to halve long-term homelessness by 2011, and to end it completely by 2015. It is based on the “Housing First” principle, which asserts that appropriate accommodation is a prerequisite for solving other social and health problems, and the programme includes a 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. The programme also includes projects aimed at providing supported housing for recently

¹⁴ <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2009/counting-the-homeless>

¹⁵ <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2010/the-finnish-national-programme-to-reduce-long-term-homelessness>



released prisoners, reducing youth homelessness and preventing evictions, e.g. by providing and expanding housing advisory services. The programme is based on a partnership between central government and the country's ten largest cities affected by homelessness. The Peer Review hosted by Finland sought to assess the programme's success and to exchange experiences with countries that are implementing or preparing similar national strategies to reduce long-term homelessness.



B. The Host Country Policy — the Portuguese National Homelessness Strategy

The Portuguese '*National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People — Prevention, Intervention and Follow-Up, 2009–2015*' was designed by a large group of stakeholders who publicly committed their organisations to the Strategy. It was launched on 14th March 2009 in a ceremony held by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. For the purpose of designing this National Strategy, an Inter-Institutional Group was formed with representatives from public and private (non-profit) entities. This Group was coordinated by the Institute of Social Security (ISS), a public institute created in 2001 under the aegis of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

This Portuguese 'National Homelessness Strategy' is particularly interesting as it represents a breakthrough in the southern European approach to tackling homelessness (Baptista, 2009). While there have been national strategies on homelessness developed in a number of northern European countries over the past decade or so (Benjaminsen et al, 2009), including in Ireland, the UK, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and France, this is the first national-level 'southern strategy' (Baptista, 2009). As such, there are likely to be a range of lessons from this process which are particularly pertinent to those seeking to address homelessness in the context of other 'Mediterranean welfare regimes', notwithstanding the important differences between these southern European countries. However, the participative and inclusive approach taken in developing the Portuguese Strategy was also thought likely to contain elements of good practice that were more broadly applicable across EU Member States in northern, central and eastern Europe.

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The Development of the Portuguese National Homelessness Strategy

The Drivers of the Strategy

In Portugal, as in the other southern European countries (Italy, Greece and Spain), the most disadvantaged members of society have traditionally



been cared for via informal social networks (the family, neighbours and the local community) as a 'compensatory' form of welfare. However, these bonds have weakened in recent decades because of social and economic change, and increasingly charities and other voluntary organisations have attempted to fill the gap, funded in part by the state (Caeiro, 2009). In the case of homelessness, for example, service providers are mostly non-profit organisations (church organisations or secular NGOs) that are financed by the state (about 80% of their funding comes from the state).

The relative poverty rate¹⁶ in Portugal, at around 18% (Stephens et al, 2010), is high by EU standards, and is higher for elderly people (22%) and for children under 16 (23%). Until the early 1990s there were no specific measures or policies addressing poverty in Portugal, and little interest had been shown in developing homelessness policies until the European Commission asked Member States to make homelessness a priority and to include specific measures in their National Action Plans (now National Strategic Plans) produced in the context of the 'EU Strategy on Social Protection and Social Inclusion' (Caeiro, 2010)¹⁷.

While robust evidence on trends in homelessness in Portugal is scarce, in the early 2000s it became apparent that homelessness was growing in cities like Lisbon and Porto. This apparent growth in the problem, and the difficulty of gaining a clear understanding of the phenomenon due to the uncoordinated nature of responses, prompted the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (which, through the ISS, is the major funding body and regulator of services in the field of homelessness) to take a more strategic approach. A process was launched which eventually led to the broad-based partnership that developed the National Homelessness Strategy.

The Process of Developing the Strategy

The first step taken was to try to gain a better grasp of the reality and extent of homelessness in Portugal. In a survey undertaken by the ISS in 2004, a questionnaire was sent to all relevant institutions (municipalities, local

¹⁶ i.e. percentage of individuals living in households with an income of less than 60% of median household income.

¹⁷ Download relevant report at http://www.feantsa.org/files/freshstart/Campaign_2010/background_docs/FEANTSA_handbook_EN_FINAL.pdf



social services and homelessness service providers) designed to collect information about existing provision for people experiencing homelessness. This was followed up by the first ever national count of rough sleepers in Portugal at the end of 2005. There was then an ISS evaluation of shelters for homeless people which highlighted a lack of strategic co-ordination.

One of the main conclusions of all of this research was that there was an urgent need to design a national strategy which sought to prevent homelessness, intervene effectively where homelessness occurred, and to provide follow-up support for people who were moving on from a homeless experience. Amongst the key challenges identified were the fragmented pattern of service provision in Portugal, a lack of strategic cooperation between agencies, and a lack of information sharing and monitoring. But at the same time there were encouraging signs of emerging local mobilisation to address homelessness more strategically in some parts of Portugal.

In March 2007, a meeting brought together representatives of a wide range of public and private entities involved in homelessness. They agreed the need to develop a national strategy on homelessness and an Inter-Institutional Group, coordinated by the ISS, was formed to devise such a strategy. This Group built upon the partnership structure that had enabled the 2005 rough sleepers count, but was amended via increased NGO participation, a replacement of local-level bodies with mainly national players, and the involvement of research units as partners alongside policy colleagues (rather than simply providing commissioned inputs). There was also provision made for occasional contributions by specific external stakeholders at key stages in the process (such as FEANTSA). New stakeholders identified at the planning stage included government departments such as the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Education. Such a broad-based consultative approach is unusual in Portugal, particularly at national level.

Another key element in the process of strategic development was that each representative on the Inter-Institutional Group was charged with liaising with senior officials in their respective organisation to ensure “institutional endorsement” of the work being undertaken in the Group. Formal “institutional approval” was sought from all parties as soon as the Group had reached consensus on the most challenging issues. With respect to



the definition of homelessness, for example, a letter of commitment which refers to the adoption of this definition was signed by all of the partners and also refers to a commitment to publicise this definition nationally. This “legitimizing path” was challenging for some stakeholders, especially those of a collective nature such as the NGO federations.

The National Homelessness Strategy was formally launched in March 2009 and the implementation phase began. The initial stage of implementation involved the development of operational tools (e.g. a training manual for staff, information systems, etc.) and monitoring and evaluation instruments. There was also a focus on dissemination and the continued involvement of stakeholders through regular meetings of the Inter-Institutional Group with the “local social networks” which are responsible for implementing the strategy at local level. Data collection focusing on the characteristics of homeless people was also a key element of strategy implementation. However, as these assessments are still to be completed by all of the local social networks, it is unclear what the current scale of homelessness is in Portugal. The estimate provided by the host country is that there are around 3,000 homeless people in Portugal (according to the relatively narrow definition outlined below), most of them in Lisbon and Porto.

The Content of the Strategy

The Strategy comprises mainly broad aims to be implemented at a local level, based on detailed homelessness plans which are intended to take into account local needs and priorities. The Strategy is organised around two main aims:

- to enhance the evidence base on homelessness via the adoption of an agreed definition of homelessness, and a shared information and monitoring system; and
- to promote quality in the provision of homelessness services and responses.



The Strategy defines three specific areas to be tackled under these two strategic aims:

- preventive action in order to avoid situations of homelessness arising from eviction or discharge from institutions;
- direct intervention in situations of homelessness, focusing on the clarification of procedures and responsibilities, and also on innovative approaches; and
- follow-up support after resettlement, which is to be achieved within the local social networks.

There is a particular emphasis in the Strategy on improving the quality of intervention practices in the homelessness field, via, for example, training initiatives, enhancing the effectiveness of local homelessness units, and the adoption of local integrated approaches. The Strategy has placed a greater emphasis on the housing exclusion dimension of homelessness than has hitherto been the case in Portugal, but it also directly addresses other issues such as health, income, social benefits and employment.

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The Strategy also establishes an organisational structure for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy, both at national level and at local level. In keeping with the growing emphasis in recent years on the role of local stakeholders, particularly local authorities and local social networks, in creating strategies to tackle homelessness, the National Strategy provides guidelines for the implementation of local 'diagnoses' of homelessness and local homelessness plans. The national Group for the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategy is responsible for disseminating these guidelines and for providing support to the local networks and units responsible for designing homelessness plans.

The “underlying philosophy” of the Portuguese National Homelessness Strategy can thus be summarised as follows (Baptista, 2009):

- strengthening the evidence base;
- enhancing interagency cooperation and mutual responsibility;



- improving staff training, including that of dedicated ‘case managers’ for homeless people;
- strengthening the focus on housing needs and responses;
- ensuring continuity and diversity of support; and
- shifting the state’s role towards more strategic control over the provision of services.

One important aspect of many national homelessness strategies, also emphasised by the 2010 Joint Report, is concrete targets and indicators of progress towards meeting these targets (Benjaminsen et al, 2009). While most of the detailed objectives in the Portuguese Strategy relate to policy implementation goals or ‘milestones’ (e.g. disseminating definitions, delivering staff training, setting up local networks, establishing information systems etc.), there are some concrete targets with respect to service delivery (e.g. that 80% of homeless people should have a “case manager”), and also some target outcomes for homeless people themselves (e.g. to ensure that no one has to stay overnight on the street for more than 24 hours due to the lack of an alternative; that no one should leave an institution without having all necessary help to secure a place to live). There are also a range of specific targets agreed at local level.

Early reports on implementation suggest that, while good progress was made in some areas in 2009 — particularly with respect to the dissemination of the homelessness definition, the gathering of information on homelessness in local areas, and the setting up of relevant processes and structures for addressing homelessness — a number of difficulties were encountered. These difficulties related mainly to insufficient financial, human and logistical resources being made available to meet all of the agreed objectives, as well as challenges in harmonising timetables, and resistance in some quarters to intervention in this area or to completing the required questionnaires. The lack of an “enforceable legal status” for the Strategy has also been raised as a concern.



Actions planned for 2010 include:

- monitoring the establishment and development of relevant local intervention networks;
- the development of the information systems;
- implementing innovative solutions which guarantee a minimum standard of service;
- staff training; and
- monitoring and evaluating the strategy.

It was emphasised that the Strategy was focused on medium and long-term results, with only modest expectations of concrete results at this early stage. Rather, the hope was that new mechanisms would be put in place that stood the test of time and represented a “paradigm shift” in how homelessness was dealt with in Portugal. A general point made was that the prior existence of local social networks has been a key factor where there has been successful implementation of the Strategy in Portugal, and valuable lessons have been learned from the pilot projects.

Finally, one of the most striking elements of the Portuguese Strategy is the important role that EU-level initiatives have played in its development. Thus the focus on homelessness in the Social OMC seems to have been very helpful, and several tools developed by FEANTSA (such as the ETHOS definition) have been used in the process of Strategy development and implementation.



C. Policies and Experiences in Peer Countries and Stakeholder Contributions (EUROCITIES and FEANTSA)

This Peer Review hosted by Portugal had as its central aim the promotion of mutual learning and exploration of good practice with respect to the development of national strategic approaches to addressing homelessness. It had a particular focus on the effective involvement of a range of relevant stakeholders in designing and implementing such strategies. Thus peer countries and stakeholder organisations were asked to provide their perspective on the development and content of the Portuguese Strategy, in the context of their own policy and strategic frameworks and experiences¹⁸.

A number of countries found the Portuguese model and the opportunity to participate in this Peer Review particularly helpful. These included **Serbia**, where this was viewed as an opportunity to start thinking about “new vulnerable groups”, such as homeless people, in the context of its poverty reduction strategy and programme to address the rest of the EU social inclusion agenda, as part of its bid to become a candidate country. The Housing First and case management aspects of the Portuguese Strategy were viewed as particularly helpful from a Serbian perspective.

Many similarities were noted between the Portuguese and **Polish** situations – notably the prominent role of the NGOs and previous reliance on informal networks to protect vulnerable people. Also similar is the traditional focus on emergency/crisis interventions and the perception of homelessness as mainly a ‘social’ rather than as a ‘housing’ issue. One of the most helpful aspects of the Portuguese approach, from a Polish perspective, is its emphasis on a multi-sectoral and inter-agency approach. Despite the seriousness of the problem, there is no national strategy in Poland to tackle homelessness (though there has been some work on a ‘National Programme’ on homelessness which is currently suspended). There were thought to be many good practice aspects of the Portuguese Strategy and

¹⁸ The comments papers can be downloaded at <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2010/building-a-comprehensive-and-participative-strategy-on-homelessness>



the experience of developing it that could be adopted in Poland, in the light of the similarities between the two countries' situations, particularly with respect to the active participation of many sectors and the time needed to develop an integrated strategy.

The situation was also said to be fairly similar in **Hungary**, where more than 50% of providers of homelessness services are NGOs. As with Poland, a key lesson from this Peer Review for Hungary was how to get all the relevant actors around the table. Hungary has developed a comprehensive government-commissioned homelessness strategy but one crucial step was omitted: the involvement of all the relevant stakeholders. Political support for the strategy was also lacking, and it was not adopted at government level. The conditions for a national strategy to be fully implemented were not met in Hungary: there was a lack of political and stakeholder commitment, only partial commitment of resources, and no public or media debate. However, the new government in Hungary has adopted a resolution for a medium-term action plan to reduce the number of rough sleepers.

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In **Spain**, a national homelessness strategy cannot be imposed centrally as social policy (including homelessness) is primarily the responsibility of autonomous regions and municipalities. However, thanks to European policy initiatives, Spain has organised a very good national stakeholder network on all issues of social protection and social inclusion, and a committee of all the ministries involved in social inclusion has been created, together with a council of NGOs. Work is underway to build cooperation and consensus among the various levels of administration involved in homelessness, and a working party on homeless people is being set up. At a seminar in Seville in November 2010, the federal government presented to the autonomous communities and local authorities a model consisting of minimum standards for services to homeless people and suggested structures and management techniques for those services. It was hoped that elements of the Portuguese experience could be adapted to Spain's circumstances, but it was emphasised that significant challenges were presented by the much more complex governance structures in Spain.

As noted above, **Finland** has introduced a new national programme to address long-term homelessness. This new programme is a response to the



sense that previous strategies had failed to reach those with multiple needs beyond housing. There is a strong emphasis on Housing First approaches, and as part of this Strategy, Finland is trying to get rid of transitional housing: the hostels and dormitories have been converted into supported housing units, with permanent tenancies. In the Finnish context, it has been realised that what finally counts is what homeless people gain from this exercise and that there is no real commitment without financial commitment. That is why the Finnish strategy is concrete, with clear financial commitments by the different partners. There is a substantial budget specifically attached to this national programme: most of the funding comes from the State but municipalities also contribute. Finnish NGOs were said to have good relations with the government, and more especially with the municipalities. NGOs were viewed as strategic partners who can implement some ideas that the municipalities cannot envisage, as it would take too long to get the administrative and political go-ahead. Finnish NGOs have also been invited to take part in the policy planning stage.

Ireland has established a national homelessness strategy for the period 2008 — 2013 — called 'The Way Home' — which identifies six aims, including ending long-term homelessness, and eliminating the need to sleep rough, by 2010. Many new policies and procedures have been put in place, and there is huge media and political interest in making sure that target is met, or at least that everything is being done to deliver on it. These efforts are centred on Dublin, where most homeless people live. The homelessness services in Dublin have been completely restructured, and Ireland is getting rid of transitional housing completely. There will now be short-term emergency accommodation, long-term supported accommodation, and mainstream housing (similar to the Housing First approach). Every NGO in Dublin uses the same Holistic Needs Assessment, and inter-agency information sharing takes place on the basis of this assessment.

In **Denmark**, the national homelessness strategy is focused on eight municipalities, where more than half of all homeless people in Denmark live. The strategy (2009–2012) has four government-set targets, including reducing the number of people sleeping on the streets and ending street homelessness by 2014. It is very much a top-down strategy, so a lot of effort



has gone into convincing both the NGOs and the municipalities to commit to it (Danish NGOs running the shelters are often suspicious of the municipalities, and are reluctant to expose their occupants to municipal scrutiny). One key Danish target is to reduce the amount of time that people spend in the hostels, and additional funding has been set aside for more housing, in line with the Housing First approach. But Denmark does not intend to close its hostels down: there will still be a need for short-term solutions for people who are newly homeless. The Danish Strategy's insistence on municipal co-funding helped to cement municipal commitment. There is a great emphasis in Denmark on case management and individually-tailored support.

Both **EUROCITIES** (Working Group on Homelessness) and **FEANTSA** welcomed and supported the Portuguese Strategy which, as FEANTSA commented, showed that *“progress on homelessness is also possible in an unfavourable structural and welfare context”* (see Stephens et al, 2010). FEANTSA emphasised the importance of strong leadership (from ISS) as well as stakeholder involvement in the Portuguese Strategy, but the lack of significant resources is a concern. National initiatives can secure change through some combination of the following three elements: strategic frameworks; legislation; and financial commitment. Portugal has focused on the strategic framework thus far and the Strategy sets some good universal principles to build on. Without a means of delivery, these can become rhetoric, but they are a good start. FEANTSA noted *“a general consensus that homelessness is a process/pathway and that there is a need also to include preventative measures in the strategy”*. Understandably, the strategy focuses on crisis interventions. EUROCITIES commented that one way of rebalancing it towards prevention would be to take an explicitly “whole-market” approach. This could look at primary prevention activities within services for the whole community. The needs of homeless or potentially homeless people should be taken into consideration in local investment plans, health strategies, crime and disorder planning and similar initiatives. Education, training and employment services should also be involved. Secondary prevention activities should include improving the quality of emergency accommodation (which may mean choosing quality over quantity), preventing evictions through agreements with major landlords, and providing pathways out of hostels and into independence.



Crisis prevention services for those on the street can be provided by multi-agency outreach teams, but here too, the aim should be to point to a way out. Other possible areas to build on include accreditation models for the quality of services and stronger links to budgets and commissioning as a way of enforcing strategic aims. User involvement as a means of improving outcomes should also be considered.



D. Discussions at the Peer Review Meeting

A number of key themes emerged in the Peer Review meeting discussions, as now summarised.

The positive impact of the National Strategy at local level

Presentations were made by practitioners from Lisbon, Porto and Cascais to illustrate how the national strategy had been implemented at local level. In Lisbon, for example, there are four “ideal” responses as part of their “integrated intervention model”: emergency centre; temporary accommodation; transitional housing; and individualised housing (Housing First and supportive housing). Each homeless case is analysed by a case manager. There is a specific protocol to facilitate homeless people’s access to mental health services in Lisbon. In Cascais, the local strategy for the integration of homeless people was created by the institutions that make up the local social network. The points identified for action were closely linked to the National Strategy and achievements thus far include better knowledge of the problem, more effective use of resources, and greater use of case management. Obstacles include insufficient resources, issues of mental health and of alcohol and drug addiction, as well as a lack of housing responses. In Porto it was said that the work on homelessness would never have been possible without the National Strategy. The 15 parishes of Porto currently have 2,237 homeless people in all, which is about 1% of the total population. An inter-institutional network is being built up consisting of all of the institutions, services and NGOs involved, working in close cooperation with the National Strategy team. Interventions under the Porto scheme have a strong emphasis on effective case management, and have taken 1,528 people off the streets since April 2009.

Practitioners from Portugal made the point that, for the municipalities, the setting of a national policy framework has been vital to the achievement of progress on homelessness. This was not so much a matter of enforcement (i.e. legal status of Strategy), but rather of feeling “sheltered” by the existence of this policy “umbrella” at national and European levels. Some in Portugal felt that the definition of homelessness in the National Strategy was too narrow, but while the NGOs did not succeed in getting this definition



broadened, they did manage to bring in dimensions such as prevention and follow-up. So in general, the NGOs are pleased with the Portuguese Strategy. The big problem was said to be resources. Small organisations already working under severe constraints cannot be expected to take on new management and coordination tasks under the Strategy unless it also provides them with more resources.

Legal basis of the National Strategy

The lack of legal status for the Nation Homelessness Strategy was seen as a significant barrier by some in Portugal, as it means that municipal engagement cannot be made mandatory (most of Portugal's national plans are embedded in legislative provisions). However, it was felt that it was better to identify any local obstacles before adopting a law in this area, as unenforceable laws can actually hinder progress. It may be that the time is now right to reconsider this legal basis for the Portuguese Strategy, though some in Portugal feel that obliging municipalities and other state agencies to participate could be counter-productive and undermine the cooperative spirit of strategic joint working. While there are no legislative levers associated with the Portuguese Strategy, there are financial "levers" as dedicated funding will only go to those projects which have undertaken a "local diagnosis". However, most funding is concentrated in Lisbon and Porto where the largest numbers of homeless people are located.

In other countries, such as Spain, there can be no legal basis for a national homelessness strategy as this is a devolved matter. In these circumstances, any national co-ordination of such issues has to be on a voluntary, cooperative basis.

Cost effectiveness

Peer countries inquired whether Portugal could quantify the total costs associated with addressing homelessness. However, in Portugal, as elsewhere, this was often difficult, especially when different levels of government/sectors were involved and when definitions of homelessness became broader. Finland has conducted a costs analysis which showed that their homelessness programme saves money. In Denmark it was found



that case management was a particularly cost-effective approach. In the Portuguese context, it was suggested that the Housing First project in Lisbon was proving very cost-effective, especially given a dramatic drop in use of emergency health services amongst those assisted by this pilot project. It was suggested that value-for-money arguments are becoming increasingly important, and that more research into the costs of homelessness is needed at European level.

Data gathering

Peer countries were interested in how Portugal had developed the evidence base for its Strategy. This can be particularly challenging in the context of devolved responsibilities for homelessness. It was confirmed that data gathering problems existed in Portugal as there is no centralised data system (building such a system is part of the Strategy's aims, but this aspect of implementation is lagging behind others). The national surveys conducted in 2004 and 2005 (see above) were limited in many respects, but they served a useful function in mobilising stakeholders and raising awareness of the issue. They also produced at least some data that could be presented to key partners to encourage their involvement.

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Stakeholder and political commitment

Peer countries sought more details on how Portugal had coordinated implementation of its Strategy and how the channels of communication worked in practice. In Serbia, for example, it was reported that there were often difficulties in getting different sectors to work together. It was explained that the ISS is responsible for coordinating the Strategy at national level (but only one person is devoted to this task), and at local level the locus of coordination varies between central government offices, municipalities and NGOs. The point was made that it is not so much how many people are devoted to the task of coordination that matters, as their effectiveness in working together.

The Portuguese concern initially was to involve as many NGOs working with homeless people as possible, but this was not feasible in the working groups developing various aspects of the Strategy, as there were so many of



these organisations. Organisations working with homeless people are not federated in Portugal (this is also the case in several other peer countries), which makes representing these disparate bodies in policy development processes very challenging. The point was made that these inter-agency policy development processes are in any case not easy to manage: they can be conflictual, and they do require time. Consensus must be built before moving on to the next step. Representation of homeless people themselves is another challenge. In Portugal, and in many other countries, they do not have any organisation that represents them.

There was also much discussion of the importance of political commitment. In Portugal, it was said that there was not much political commitment at the outset of the Strategy but that this actually built up as the Strategy unfolded and stakeholders pushed for it.

Housing First

The Housing First pilot project in Lisbon met with great interest. This supports homeless people with mental health problems in accessing and maintaining independent accommodation rented from private landlords in mainstream neighbourhoods. The housing provided is all in individual apartments, with no shared accommodation, and is scattered all over Lisbon. This pilot project provides immediate access to accommodation with no requirement for service users to address psychiatric or substance misuse problems before accessing accommodation. As far as possible, people are allowed to choose which area they will live in. A support team is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Tenants pay 30% of their monthly income towards the rent, unless they have no income in which case the project pays 100% of the rent. The project's support service team currently has five staff for 50 participants. Tenants must agree to regular home visits (at least six per month) and they receive help with daily tasks, such as accessing health services and other resources and shopping. Once they are integrated and in employment, and so can pay the rent themselves, they can take over the leases.

Peer countries were particularly encouraged by the willingness of landlords in Lisbon to engage with this project. There have been difficulties encountered elsewhere persuading private landlords to let to homeless people in Housing

First projects (such as in Dublin), and in many locations Housing First projects rely on social housing (such as the pilot project in Glasgow). In contrast, the Lisbon private landlords have been very receptive, as they see benefits in this model (it also helps that there is a relatively 'slack' private rental market in Lisbon). It guarantees that the rent will be paid in full and on time, and that compensation will be paid for any damage caused by the tenant. The landlords also know that they can contact the project's support workers if they have any concerns. This was originally a one-year pilot project but there are now plans to extend it, and also to establish similar projects in other locations in Portugal such as Porto.

Political controversy and “NIMBYism”

There was much discussion about “change management”, and in particular dealing with resistance to change from NGOs, the media and the general public, to enable progressive new approaches to be implemented. For example, in Finland the hostels were run mainly by NGOs, who at first were very hostile to the change over to a Housing First approach. But now they enthusiastically support it, and the process is continuing. It was important in this context to have clear targets with the resources to back it up. There had been similar experiences in Denmark, where criticism from the press over changes to the homelessness service network had had to be handled carefully. There was also a discussion about how Dublin managed the move away from transitional housing. It was explained that much of the transitional housing was in private rented accommodation, so closing it down was simply a matter of terminating leases. Transitional housing belonging to NGOs or the public sector is being converted into permanent housing, where possible. The change had not been straightforward from a media point of view as there were some negative headlines. But assurances were given time and again that no place would close down without ensuring sufficient alternative beds and better outcomes.

There was some discussion about how Housing First programmes deal with objections from neighbours who may not want to live next to formerly homeless people. This NIMBY (“Not In My Backyard”) attitude frequently manifested itself in a number of peer countries. In Denmark this problem had been addressed with the use of promotional material describing good



practice examples, and it was found that good case management and social support had helped to overcome this hostility. In the Portuguese context, it was said that Housing First accommodation attracts much less local hostility than hostels. In fact, neighbours may not even be aware that they are living next to a Housing First tenant. Speakers from other countries confirmed that neighbours' reactions to Housing First schemes have generally been much less negative than was initially feared.



E. Conclusions and key lessons

This Peer Review of the Portuguese National Homelessness Strategy provided a broad range of learning points and key lessons, as now summarised.

1. Employing the Portuguese National Homelessness Strategy as a model.

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. Relevant points related to both strategic processes and strategic outcomes.

Process: *Stakeholder buy-in*, right from the beginning, is essential. This can be difficult and takes time. But relevant stakeholders, particularly those who will be delivering services such as NGOs, central government departments and municipalities, all have to have a sense of ‘ownership’ of the strategy, as implementation will almost always require them to change the way they do things. Ideally, one would wish to develop a sense of “partnership” between NGOs and government, so all parties feel that they are pulling in the same direction. In some countries NGOs can be difficult to coordinate as they are a disparate group, each with their own agendas, and can be very powerful. Particularly if they receive little or no state funding, the State does not have much leverage over them. An *umbrella organisation* for NGOs involved with homelessness can help them to arrive at an agreed common position, thus facilitating discussions with the State. Countries that do not have such an umbrella organisation might wish to consider establishing one, and governments might contribute some initial funding to make this possible. *Political commitment* to a strategy is also crucial, especially in order to obtain financial support (see below), and can take time to develop. EU initiatives can help to encourage such political commitment on the part of Member States.

Outcomes: Participation in strategic development should not be seen as an end in itself: the ultimate goal must be to effect actual improvements the lives of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. Two elements seem crucial to achieving positive change: a) *concrete targets*, both qualitative and quantitative, which are clearly monitorable, and accompanied by an



implementation plan and timetable; b) *financial commitments*, which are both clear and realistic. It may be helpful to ensure some 'early wins' in the development of homelessness strategies by investing in concrete projects which can produce at least some positive results in improving people's lives quite quickly, while the longer-term task of full strategy development takes place. Housing First pilot projects are one potential model for such early concrete achievements (see below).

2. Definitions of homelessness. Definitional issues pose a dilemma in most countries. Narrow definitions can help to move things forward, but risk excluding some groups of homeless people. Broader definitions are more inclusive, but may lead to a dissipation of energy. Each country needs to strike the right balance for itself, on a pragmatic basis. The guiding principle should always be: which definition is going to help to make the biggest practical difference to homeless people's lives? Especially if a narrow definition is adopted, action "upstream" and "downstream" of this definition must not be neglected. Steps must still be taken to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place and to provide people with continuing support after resettlement.

3. Cost-effectiveness. This is a concern in all countries, with those working in the field of homelessness having to demonstrate that they provide value for money, particularly in the current austere economic climate. Increasingly, the language of 'investment' is required to justify expenditure. There is a need to develop robust methodological tools to a) trace the relative costs of different approaches, and b) demonstrate the *effectiveness/benefits* of progressive approaches. Some countries have made much more progress on demonstrating this cost-effectiveness than others. The EU might be able to help here, by supporting the development of relevant methodological tools.

4. Evidence base. Portugal's emphasis on generating a better evidence base was supported as a good use of resources. Building up such an evidence base is crucial in all those countries where there is currently little robust data in this field. In such contexts, marshalling the facts is an important means of building political and media support for programmes to tackle homelessness.



5. Staff training. Portugal's emphasis on staff training was also felt likely to be a cost-effective use of resources in order to a) improve *service quality*, b) facilitate *culture change*. The latter was especially important in contexts where the aim was to shift the focus of services away from emergency interventions towards prevention and reintegration/resettlement.

6. Case management. This approach was widely used in a number of peer countries and was viewed as a particularly cost-effective form of intervention. Those countries that did not already employ case management were interested in developing it as a way of delivering targeted, tailored services, particularly to those homeless people with more complex needs.

7. Housing First. There was a great deal of interest in the Housing First approach, with a number of countries already pursuing this model quite vigorously, and others keen to develop it. There is considerable evidence from the US that the Housing First model produces significant benefits and is cost-effective, but it would be useful to pool experiences of working with this new approach in the European context. While Housing First appears a very promising way forward, it involves a number of challenges, not least in persuading politicians, policy makers and the general public that it is a 'socially just' approach. This is especially so in countries with a legacy of low-quality housing, or with very tight housing markets, wherein a large proportion of the population may lack access to adequate housing. It is also important to remember that a Housing First model is not a "housing only" model; social support and case management must be integrated with housing interventions, particularly for those with the most complex needs.

8. Quality of interventions. Further dialogue is needed among European countries about what exactly is meant by "quality" in homelessness services. How do we demonstrate it? How do we accredit it? How can we push quality standards up where necessary? In most countries, there is a recognised need for quality improvements in at least some aspects of services to homeless people. However, the relative effectiveness of legal, financial and administrative (inspections and audits) levers in driving up standards is yet to be established. The European Quality Framework for Social Services is relevant in this regard.



9. EU support for action to tackle homelessness. This was warmly welcomed by peer reviewers. It is particularly helpful for those countries that do not yet have a national strategy, or are in the early stages of developing one. EU requirements or recommendations in this field can strengthen the hand of those who are putting forward a progressive agenda in the Member States and can help to build political commitment. Thus the specific chapter devoted to homelessness in the 2010 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, which provides detailed guidance and can be considered as an EU policy framework in this area, was viewed as a significant step forward. The Consensus Conference was also considered to be an important milestone in promoting EU-wide progress in this area.



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Appendix 1: ETHOS — Summary of European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

ROOFLESS	1	People living rough
	2	People staying in a night shelter
HOUSELESS	3	People in accommodation for the homeless
	4	People in women's shelter
	5	People in accommodation for immigrants
	6	People due to be released from institutions
INSECURE	7	People receiving support (due to homelessness)
	8	People living in insecure accommodation
	9	People living under threat of eviction
INADEQUATE	10	People living under threat of violence
	11	People living in temporary / non-standard structures
	12	People living in unfit housing
	13	People living in extreme overcrowding

Source: Edgar et al, 2007 — adopted by the European Commission and the Council (Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2010).





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Building a comprehensive and participative strategy on homelessness

Host country: **Portugal**

Peer countries: **Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Serbia, Spain**

Although an increasing number of Member States have adopted comprehensive and participative homelessness strategies, with an emphasis on coordination between public authorities and NGOs, integration of service provision, and more effective use of public funding, this has mostly occurred in northern European countries. In contrast, many southern and eastern countries still face difficulties and constraints, in particular with regard to strategy design and stakeholder involvement.

Portugal therefore wishes to host a Peer Review aimed at gathering information, enhancing mutual learning and exploring good practices in these fields.

Portugal's own 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 based upon a rather 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.

The Peer Review will enable participants to share their experiences and to learn from the elements of good governance and of stakeholder involvement and commitment present in the Portuguese homelessness strategy.