



## Red Cross Approach:

Combatting  
Homelessness in  
Europe



**RED CROSS**  
EU OFFICE

# Red Cross Approach:

## Combatting Homelessness in Europe

Our sincere appreciation goes to everyone who contributed to the development of this publication.

To order copies, please contact [social@redcross.eu](mailto:social@redcross.eu)

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Cover photo:

The German Red Cross "warmth bus" supports people experiencing homelessness in Berlin, December 2017.

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# Contents

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>6</b>
Key recommendations	10
Key conclusions	12
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>14</b>
Homelessness, a pressing EU issue	14
Red Cross, fighting homelessness across Europe	15
Holistic approach to homelessness	16
Integrated-services approach to homelessness	17
<b>CHAPTER 1 – HOMELESSNESS: AN UNDEFINED MULTIDIMENSIONAL ISSUE</b>	<b>22</b>
1.1. Defining homelessness in the EU	23
1.2. Determining the scope of homelessness in the EU	23
1.3. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people who are homeless and people at risk of homelessness	24
<b>CHAPTER 2 – PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS AND PROVIDING SUPPORT TO PEOPLE AT RISK</b>	<b>26</b>
2.1. Assisting survivors of gender-based violence and their families	27
2.2. Preventing unaccompanied minors from becoming homeless	28
2.3. Temporary accommodation for families and their children	30
2.4. Temporary accommodation for families living in inadequate housing conditions	31
2.5. Accommodation for young people leaving youth care, released from imprisonment or protective treatment	32
<b>CHAPTER 3 – PROVIDING IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE TO PEOPLE WHO FIND THEMSELVES HOMELESS</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1. Building trust throughout mobile teams wherever it is needed	34
3.2. Offering rapid responses to accommodate rough sleepers	36
3.3. Preventing health deterioration through health interventions	37
<b>CHAPTER 4 – HOUSING SOLUTIONS TO EXIT HOMELESSNESS</b>	<b>38</b>
4.1. Housing-led approaches to exit homelessness	39
4.2. Adapting the Housing First approach for the Red Cross	41
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>ANNEX: AN ACTION PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS</b>	<b>44</b>

# Foreword

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**Mette Petersen**  
Director of the Red  
Cross EU Office

In 2020, like elsewhere, the European continent suffered the devastating consequences of the first pandemic of the 21st century. COVID-19 emphasised the importance of strong and resilient health and social services to counter the negative impacts of major crises. Since the onset, National Red Cross Societies across the EU have been on the front line, working tirelessly to provide invaluable assistance to vulnerable individuals and groups, while also supporting national governments in their response to the crisis. This support has ranged from delivering food packages and medicine to people living in remote rural areas, to providing psychosocial support to people facing loneliness and isolation, to offering social and educational assistance to children and their families, to meeting the immediate needs of people experiencing extreme poverty and homelessness and supporting EU Member States through testing and vaccinating hundreds of thousands of people. Today, as we continue to grapple with the effects of COVID-19 and its future consequences for millions of people around the world, there has never been a more pressing time to adequately invest in building a strong social services sector to lift people out of poverty, ensure their inclusion in society and create greater social cohesion. Addressing homelessness and its underlying causes and consequences must be a key priority in these efforts.

The Red Cross strongly believes that housing is a fundamental right. A good quality and affordable home should be provided to people who need it. Across Europe and beyond, we work to ensure that this principle becomes a reality for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The practices presented in this publication demonstrate the commitment of European Red Cross Societies to fighting social exclusion and combatting homelessness, especially among the most vulnerable groups in society, those that are often overlooked as being homeless. The Red Cross has a holistic and integrated threefold approach to preventing, responding to and sustainably exiting homelessness. This comprises prevention services addressing the specific needs of vulnerable and minority groups, immediate assistance on the streets with fully equipped mobile teams that provide high-quality services wherever needed, and innovative housing-led solutions to support people's full reintegration into society. This publication provides practical examples of how to implement high-quality services that place individuals at the centre to deliver relevant support to people who find themselves homeless.

Finally, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Lisbon declaration launching the European Platform on Homelessness, signed on 21 June 2021, represent the EU's commitment to reduce social inequality and promote social cohesion across all Member States. In this sense, EU funding represents a unique tool to implement the pillar and leave no one behind if it is invested carefully in frontline services. The Red Cross has invested in combatting the causes and consequences of homelessness and stands ready to create long-term partnerships with the EU, Member States and like-minded organisations to end homelessness in Europe by 2030.

We hope you will join us!

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“  
***Housing is a  
fundamental right.  
A good quality  
and affordable  
home should be  
provided to people  
who need it.***”



# Executive summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the most vulnerable groups in Europe. Beyond the negative health consequences, the disruptive effects of the pandemic have significantly affected groups that were already exposed, such as families experiencing poverty, migrants and survivors of gender-based violence. Indeed, people experiencing homelessness have been identified as one of the most affected groups of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

In collaboration with national, regional and local authorities, service providers and other organisations, European Red Cross Societies support people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless. The range of activities presented in this publication showcases the scope of assistance provided to support a wide diversity of vulnerable groups through community-based services and committed volunteers. Importantly, this publication also highlights the impact of the Red Cross' approach to preventing, responding to and lifting people out of homelessness.



French Red Cross volunteers reach out to people living on the streets in Paris during the COVID-19 pandemic, May 2020.

© Christophe Hargoues / French Red Cross

1 FEANTSA (2020) The impact of Covid19 on homeless people and services. Online, [www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/magazine/2020/Full\\_Magazine\\_Autumn\\_2020.pdf](http://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/magazine/2020/Full_Magazine_Autumn_2020.pdf)

## Homelessness, a pressing EU issue

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In November 2020, the European Parliament voted for the European Commission and EU Member States to take the necessary actions to end homelessness by 2030.<sup>2</sup> Among the main demands, the European Parliament called for:

- » equal access to public services, such as healthcare, education and social services
- » support for the integration of people experiencing homelessness into the labour market via employment programmes, training and tailored schemes
- » constant access to emergency shelters as a last resort (in addition to prevention and support measures)
- » work on a common definition of homelessness, improved data collection and coherent indicators to be able to better understand and assess the extent of homelessness.

In March 2021, the European Commission launched its Action Plan to support the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). Within the context of the Action Plan, homelessness was placed high on the political agenda with the launch of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness in June 2021. The platform, together with the commitment made by Member States when signing the Lisbon declaration, represents an important first step towards combatting homelessness.

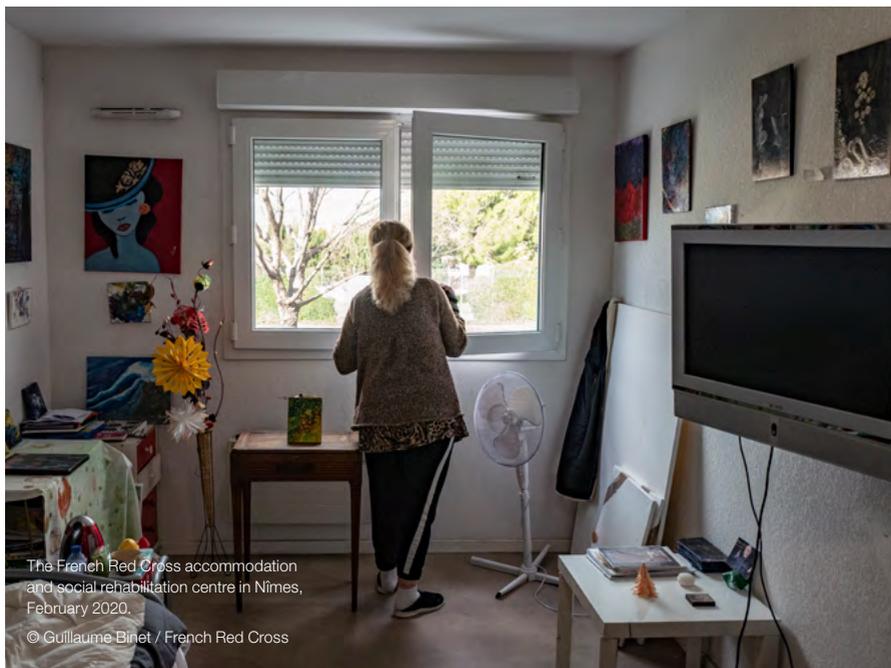
Across Europe, National Red Cross Societies respond to the needs of people who are homeless by providing accommodation, health services and assistance in accessing social protection and employment services, as well as psychosocial and material support. They work diligently to prevent homelessness for citizens who are often not noticed as being homeless, by identifying people at risk and helping them to maintain their housing, while offering assistance with the underlying issues which contribute to their housing problems. They also work in partnership with others to support people out of homelessness and into sustainable and high-quality homes. This publication presents three important cross-cutting approaches to homelessness which seek to facilitate the realisation of the human and social rights of people who find themselves homeless, assist people at risk of becoming homeless, and support people who are homeless to exit homelessness. The key actions of the Red Cross approach are:

- » **Preventing homelessness by providing dedicated services for people at risk.**

We support people at risk of homelessness through addressing tenancy problems and underlying issues which may affect their housing.

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2 European Parliament (2020) How Parliament wants to end homelessness in the EU. Online, [www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20201119STO92006/how-parliament-wants-to-end-homelessness-in-the-eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20201119STO92006/how-parliament-wants-to-end-homelessness-in-the-eu)



» **Providing immediate assistance to people who find themselves homeless.**

We respond to the needs of people who are homeless, without discrimination, ensuring their access to accommodation, social protection, and psychosocial and material support.

» **Empowering and supporting people to exit homelessness.**

We work with people experiencing homelessness to create the right support to help them exit homelessness into sustainable high-quality housing.

## **Holistic and integrated services to address homelessness**

The profile of people experiencing homelessness is both varied and large in scope. Homelessness also affects people differently. Integrated services to address homelessness offer a range of activities and coordinated services to improve outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. A holistic approach should provide a wide range of support to meet people's needs. Interventions should consider people's physical, emotional, social and mental well-being. Without the stability of housing and access to essential social and health services, people experiencing homelessness

can often drift in and out of homeless shelters, prisons and hospitals. As well as being inefficient and costly, this cycle does not address the health and well-being of people with underlying issues which are exacerbated by their homelessness.

## **Chapter 1 – Homelessness: an undefined multidimensional issue**

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Chapter 1 stresses the urgency of defining homelessness to challenge the discriminatory stereotypes of people who find themselves homeless in society and to implement sustainable actions to combat the most acute forms of material deprivation. This chapter also underlines the importance of having standardised terminology to describe what it means to be homeless. Finally, it explores the concept of 'hidden homelessness' – people who are not visible to support services because they have not sought assistance, receive immediate support from their families, live in cars or do not have a fixed address.<sup>3</sup>

## **Chapter 2 – Preventing homelessness and providing support to people at risk of homelessness**

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Chapter 2 presents several good examples from National Red Cross Societies running support services for people at risk of becoming homeless. These examples address the needs of specific groups such as unaccompanied minors, survivors of gender-based violence, young people leaving institutional care and families with children. As there are many different reasons why people may be at risk of homelessness, this chapter shows the importance of employing a holistic approach that brings together national, regional and local stakeholders in an integrated manner to effectively implement prevention services.

## **Chapter 3 – Providing immediate assistance to people who find themselves homeless**

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Chapter 3 showcases National Red Cross Societies' response to the needs of people who are homeless to ensure their access to temporary accommodation, social protection and psychosocial and material support. This chapter shows examples of mobile interventions by Red Cross teams across Europe, but also in-house services (day/night shelters) that attend to the needs of people sleeping rough. It explores the importance of mobile teams as a first point of contact with people living on the streets. Red Cross mobile teams can reach out to people who are normally ignored, to listen and to support their social and health needs. Importantly, they aim to build a relationship of trust that will allow further assessment on existing support services to meet the needs of people who find themselves homeless.

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<sup>3</sup> OECD (2020) Policy Brief on Affordable Housing. Better data and policies to fight homelessness in the OECD. Page 5, online, [www.oecd.org/housing/data/affordable-housing-database/homelessness-policy-brief-2020.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/housing/data/affordable-housing-database/homelessness-policy-brief-2020.pdf)

## Chapter 4 – Housing solutions to exit homelessness

Chapter 4 focuses on long-term housing programmes to support people's full integration in society. This chapter shows how exiting homelessness requires sustainable actions that place access to a home with person-centred support plans as the main solution to foster social reintegration via stable housing.

### Key recommendations

#### At EU level

- » Support Member States to implement the EPSR and the Lisbon declaration by allocating funding, developing policy guidance and sharing good practices which have been shown to successfully support people experiencing homelessness. In this context, partnerships should be created with social service providers to ensure progress towards implementing the declaration at the national level.
- » Help Member States to guarantee the right to quality housing for all, as outlined in principle 19 of the EPSR, including by supporting the collection of national data and statistics on homelessness and its underlying causes, as well as the development of integrated and holistic national housing strategies.
- » Invest in the social services sector to address homelessness. Not-for-profit actors, such as National Red Cross Societies, have the trust of homeless populations through their provision of integrated, holistic and sustainable frontline assistance and services to thousands of people who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless.
- » The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) contributes to strengthening social cohesion by addressing humanitarian, social and health emergency needs. Including FEAD in the new European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) should continue to provide unconditional assistance to people at risk of homelessness, while safeguarding dignity and leaving no one behind.
- » To promote social inclusion and help people experiencing homelessness to regain autonomy and control over their lives, ESF+ should continue to support long-term approaches that do not exclusively focus on employment-related actions but prioritise access to sustainable and durable housing-led solutions.
- » The European Semester process should consider specific indicators to analyse the impact of existing high-quality and affordable health and care services in all EU Member States and their correlation with the size of the homeless population.

## At Member State level

- » The EU and Member States should counter the lack of consistent and aggregated data for future policy and legislative actions to effectively address the causes, immediate needs and existing support services for homelessness at the national level. Such actions should be undertaken in partnership with frontline not-for-profit organisations.
- » Member States should create the necessary policy frameworks to ensure implementation of principle 19 of the EPSR. Developing national housing strategies which are integrated and holistic in their approach to prevent, respond to and support people out of homelessness should be central. These strategies need to be well resourced and developed in partnership with people who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness, as well as the frontline not-for-profit organisations working to support them.
- » Member States and the national and regional management authorities of EU funding should recognise the increased demand for social services and invest ESF+ funding in the innovative social service practices of not-for-profit organisations which meet local needs.
- » Member States should ensure that national programmes supporting the implementation of the new ESF+ become drivers for social integration by uniting employment-related measures with innovative and sustainable housing-led solutions for people to exit homelessness.



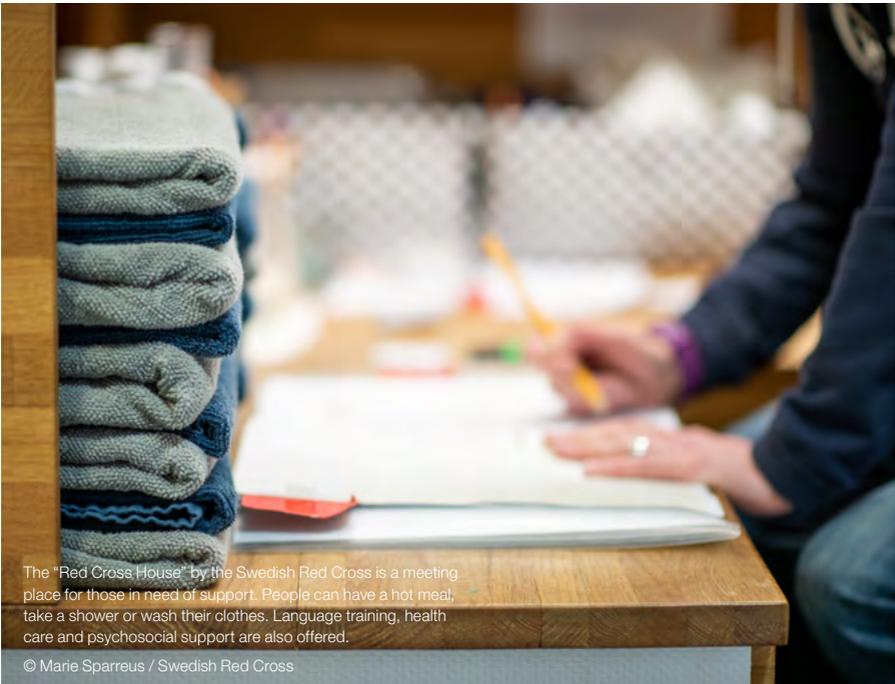
Volunteers with an Italian Red Cross Road Unit deliver food to a person experiencing homelessness in Rome, December 2020.

© Emiliano Albensi / Italian Red Cross

- » Access to adequate and affordable housing is a fundamental right. Member States should adopt social housing policies that do not overlook people who are homeless and find themselves below the radar of public and social support services.

## Key conclusions

- » People experiencing homelessness are often ignored as a vulnerable group, notwithstanding the complexities around one of the most acute forms of material deprivation. Efforts to combat homelessness should consider a holistic approach that unites traditional immediate responses in the areas of shelter, food and health interventions with innovative social inclusion measures, such as housing-led solutions and prevention services. Particular focus should be put on addressing the needs of families and young people experiencing homelessness.
- » Combatting homelessness calls for further research on the main causes and impacts of people being at risk of becoming homeless. Research addressing the individual and collective needs of people experiencing homelessness should never become extractive.



The "Red Cross House" by the Swedish Red Cross is a meeting place for those in need of support. People can have a hot meal, take a shower or wash their clothes. Language training, health care and psychosocial support are also offered.

© Marie Sparreus / Swedish Red Cross

It should be inclusive and facilitate the participation of people with lived experience to fully understand the reality behind the complexities of homelessness as a structural issue.

- » Extreme vulnerability affects a variety of groups, including families with children, young people, foreigners, migrants, asylum seekers and the LGBTIQ+ community. These groups are often overlooked in emergency responses. The exchange of good practices and learning among stakeholders is paramount to better address the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- » National housing strategies need to consider the varied and complex underlying reasons for homelessness. Hence, it is important that national strategies are integrated with other essential health and social care services for homeless people. The success of interventions depends on their holistic nature – whereby they place the individual at the centre of all processes.
- » Partnerships among all actors at the EU, national, regional and local levels are key to ending poverty. To end homelessness, partnerships are vital in coordinating funding, sharing practices, and evaluating impact. Coordinated and concerted efforts among all stakeholders, including people who are homeless, help to ensure no one is left behind.
- » EU funds should become a major driving force for organisations combatting homelessness across Europe. Bureaucratic procedures in accessing EU funding should be as flexible as possible to allow programmes to adapt to people's immediate needs, whenever support is needed.

# Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 has severely impacted vulnerable groups in Europe. Beyond the negative health consequences, the disruptive effects of the pandemic have significantly affected groups that were already vulnerable, such as families experiencing poverty, migrants and survivors of gender-based violence. The long-term socio-economic and health consequences of COVID-19 have heightened loneliness and mental health issues especially among older people, persons with disabilities, children and unemployed youth. The impact of COVID-19 has created a tipping point placing more people at risk of social exclusion and poverty, while widening social exclusion for the most vulnerable people in our societies, making it even more visible and dramatic.<sup>4</sup> This publication highlights, by presenting 13 cases from National Red Cross Societies across Europe, the Red Cross' commitment to ending homelessness in Europe. Through adopting both a holistic and integrated approach, National Red Cross Societies in Europe have amassed years of experience in developing interventions and programmes that achieve impact and importantly positive outcomes for people who cannot access housing.

“  
**People experiencing homelessness have been among those worst affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.**”

National Red Cross Societies across Europe have been, and continue to be, on the frontline responding to the needs of the most vulnerable people. This has been particularly evident when it comes to homelessness. People experiencing homelessness have been identified as one of the most affected groups of the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> In collaboration with national, regional and local authorities, National Red Cross Societies in the EU support people experiencing homelessness through their networks of community-based volunteers. This publication showcases the impact of the Red Cross threefold approach to address the needs of diverse vulnerable groups during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Homelessness, a pressing EU issue

In November 2020 the European Parliament voted for the European Commission and EU Member States to take the

4 EAPN (2020) Supercharging Poverty? EAPN 2020 Poverty Watch Report. November 2020. Key findings and recommendations from 2020 poverty watches. Online, [www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EAPN-EU-Poverty-Watch-2020-final-version-4931.pdf](http://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EAPN-EU-Poverty-Watch-2020-final-version-4931.pdf)

5 FEANTSA (2020) The impact of Covid19 on homeless people and services. Online, [www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/magazine/2020/Full\\_Magazine\\_Autumn\\_2020.pdf](http://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/magazine/2020/Full_Magazine_Autumn_2020.pdf)



Belgian Red Cross volunteers offer food to people in need during the COVID-19 pandemic, May 2020.

© Olivier Papegnies / Belgian Red Cross

necessary actions to end homelessness by 2030.<sup>6</sup> Among the main demands the European Parliament calls for are:

- » equal access to public service such as healthcare, education and social services
- » support for the integration of homeless people into the labour market via employment programmes, training and tailored schemes
- » constant access to emergency shelters as a last resort (in addition to prevention and support measures)
- » work on a common definition for homelessness, improved data collection and coherent indicators to better understand and assess the extent of homelessness.

Furthermore, the resolution called on the European Commission to set an EU Framework of National Strategies on homelessness and for EU Member States to decriminalise homelessness and to combat prejudices and stereotypes among the general population, while continuing to raise funds to tackle the problem.<sup>7</sup> At present, only ten EU Member States have national strategies on homelessness, while six have regional strategies.

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6 European Parliament (2020) How Parliament wants to end homelessness in the EU. Online, [www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20201119STO92006/how-parliament-wants-to-end-homelessness-in-the-eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20201119STO92006/how-parliament-wants-to-end-homelessness-in-the-eu)

7 European Parliament (2020) How Parliament wants to end homelessness in the EU. Online, [www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20201119STO92006/how-parliament-wants-to-end-homelessness-in-the-eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20201119STO92006/how-parliament-wants-to-end-homelessness-in-the-eu)

The Office of the UN Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) describes homelessness as a human rights violation based on stigma and prejudices (often around ethnic, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation) which can evolve into social, political and economic deprivation, including lack of access to affordable and adequate housing.<sup>8</sup> The UN Sustainable Development Goals envisage a 2030 where the needs of people experiencing poverty and material deprivation have been addressed, where governments have implemented actions to lift people out of poverty while strengthening their dignity. Goal 11 acknowledges the importance of making cities and human settlements more inclusive.<sup>9</sup>

At EU level, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is a legally binding document, provides the main basis for protecting and recognising human rights in the EU. On the subject of housing and homelessness, article 34.3 of the charter reads, “In order to combat social exclusion and poverty, the Union recognises and respects the right to social and housing assistance so as to ensure a decent existence for all those who lack sufficient resources, in accordance with the rules laid down by Community law and national laws and practices”.<sup>10</sup> This was given credence by the launch of the EPSR (at the 2017 European Social Summit in Gothenburg) and its recognition of housing and assistance to people who are homeless as a basic social protection and right. Article 19 of the EPSR, which focuses on housing and assistance to people experiencing homelessness, calls on Members States to ensure:

- » access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need
- » vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction
- » adequate shelter and services shall be provided to homeless people in order to promote their social inclusion.

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8 OHCHR (2020) Homelessness and human rights. Online, [www.ohchr.org/en/issues/housing/pages/homelessnessandhumanrights.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/housing/pages/homelessnessandhumanrights.aspx)

9 United Nations (2018) Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 11. Sustainable cities and communities. Online, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

10 European Parliament (2000) Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, (2000/C 364/01). Online, [www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf)

In March 2021, the European Commission launched its Action Plan to support the implementation of the EPSR. Within the context of the Action Plan, homelessness has been placed high on the political agenda with the signing of the Lisbon declaration and the launching of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness in June 2021. Through their wider financial and legislative influence, EU funding instruments such as the ESF+, the Fund for European Aid for the most Deprived (FEAD), the European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF), InvestEU<sup>11</sup> and Next Generation EU,<sup>12</sup> through the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), show the EU has a major role to play in addressing the immediate food, shelter and material assistance needs of people who are, or are at risk of, becoming homeless.

## **Red Cross, fighting homelessness across Europe**

National Red Cross Societies in Europe believe that everyone deserves a home that is safe, secure and affordable. Across Europe, 20 National Red Cross Societies respond to people who are homeless by providing accommodation, health services and assistance in accessing social protection and employment services, as well as psychosocial and material support. We work to prevent homelessness by identifying people at risk and helping them maintain their housing while giving assistance on underlying issues which contribute to their housing problems. Moreover, we work in partnership with others to support people out of homelessness and into sustainable and quality homes.

*Graphic 1* highlights the specific areas of support being provided by National Red Cross Societies across the EU to those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. The graph also serves to demonstrate the integrated approach adopted by National Red Cross Societies in meeting the needs of those who require a range of support services and assistance.

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11 European Commission (2020) InvestEU. Online, [https://europa.eu/investeu/home\\_en](https://europa.eu/investeu/home_en)

12 European Commission (2020) Recovery Plan for Europe. Strategy, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en)

**Graphic 1:**  
**Scope of homeless support services provided by National Red Cross Societies across the EU**

	Food	Shelter	Housing	Employment	Health	Legal	Admin support
Austria	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Light Grey	Black
Belgium (FR)	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Light Grey	Dark Red	Light Grey	Light Grey
Czechia	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Light Grey
Denmark	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Black
Estonia	Light Red	Light Grey					
Finland	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Black
France	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Light Grey	Black
Germany	Light Red	Light Red	Light Grey	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Black
Greece	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Black
Hungary	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Black
Italy	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Light Grey	Light Grey
Latvia	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Black
Luxembourg	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Light Grey	Black
Norway	Light Red	Light Red	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Light Grey	Black
Portugal	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Black
Romania	Light Red	Light Red	Light Grey	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Light Grey
Slovakia	Light Red	Light Red	Light Grey	Light Grey	Dark Red	Light Grey	Black
Slovenia	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Black
Spain	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Light Grey	Black
Sweden	Light Red	Light Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Dark Red	Black

Based on 2020 Red Cross EU Office mapping of member National Red Cross Societies' work on homelessness.

The Red Cross assists people who are at risk of becoming homeless and supports people who are homeless to exit homelessness. The key actions of this tactic are:

- » **Preventing homelessness through providing support services for people at risk.**

We support people at risk of homelessness through addressing tenancy problems and underlying issues which may affect their housing. By identifying people at risk early, we provide targeted support based on their actual needs. At the same time, we look to support people who require assistance with other underlying issues which may place their housing at risk.

» **Providing immediate assistance to people who find themselves homeless.**

We respond to the needs of people who are homeless without discrimination, ensuring their access to accommodation, social protection, psychosocial and material support. Through our outreach work, we support people who cannot access housing to access essential services and support, while working with them to provide accommodation over the medium to long term.

» **Empowering and supporting people to exit homelessness.**

We work with people living on the streets to create the right support to help them exit homelessness to sustainable quality housing. We do this by developing individual support plans which address holistically the needs of the individual. Once a long-term housing solution has been identified we continue to work with the person, supporting them to keep their home.

Importantly, the Red Cross' action is anchored to three important cross-cutting approaches to homelessness which seek to support the realisation of the human and social rights of people experiencing homelessness. In collaboration with national stakeholders and civil society organisations, National Red Cross Societies in Europe run activities to implement principle 19 of the EPSR to provide access to key support services such as healthcare and social care for people experiencing material deprivation and homelessness.

## **Holistic approach to homelessness**

Without the stability of housing together with essential social and health services, people experiencing homelessness can often drift in and out of homeless shelters, prisons and hospitals. This cycle does not address the health and well-being of people who have underlying issues which are exacerbated by their homelessness and is also inefficient and costly. In brief, a holistic approach should provide a whole range of support to meet people's needs, considering their physical, emotional, social and mental well-being. Each person has a distinct experience of homelessness and their path to exiting it will depend on their overall well-being, not just their homelessness.

The Spanish Red Cross in Zaragoza provides multiple services to people experiencing homelessness. It offers immediate assistance in the form of material assistance, food and administrative support. It also organises homeless counts every two years that aim to quantify and better understand the population and immediate needs of the people who live on the streets.

## In practice – Holistic approach to homelessness

### Homeless count – Zaragoza, Spain

The Spanish Red Cross' 'Homeless Counts' programme in the city of Zaragoza began in November 2010. The counts are carried out every two years, with the collaboration and involvement of other associations working with homeless people.

### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

To determine the number of people who are homeless, a homeless count consists of estimating the number of people experiencing homelessness on a given night, who are not using or do not have access to any support system (family, friends, emergency shelters or temporary housing solutions).

### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

The main objective of this exercise is to try to quantify the population that lives strictly on the streets, that is, people who remain outside the institutional network of support centres.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

The volunteering teams collect information such as age, nationality, gender, time living on the streets, professional and/or academic background and reasons to be living on the streets. This is later disseminated to other organisations, local and regional authorities.

### OUTCOMES

The 2018 count found a reduced number of people sleeping rough (120) compared with previous years. The large majority (85.8 per cent) were men, with 35.3 per cent of all people experiencing homelessness being between 40 and 49 years old.<sup>13</sup>

## Integrated-services approach to homelessness

The profile of people experiencing homelessness is both varied and large in scope. Homelessness also affects people differently. An integrated-services approach to homelessness offers a range of activities and efficiently coordinated services to achieve improved outcomes even for people who are often overlooked by social services. It can offer a more appropriate response to homelessness and the many challenges people encounter such as addressing poor physical and mental health, unemployment and ensuring access to social services and benefits. It means placing people's individual needs at the centre of the process and aiming to achieve the best possible outcomes based on these needs.

13 Spanish Red Cross (2018) V Estudio personas sin techo. Zaragoza, page 48.

## In practice – Integrated approaches to homelessness

### Hellenic Red Cross Multifunctional Centres – Greece

The Hellenic Red Cross multifunctional centres<sup>14</sup> in Athens and Thessaloniki follow a holistic approach in providing social care and support for refugees and migrants to stay safe, connected and informed. Activities focus on strengthening their ability to cope, manage their needs and overcome daily challenges.

#### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

The main target group are people who are overlooked as being homeless (hidden homelessness), either due to their ineligibility to receive administrative and social support from public authorities, or simply because they are supported by a network of friends and family and social protection services are not aware of their needs.

#### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

Working with migrants with legal administrative status in Greece, the multifunctional centres address basic needs such as housing, food, social protection, access to essential household items, access to healthcare services and education for families with children. These services are provided in collaboration with different departments in the Hellenic Red Cross that work to restore family links, to provide primary healthcare and provide interpreters to facilitate access to public services.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

In Athens, the centre offers activities for children from preschool age up to teenagers. It provides legal advice to support refugees to understand their status, required documents and current situation, and helps them clarify their options for staying in Greece. Legal support can also be provided by phone. A hotline phone service provides accurate, up-to-date information, guidance, support and advice in 12 different languages for refugees and migrants living in Greece.

#### OUTCOMES

The multifunctional centres in Athens and Thessaloniki assist refugees, through their available services, to feel safe, connected and properly informed. The centres support them towards being resilient, self-sufficient and confident in building a new life, supporting their social integration. They also help refugees to create new networks with other people in similar situations, providing them with a sense of community, which may otherwise be difficult to obtain in an urban setting.

14 Hellenic Red Cross (2021) Multifunctional Centers. Athens-Thessaloniki. Online, <https://hrcmfathens.com/?lang=en>

1.

# Homelessness: An undefined multidimensional issue



Hungarian Red Cross volunteers help families experiencing extreme poverty to replace doors and windows, and to modernise the heating in their homes, December 2019.

© Márton Neményi / Hungarian Red Cross

## 1.1. Defining homelessness in the EU

The EU has no definition of homelessness. Defining homelessness poses the intrinsic challenge to identify the limits of what it effectively means to be without a home. The Oxford Dictionary puts it simply, “the state of having no home”.<sup>15</sup> According to the United Nations Settlement Programme, homelessness is “one of the most acute forms of material deprivation” because it “refers to the inability of people to enjoy a permanent accommodation.”<sup>16</sup> In many EU Member States, homelessness is associated with being a rough sleeper, of being without a physical home. But in Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Greece and Romania, being homeless applies to a wider spectrum, covering for example, people living in insecure accommodation, inadequate housing conditions, temporary accommodation or reception centres.<sup>17</sup> Other countries such as Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Denmark, Malta and Slovakia have either no existing definition or administrative definitions and/or legal obligations at the local level to provide material assistance and social protection for people without a home.<sup>18</sup>

## 1.2. Determining the scope of homelessness in the EU

Defining homelessness is critical, both to challenge the negative stereotyping and discrimination against people who find

themselves homeless, and to implement sustainable actions to combat the most acute forms of material deprivation and poverty in society. The lack of harmonisation on what it means to be homeless across the EU affects the ability to define the amount of people who are homeless at EU level. Moreover, data on ‘hidden homelessness’ can vary significantly – people who are not visible to support services, because they either have not sought support, receive immediate support from their families, live in cars or do not have a fixed address.<sup>19</sup> The European Commission acknowledges the need to improve data collection as one of the necessary policy responses to combatting homelessness.<sup>20</sup> The European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) developed by the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)<sup>21</sup> classifies the different living situations of homeless people as living rough, in inadequate housing conditions, in accommodation for people who are homeless or in institutions. This typology fits with existing definitions in some countries such as Spain and Luxembourg. Although the guide is useful for categorising living conditions and for data collection purposes, it does not aim to harmonise existing definitions across Member States.

The latest data indicates that there are up to 700,000 people who are homeless in the EU.<sup>22</sup> This represents a 10 per cent increase from previous estimates in 2010. Although single men continue to dominate the main picture

- 15 Oxford Learner’s Dictionary (2021) Definition of homelessness. Online, [www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/homelessness](http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/homelessness)
- 16 UN HABITAT (2019) Homelessness & the SDGs. Online, [www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2019/07/SALCEDO\\_Jesus\\_Presentation\\_2-1.pdf](http://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2019/07/SALCEDO_Jesus_Presentation_2-1.pdf)
- 17 European Social Policy Network (2019) Fighting homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe. A study of national policies. European Commission, pages 24–27. Online, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2dd1bd61-d834-11e9-9c4e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- 18 European Social Policy Network (2019) Fighting homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe. A study of national policies. European Commission, page 24. Online, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2dd1bd61-d834-11e9-9c4e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- 19 OECD (2020) Policy Brief on Affordable Housing. Better data and policies to fight homelessness in the OECD. Page 5, online, [www.oecd.org/housing/data/affordable-housing-database/homelessness-policy-brief-2020.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/housing/data/affordable-housing-database/homelessness-policy-brief-2020.pdf)
- 20 European Commission (2021) Homelessness. Definition. Policy Response. Employment and Social Affairs & Inclusion. Online, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1061&langId=ga>.
- 21 FEANTSA (2005) ETHOS: European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion. Online, [www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2005/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion](http://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2005/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion)
- 22 FEANTSA (2020) Fifth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2020. Online, [www.feantsa.org/en/report/2020/07/23/fifth-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe-2020?bcParent=27](http://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2020/07/23/fifth-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe-2020?bcParent=27)

“ People experiencing homelessness often face barriers to access primary healthcare. ”

Medical equipment and a dental chair used in the health clinic operated by the Danish Red Cross, October 2020.

© Julie Bergstrand-Christensen / Danish Red Cross



of homelessness across Europe, young people and families are on the rise. In Ireland, for example, 2,166 children and their families were found to be homeless,<sup>23</sup> and during the Brussels count in 2020, 933 children were found to be living in support services while 12 were sleeping rough.<sup>24</sup>

Among the causes of becoming homeless is the cost of housing: according to Eurostat, 9.6 per cent of Europeans spend at least 40 per cent of their monthly income on housing;<sup>25</sup> for families with children and one or all members unemployed, living expenses can easily skyrocket. In fact, the correlation between housing prices and homelessness has been identified as one of the main reasons for the dramatic increase in the number of people experiencing poverty in Europe.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, over indebtedness and high unemployment rates, especially among young

people, have become determinant factors in experiencing homelessness or becoming homeless due to the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>27</sup>

### 1.3. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people who are homeless and people at risk of homelessness

There are a number of reasons why people experiencing homelessness have poorer mental and physical health, chief among these is the extreme poverty they experience, and the harsh living conditions, unaddressed trauma and barriers to accessing primary healthcare.<sup>28</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic, the risk of poor health was further escalated due

23 Focus Ireland (2021) Latest Figures on Homelessness in Ireland. Online, [www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/latest-figures-homelessness-ireland](http://www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/latest-figures-homelessness-ireland)

24 RTBF (2021) Plus de 5300 personnes sans-abri et mal logées à Bruxelles: une augmentation de 30% par rapport à 2018. Online, [www.rtbf.be/info/regions/detail\\_plus-de-5300-personnes-sans-abri-et-mal-logees-a-bruxelles-une-augmentation-de-30-par-rapport-a-2018?id=10721007](http://www.rtbf.be/info/regions/detail_plus-de-5300-personnes-sans-abri-et-mal-logees-a-bruxelles-une-augmentation-de-30-par-rapport-a-2018?id=10721007)

25 Eurostat (2020) Housing costs a challenge to many households. Online, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200520-1>

26 European Social Policy Network (2019) Fighting homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe. A study of national policies. European Commission, page 51. Online, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2dd1bd61-d834-11e9-9c4e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

27 FEANTSA (2021) Sixth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe. Pages 15–16 Online, [www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/News/6th\\_Overview\\_of\\_Housing\\_Exclusion\\_in\\_Europe\\_2021\\_EN.pdf](http://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/News/6th_Overview_of_Housing_Exclusion_in_Europe_2021_EN.pdf)

28 Nature Reviews (2021) Health care for homeless people. Online, [www.nature.com/articles/s41572-020-00241-2](http://www.nature.com/articles/s41572-020-00241-2)

to national policies enforced throughout Europe cautioning people to stay at home. Self-isolation and social distancing measures implemented across Europe have been hard to follow for people who find themselves homeless. These policies only further worsened the situation for people experiencing homelessness as accessing services became increasingly difficult due to increased restrictions and social distancing.

The pandemic also placed additional pressure on people at risk of homelessness. During the lockdown, vulnerable people and families living on basic wages witnessed a dramatic drop in their income, making the payment of rent extremely difficult. Based on interviews and exchanges with representatives from National Red Cross Societies across Europe in 2020 about their work around homelessness, we noted a telling increase in homelessness or the risk of homeless to the following groups:

**Graphic 2:**  
Groups with increased risk of homelessness and associated risk factors due to COVID-19

AT RISK GROUPS	RISK FACTORS
Disadvantaged youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Lack of access to adequate and affordable accommodation</li> <li>» Unemployed or in precarious employment</li> <li>» Lack of access to education and training</li> <li>» Lack of financial and accommodation support when in education</li> <li>» Lack of social protection schemes designed specifically for young people</li> </ul>
LGBTIQ+ community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Discrimination, stigma and violence based on sexual orientation or self-identity</li> <li>» Lack of access to health and social support schemes designed specifically for LGBTIQ+</li> <li>» Discrimination leading to reduced employment opportunities and greater risk of poverty</li> </ul>
Children and their families at risk of poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Lack of access to adequate and affordable accommodation</li> <li>» Families unable to pay rent due to unemployment, housing and essential services costs</li> <li>» Lack of support accommodation which maintains family life and routines</li> </ul>
Survivors of gender-based violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Lack of social protection schemes designed specifically for survivors of gender-based violence</li> <li>» Unemployment and lack of economic independence, which heighten risk of staying with abuser</li> <li>» Lack of access to health, psychological and education support services for survivors of domestic violence</li> </ul>
Unaccompanied minors and migrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Discrimination and stigma based on ethnicity rooted in political populism</li> <li>» Lack of access to health and education support designed around the needs of unaccompanied minors and migrants</li> <li>» Difficulties in accessing housing schemes</li> </ul>

## 2.

# Preventing homelessness and providing support to people at risk



Italian Red Cross volunteer nurses test the blood pressure of a person experiencing homelessness in Rome, October 2019.

© Emiliano Albensi / Italian Red Cross

Following a snowstorm in Athens, Hellenic Red Cross teams provide psychosocial support and distribute blankets, clothing and food to people experiencing homelessness, February 2021.

© Evangelos Panagiotakopoulos / Hellenic Red Cross



Preventing homelessness requires addressing the underlying causes for people who are at risk of becoming homeless. As the reasons for homelessness are many and varied, a holistic approach which brings together national, regional, and local stakeholders in an integrated manner is core to this prevention work. This chapter also shows how different initiatives can be triggered by principle 19 of the EPSR to guarantee social protection and housing solutions to prevent homelessness and to offer access to quality social care and healthcare.<sup>29</sup> Examples from the French Red Cross, the Swedish Red Cross, the Latvian Red Cross, the Hungarian Red Cross and the Czech Red Cross showcase examples of how the Red Cross' threefold approach serves to implement the EPSR to combat homelessness.

## 2.1. Assisting survivors of gender-based violence and their families

Principle 2 of the EPSR considers actions to foster equality and equal treatment between women and men in all areas. The

EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, as part of the European Commission's actions, sets out policy objectives to achieve a Europe where women are free to pursue their chosen path in life, where they have equal opportunities to thrive, and where they can equally participate in and lead our European society.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, for women experiencing poverty and homelessness or who are survivors of gender-based violence, achieving equality might appear as a distant goal. Tackling gender-based violence requires a person-centred approach where the immediate needs of women are addressed to ensure both their physical safety and psychological well-being, as well as the social and economic administrative support to strengthen their autonomy. This section showcases an example from the French Red Cross emergency accommodation centre that responds to the immediate housing needs of women who are survivors of violence in the Paris area.

29 European Commission (2016) European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles. Online, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

30 European Commission (2020) A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. Online, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en)

## In practice – Preventing homelessness

### Emergency accommodation for survivors of gender-based violence and their families – France

The French Red Cross runs a centre offering temporary accommodation to survivors of domestic and intra-family violence, single mothers with children, women who are alone or pregnant women without stable accommodation.

#### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

The centre offers transitional temporary accommodation, in a safe environment, for women and children to stay while they are waiting to be transferred to more suitable and long-term housing solutions. The women can reach social workers by phone at any time.

#### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

The centre welcomes women who have left their homes to flee violence and who need immediate housing solutions. It comprises eight rooms which can be adapted to suit families of different types and sizes and can house up to 20 people in total.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

On arrival, the Red Cross team at the centre assesses the women's needs. Then, they provide material assistance in the form of clothes, personal hygiene supplies, basic necessities for babies (such as infant milk, potties and nappies). They also offer a prepaid phone card so the women can have a new secure means of communication and avoid harassment via their old phones.

#### OUTCOMES

The main outcomes the Red Cross team aims to achieve are to ensure the women's physical safety and psychological well-being, reassurance and security; to accompany and support people to restore their confidence and to strengthen their self-esteem; to provide social and economic administrative support to enable the women to take charge of their daily lives; and to provide legal and administrative support.

## 2.2. Preventing unaccompanied minors from becoming homeless

Unaccompanied minors are vulnerable to homelessness and the associated risks of living on the streets. Principle 11 of the Action Plan to implement the EPSR considers child protection from poverty and the implementation of specific measures targeting children's well-being. It also guarantees that people from different backgrounds are not discriminated due to their gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Principle 3 of the EPSR enhances as well equal opportunities for everybody as highlighted in the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025.<sup>31</sup>

Across the EU, National Red Cross Societies are identifying unaccompanied minors through outreach work and supporting them through targeted services. In Sweden, the Red Cross is working across the country to support unaccompanied minors into safe and quality housing.

31 European Commission (2020) EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020-2025. Online, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-anti-racism-action-plan-2020-2025\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-anti-racism-action-plan-2020-2025_en)

## In practice – Preventing homelessness

### Promoting needs-based support for children and young people – Sweden

Local branches of the Swedish Red Cross meet thousands of young people who do not have stable housing or even a roof over their heads, who do not know how they will get food for the day and who have nowhere to take care of hygiene and other basic necessities.

#### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

In recent years, the situation for many unaccompanied young migrants in Sweden has changed. New migration laws have meant that civil society's efforts for the target group have had to be adapted to the new situation. Many young migrants have mental health issues. Their hard experiences from before and during their journeys from their home countries together with the difficult situation in Sweden have resulted in many young people having depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, stress and loneliness.<sup>32</sup>

#### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

The Swedish Red Cross works to meet the immediate needs of housing for children and young unaccompanied minors in Sweden. Different housing solutions are proposed, including with families, corridor housing, apartments, rooms, collective housing and student housing.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Due to the changing nature of the target group over recent years, the Red Cross' activities increasingly need to focus on meeting young migrants' basic humanitarian needs. First offering housing support and food has been necessary for these young people to then be able to participate in other activities and focus on studies and social inclusion.

#### OUTCOMES

At least 1,136 young people were housed during 2020 by the 24 Red Cross local branches that offer housing for unaccompanied young migrants. Local Swedish Red Cross branches have often collaborated with other actors such as the municipality, the Swedish church and other civil society organisations.

#### Quotes from Swedish Red Cross volunteers:

*“We have done a lot, but we want to do more. We have picked up young people from park benches and other unsafe places. They have been given food, a warm place to land and tools and support to continue their lives.”*

*“The aim of the accommodation is to welcome the most vulnerable, meet their basic humanitarian needs and as soon as possible give them counselling, information, contacts to move on to studies, family, and other places where they can continue their lives.”*

*“For some it has been a matter of life or death, for others to be included in the Swedish society and find their role, for many it is about having the strength to get up in the morning and go to school.”*

32 Swedish Red Cross (2021) Humanitarian Situation and loneliness among the young. Online, [www.rodakorset.se/om-oss/fakta-och-standpunkter/rapporter/humanitara-situationen-for-ensamkommande-unga](http://www.rodakorset.se/om-oss/fakta-och-standpunkter/rapporter/humanitara-situationen-for-ensamkommande-unga)

As child poverty becomes an increasingly pressing problem across the EU, the inclusive and participatory nature of the European Child Guarantee and its provisions for funding opportunities will be important tools to fight the social exclusion of vulnerable children.<sup>33</sup> The inclusivity visible throughout the European Child Guarantee is vital to ensuring that all children, regardless of their status, can benefit from services to support their development and address their needs. Its participatory nature, which emphasises getting the opinions and views of children, is also an important contributor to its potential to improve children's lives across the EU.<sup>34</sup> The next section showcases the Hungarian Red Cross' person-centred approach to supporting families and children in Budapest who are in need of rapid

temporary accommodation and securing employment.

### 2.3. Temporary accommodation for families and their children

Families living in precarious housing and with low incomes have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In many cases they were among the first to be affected by lockdown measures resulting in the loss of employment. During the pandemic, National Red Cross Societies have been identifying and supporting families at risk of becoming homeless, by helping them to find affordable alternative accommodation and providing essential material items.

#### In practice – Preventing homelessness

##### Temporary accommodation for families risking becoming homeless – Hungary

The Hungarian Red Cross runs temporary housing programmes all over the country through ten local branches to prevent families from becoming homeless and their children being taken into state care.<sup>35</sup>

##### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

The Hungarian Red Cross works with families who have serious housing and household budget issues. Some lack an education and have low working skills; many have never had a permanent job nor permanent housing.

##### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

One of the main goals is to provide support to help children succeed in school and to prevent them from leaving school early and thereby exposing them to future social exclusion. The children take part in group sessions as well as individual development classes with the special education teacher and the kindergarten teacher.

##### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Once the family is at the centre, a social worker is assigned to attend to their needs and the psychosocial process they will go through during their stay. Social workers help the families strengthen their relationships and connections, and to find a job and affordable permanent housing. To achieve these aims, they provide strong cooperation and intensive social work, a professional team and group work for the families.

##### OUTCOMES

Families can generally stay for up to a year. This year can be prolonged by another half year or until the end of the school year to create stable circumstances for the families.

33 European Commission (2021) The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee. Online, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en)

34 Red Cross EU Office (2021) Promoting needs-based support for children and young people. Online, <https://redcross.eu/latest-news/promoting-needs-based-support-for-children-and-young-people>

35 Hungarian Red Cross (2021) Children and Families. Online, <http://voroskereszt.hu/miben-segitunk/gyermekek-es-csaladok>

## 2.4. Temporary accommodation for families living in inadequate housing conditions

Living in adequate housing conditions should be considered fundamental, especially for families with children. Housing should not simply be considered to be providing four walls, but a safe environment with adequate access to electricity, heating, water and with the minimum sanitary conditions. In many

countries the increases in housing costs have become a real burden for families, especially where all family members are unemployed. In Latvia, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), has estimated that families use 23 per cent of their gross income to keep their own home (OECD average is 20 per cent), while 86 per cent of dwellings contain access to a private indoor flushing toilet (OECD average is 96 per cent).<sup>36</sup>

### In practice – Preventing homelessness

#### Temporary accommodation for families living in inadequate housing conditions – Latvia

The Latvian Red Cross crisis centre offers temporary accommodation to people facing domestic violence, mental health issues, long-term unemployment, health problems, addiction and more.

#### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

Users of the centre are not always rough sleepers. In many cases their homes are in a very bad technical condition (such as lack of proper heating system, only cold water available) which makes it very difficult and sometimes even impossible to live there with small children or infants.

#### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

The Latvian Red Cross offers temporary accommodation to families living in houses with unsuitable living conditions, unresolved rent issues and unaffordable rent (where this is higher than the person's salary). Moreover, there are simply not enough social houses available to people on low incomes.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

People who have no place of residence can receive a referral from the Riga Social Service Department to stay for a short-term period (3 to 6 months). The centre is equipped with separate bedrooms for families with children, as well as for women and men.

#### OUTCOMES

Every year more than 80 or 90 families with children (223 people in 2020) receive the service of Latvian Red Cross crisis centre 'Burtnieks'.<sup>37</sup>

36 OECD (2021) Better Life Index. Housing. Latvia Online, [www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/housing](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/housing)

37 Latvian Red Cross (2013) Short-stay Accommodation centre "Burtnieks". Online, [www.redcross.lv/en/social-center-posts/short-stay-accommodation-centre-burtnieks-2](http://www.redcross.lv/en/social-center-posts/short-stay-accommodation-centre-burtnieks-2)

## 2.5. Accommodation for young people leaving youth care, released from imprisonment or protective treatment

Children and young people are often disproportionately affected by the political, economic and social dynamics in society. For people who are institutionalised, leaving institutions often represents having nowhere to go. The European Child Guarantee highlights the needs for action to provide support for children leaving institutional care to achieve independent living and social integration regardless of their background as stated in principle 2 of the EPSR.<sup>38</sup>

This section presents an example of good practice from Czechia where prevention and adequate support through all stages is offered once a person has moved out of institutional care. Rapid re-housing and preserving housing for families with children, or for young people is fundamental to prevent homelessness and a priority of the National Strategy for Preventing and Tackling Homelessness in Czechia.<sup>39</sup>

### In practice – Preventing homelessness

#### The Halfway House – Czechia

The Halfway House offers temporary accommodation and social support services to people under the age of 26 leaving institutional or protective education. The service also supports children and youth leaving care facilities, and those who are released from imprisonment or protective treatment.

#### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

The Czech Red Cross local branches offer programmes and services for people who have been released from prison and men between 19 and 25 years old who have found themselves in difficult social situations often connected with the loss of housing.<sup>40</sup>

#### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

Among the main objectives of this programme is to teach people staying in the Halfway House the basic skills related to independent living (such as running a household, contacting the authorities, basic financial literacy and financial management) so that they can integrate into society without problems or difficulties, reconnect with their family, if possible, get a job and find suitable housing.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

The Halfway House offers three studio-type apartments ready for immediate occupancy, each with its own bathroom and kitchenette. The programme provides services that meet the individual needs of users while preserving their rights and human dignity and helping to ensure a smooth transition between institutional facilities and integration into everyday life for people who have nowhere else to go.

38 European Commission (2021) The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee. Online, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en)

39 Šiška, Jan & Beadle-Brown, Julie (2020) Report on the transition from institutional care to community-based services in 27 EU Member States, page 37, online, <https://deinstitutionalisationdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/eeg-di-report-2020-1.pdf>

40 Czech Red Cross (2021) The Halfway House. Online, [www.cckberoun.cz/dum-na-pul-cesty.html#logoK](http://www.cckberoun.cz/dum-na-pul-cesty.html#logoK)

3.

## Providing immediate assistance to people who find themselves homeless



French Red Cross staff and volunteers respond to immediate needs and provide support and guidance to people experiencing homelessness, February 2020.

© Guillaume Binet / French Red CrossCross

National Red Cross Societies respond to the needs of people who are homeless, without discrimination, ensuring their access to accommodation, social protection, psychosocial and material support. In very practical terms this means providing immediate assistance through undertaking outreach work, listening to people who find themselves homeless, creating relationships of trust, and providing them with support. This chapter presents examples from the Belgian Red Cross, the Norwegian Red Cross and the Danish Red Cross on running integrated services that provide immediate assistance to people experiencing homelessness.

### 3.1. Building trust through mobile teams wherever it is needed

Red Cross teams across Europe run both mobile intervention teams and in-house services (day/night shelters) that attend to the needs of people sleeping rough. Mobile teams represent, in most cases, the first contact with people living on the streets. Red Cross mobile teams are able to reach out to people who find themselves homeless and are normally ignored. Staff and volunteers listen to people and work to respond to their needs. Importantly, they aim to build relationships of trust that allow for further assessment and referral to existing support services. In Brussels, 300 Red Cross volunteers participate in outreach activities every year. Volunteers support the work of the Belgian Red Cross to address the immediate needs of rough sleepers, to establish trust, and to further assess needs and appropriate support services.

A resident of the Slovenian Red Cross "Daily homeless shelter" and a volunteer do some gardening together, May 2020.

© Aleš Cernivec / Slovenian Red Cross



## In practice – Responding to homelessness

### Volunteering teams to assist homeless people in Brussels during the COVID-19 pandemic – Belgium

Since 2018, the Belgian Red Cross has been committed to supporting people experiencing homelessness in the largest cities in Belgium. In the first half of 2020, Red Cross teams made 11,109 contacts with people who cannot access housing.<sup>41</sup>

#### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

Since April 2020 and due to the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people on the streets, the Belgian Red Cross started collecting valuable qualitative data on referrals to other services and associations in Brussels, with the goal of attending to the most frequent requests from homeless people and strengthening the work with other support services and organisations working with people who are homeless.

#### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

Red Cross teams respond to an immediate need (donations of food, drinks, blankets, hygiene products) or redirect to the appropriate services (such as emergency accommodation, food, clothing and hygiene, medical services, social and legal services). When the team is made up of at least one rescuer, outreach teams can also perform basic treatments.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

The Red Cross has mobile teams made up of Red Cross workers and around 300 volunteers who go to meet people living on the street or very precariously, with the primary aim of creating a social bond with them. The teams follow pre-established routes (for good coverage of the territory) or responds to a report made by a citizen or another association.

#### OUTCOMES

##### Reorientation to support services in Brussels (first half of 2020):

- » **Medical support:** Outreach teams provide support to unregistered and undocumented migrants who have no access to the Belgian health services, redirecting them to accessible health services and hospitals.
- » **Emergency accommodation:** The Belgian Red Cross refers citizens eligible for social services in Belgium and may help by making the call for them.
- » **Food aid and clothing:** During lockdown, outreach teams delivered clothes (2,559 socks, 2,392 sets of underwear and 4,520 hygiene kits) to people on the streets as second-hand shops were closed and people could not be referred to them. Meanwhile, the delivery of food packages and food assistance on the streets was intensified during the crisis.
- » **Migrants:** Undocumented migrants, including families with children, are redirected to the humanitarian hub where they can use various services (medical, psychological, restoring family links, social service and clothing) and access information relating to their specific situation.

41 Belgian Red Cross (2020) Rapport Maraude Croix-Rouge. Bruxelles Capitale. 1er Semestre 2020, pages 8–16.

## 3.2. Offering rapid responses to accommodate rough sleepers

Sixteen National Red Cross Societies run emergency shelters offering rapid accommodation regardless of peoples' administrative status. Reorientation to support services is vital for people living on the streets, especially once trust has been established and an initial assessment

is made. During the cold months of winter, the Norwegian Red Cross offers rapid accommodation in the form of an emergency shelter that can turn into a matter of life or death. Since the emergency shelter opened in 2014, people sleeping rough from 85 different nationalities have checked in, regardless of their administrative status in Norway. The emergency shelter for homeless migrants registered 16,000 check-ins in 2019.

### In practice – Responding to homelessness

#### Providing emergency shelter accommodation for migrants who are homeless in Oslo – Norway

The Norwegian Red Cross and the Church City Mission have provided emergency accommodation to migrants who experience homelessness in Oslo since 2014.<sup>42</sup> The emergency accommodation was established due to the increasing number of migrants sleeping rough in Oslo and the lack of emergency services provided by local authorities or others.

#### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

The shelter for men was established in 2014. It has 55 beds and is located in a small church in the centre of Oslo. It has a sleeping area with camp beds and basic sanitary facilities (six toilets and four sinks). Guests can reserve accommodation for one or five nights for a symbolic price of 15 Norwegian kroner (1.5 euros) per night.

#### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

During 2019, around 300 homeless migrants visited the Red Cross shelter at least once, and a total of 16,000 check-ins were registered. The demand for emergency accommodation varies throughout the year. Some nights the shelter has room for everyone in need while on others it is full and unfortunately people must be turned away at the door. During the winter, the volunteers at the shelter turned away up to 30 migrants a night.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

The emergency accommodation in Oslo is separated into two shelters: one for women and couples, another for men.

#### OUTCOMES

People from 85 nationalities have benefitted since the shelter opened in 2014.

*"In my opinion, 2020 has proved the importance of shelters like ours. When an entire society closes, those without means become even more vulnerable. Those who make use of the shelter have lost their small sources of income and have nowhere else to go."*

Camilla Tangen Monsen – Manager of the emergency shelter for migrants who are homeless in Oslo.

42 Norwegian Red Cross (2013) Emergency for homeless migrants in Oslo. Online, [www.rodekors.no/en/lokalforeninger/oslo/pages-in-english-oslo-red-cross/emergency-shelter-for-homeless-migrants-in-oslo](http://www.rodekors.no/en/lokalforeninger/oslo/pages-in-english-oslo-red-cross/emergency-shelter-for-homeless-migrants-in-oslo)

### 3.3. Preventing health deterioration through health interventions

Reorientation to accessible health services can also help prevent major health problems among people who line on the streets. Fifteen National Red Cross Societies provide healthcare for people who cannot access housing across

the EU. In Denmark for example, regardless of their administrative status in the country, migrants and refugees can access immediate and responsive health services. Services such as dental health and early health interventions are offered in the cities of Aarhus, Copenhagen and Odense. In 2020, more than 4,000 patients visited the health clinic in Copenhagen, which represented over 21,700 individual visits throughout the year.

#### In practice – Responding to homelessness

##### Healthcare services for undocumented migrants in Copenhagen – Denmark

Since 2011, the Danish Red Cross in collaboration with the Danish Medical Association and the Danish Refugee Council has operated a health clinic in Copenhagen, followed later by ones in Aarhus and Odense.<sup>43</sup> All clinics are registered with the National Board of Health as private clinics.

##### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

In Denmark, undocumented migrants are only entitled to health benefits to a limited extent under section 80 of the Health Act. They are entitled to emergency hospital treatment as well as to palliative hospital care in cases where it is assessed that the person cannot be referred for treatment in the home country.

##### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

For migrants without a valid residence permit, a normal check-up at a general practitioner and potential further investigation at hospitals is not an option. The main objective of the health clinic is to provide basic healthcare to people with health needs, including dental care, midwifery, physiotherapy and some specialised medical doctors.

##### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

The Danish Red Cross offers basic healthcare to people without a residence permit in Denmark. Undocumented migrants are considered a vulnerable group and their right to benefits from the Danish healthcare system is limited and complex.

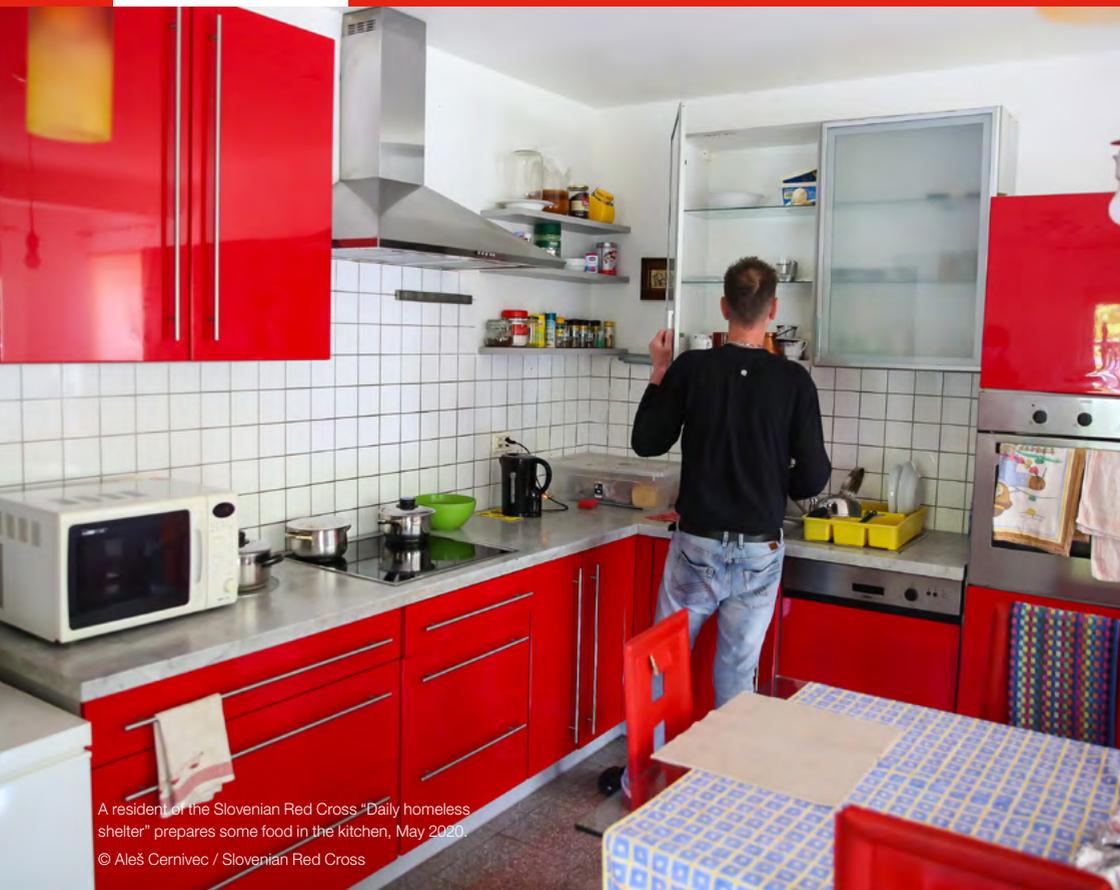
##### OUTCOMES

The clinics have more than 4,000 single patient visits per year.

43 Danish Red Cross (2021) Sunhedsklinikken. Online, [www.rodekors.dk/vores-arbejde/sundhedsklinik](http://www.rodekors.dk/vores-arbejde/sundhedsklinik)

# 4.

## Housing solutions to exit homelessness



A resident of the Slovenian Red Cross "Daily homeless shelter" prepares some food in the kitchen, May 2020.

© Aleš Cernivec / Slovenian Red Cross

A Slovenian Red Cross "Daily homeless shelter" resident does his laundry, May 2020.

© Aleš Cernivec / Slovenian Red Cross



The human right to access adequate and affordable housing is recognised by article 25 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>44</sup> In the European context, the EPSR in principle 19 supports actions and initiatives to provide social housing or housing assistance to people experiencing homelessness. Access to adequate housing should not be considered a privilege but “a precondition for the enjoyment of several human rights, including the rights to work, health, social security, vote, privacy, or education”.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, social housing schemes should not overlook people who are experiencing homelessness and who are not on the radar of social support services.

Exiting homelessness requires sustainable actions that place accessing a home as the main factor to achieve reintegration into society, which itself will happen via adequate training schemes that enable people to access the job market and thereby achieve full autonomy over their lives. This chapter presents the last pillar of the Red Cross threefold approach on homelessness: housing solutions to exit homelessness.

## 4.1. Housing-led approaches to exit homelessness

Housing-led approaches to exit homelessness comprise programmes that place accessing stable housing as the first step for people who have experienced homelessness for long periods of time, for people who have recently become homeless and for people at risk of becoming homeless. Thus, the housing-led approaches dissent with the ‘staircase’ or ‘continuum of care’ approach. In these cases, stable housing is the end goal in the reintegration process, particularly for people with complex support needs, who move through various stages in different residential services before becoming ‘ready’ for re-housing.<sup>46</sup>

The examples listed in this chapter provide flexible and person-centred services oriented to the needs of users by placing a home at the centre of the equation. The chapter showcases examples from a housing programme in Austria to achieve independent living and two examples from Italy and Portugal on implementing the Housing First approach, the most known housing-led approach.

44 United Nations (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Online, [www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights](http://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights)

45 OHCHR (2014) The Right to Adequate Housing. UN-Habitat. Online, [www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/fs21\\_rev\\_1\\_housing\\_en.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/fs21_rev_1_housing_en.pdf)

46 FEANTSA (2011) Housing-led policy approaches: Social innovation to end homelessness in Europe. Online, [www.feantsa.org/download/14\\_11\\_2011\\_hf\\_position\\_paper\\_final\\_en2408443683520304907.pdf](http://www.feantsa.org/download/14_11_2011_hf_position_paper_final_en2408443683520304907.pdf)

## In practice – Exiting homelessness

### Opportunity House: Achieving independent living in Vienna – Austria

The Opportunity House (Chancenhaus Hermes) was conceived following a profound period of reflection after many years working with people experiencing homelessness.<sup>47</sup> The Austrian Red Cross in Vienna could see that in many cases people would be stuck in homelessness for a very long time, with no prospects of exiting homelessness.

#### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

One of the biggest challenges for people at the Opportunity House is their financial situation. Often there is no steady income, or a lot of debt. Together with residents, the social workers check what kinds of welfare and support they qualify for and assist them with the application process. Some people might need medical or psychological help or even alcohol or drug rehabilitation. People are often facing a great deal of problems and it can feel overwhelming, but with the help, they are able to tackle these obstacles one by one.

#### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

The Opportunity House provides a realistic and timely perspective on finding suitable housing to live an independent life for people who were granted approval by the Advisory Centre for Homeless Assistance in Vienna, and who are waiting for an open spot in an assisted living facility for people who are homeless, or for a different kind of accommodation (such as inpatient therapy clinics and nursing homes).

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Social workers are assigned to assess next steps and goals. The support workers are often in contact with the people receiving support, mainly around ordinary daily activities. Experience has shown that for many people it is a lot easier to open up while talking casually with the support workers in the hallway or their room, than at an appointment in an office. Psychological and social care support is considered an interdisciplinary service offered at the house by social workers, support workers and attendants, so there is no need for residents to leave the service to receive dedicated attention.

#### OUTCOMES

After Opportunity House opened, the number of people per room was reduced to a maximum of two, while additional single rooms were made available. Currently there is space for 150 people (96 single men, 40 single women, 14 couples) and duration of the stay varies. As soon as a permanent housing solution is available, people move out.

*“It pays off to never give up! It is difficult at first, but in time we find a new perspective.”*  
Izabela Francus – Social Worker at Chancenhaus Hermes.

*“Chancenhaus is a bridge for people between homelessness and the return to their own living space.”*

Georg Prack – Team Manager at Chancenhaus Hermes.

47 Austrian Red Cross (2018) House Hermes: House of Opportunities for homeless women, men and couples. Online, [www.roteskreuz.at/wien/wohnungslosenhilfe/chancenhaus-hermes](http://www.roteskreuz.at/wien/wohnungslosenhilfe/chancenhaus-hermes)

Housing-led programmes like the Opportunity House from the Austrian Red Cross, if complemented with support services, offer opportunities to people experiencing chronic homelessness to move into permanent housing and fully reintegrate into society. The Opportunity House provides services ranging from learning skills such as running a household, cooking meals and shopping; to managing monthly income, obtaining and renewing documents and receiving social support; to creating bonds with neighbours; to using health services (physical and mental health); to resolving legal issues or developing community activities and school projects, vocational training and jobs.

## 4.2. Adapting the Housing First approach for the Red Cross

Housing First is an innovative housing model designed to lift people out of poverty by offering sustainable and stable housing as a start goal rather than an end goal to exit homelessness.<sup>48</sup> Several National Red Cross Societies in the EU have adapted the Housing First approach to their local context. The Housing First project offered by the Portuguese Red Cross provides rapid access to people who have been living on the streets in the city of Braga for several years and who have not had successful experiences with existing available responses.

### In practice – Exiting homelessness

#### Addressing chronic homelessness through Housing First in Braga – Portugal

This project is part of the National Housing First network, which includes several municipalities and private entities, coordinated by the Association for the Study of Psychosocial Development.

#### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

In 2013 the Portuguese Red Cross branch of Braga started its pilot project for Housing First.<sup>49</sup> The programme offers long-term housing solutions to people experiencing homelessness in Braga.

#### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

The support services are flexible, individualised and oriented to the needs and objectives of the participants, in areas such as: managing and maintaining the home (running a household, cooking meals, shopping), managing monthly income, relationships within the neighbourhood, obtaining and renewing documents, using health services (physical and mental health), obtaining social support, resolving legal issues or developing community activities and school projects, vocational training or jobs.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

This project is part of the National Housing First network, which includes several municipalities and private entities, coordinated by the Association for the Study of Psychosocial Development. In Braga at present, it has three houses in which five people are housed (including two couples). Participants were in a situation of long-term homelessness and did not adapt to traditional accommodation responses (accommodation centres), hence maintaining their homelessness.

#### OUTCOMES

The results since the implementation of Housing First in the local branch of Braga have been very positive, with people maintaining housing and a significant improvement in all social inclusion indicators, including health.

48 Housing First Europe (2021) Introducing Housing First, Online, <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/what-is-housing-first/introducing-housing-first>

49 Portuguese Red Cross (2013) Housing First pela erradicação da pobreza. Online, [15:11] Luis Vilacha Fernandez <https://www.cruzvermelha.pt/not%C3%ADcias/item/4628-housing-first-pela-erradica%C3%A7%C3%A3o-da-pobreza.html>

In Braga, the Housing First project finances the renting of the accommodation, furniture and basic equipment, as well as water, electricity and gas consumption. Participants contribute 30 per cent of their monthly income to paying the rent and household

bills. Lastly, the Italian Red Cross local branch of Benevento provides a very good example of a public-private partnership in collaboration with the municipality and use of EU funding for both short- and long-term interventions to combat homelessness.

## In practice – Exiting homelessness

### Implementing Housing First using the European Social Fund – Italy

The Italian Red Cross branch of Benevento, in collaboration with the municipality, has recently inaugurated three apartments where people who are homeless are temporarily accommodated and supported in paths towards housing autonomy and job placement, according to the Housing First model.<sup>50</sup>

#### ISSUE/CHALLENGE

The project, funded by the National Operational Programme Inclusion (ESF 2014-2020) of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, is based on two fundamental principles: 1) rapid re-housing – housing as a basic human right, and 2) case management – taking charge of and accompanying the person towards accessing social and health services.

#### OBJECTIVE OF THE PRACTICE

The project aims to provide housing as the first step – the primary intervention for people experiencing homelessness to start on paths of social integration. As shown by studies, the well-being brought about by improving health and giving psychological support can foster greater housing stability.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Professionals with social, legal, health, psychological, transcultural and organisational skills assist people who are homeless to get a job, write a CV, or practise how to highlight their skills and abilities in an interview. They are also assisted in getting identity papers and residence permits, and in leading a healthy lifestyle – from personal hygiene to proper nutrition up to the management of small health problems that may arise during daily life.

#### OUTCOMES

The people supported are therefore accompanied in a path of assistance that brings them back to a healthy and safe condition, allowing them to re-appropriate their own lives and their 'self', regaining confidence in their abilities to embark on a path towards personal autonomy and independence.

<sup>50</sup> Italian Red Cross (2021) Area Supporto e Inclusione Sociale. Comitato di Benevento. Online, [www.cribenevento.it/portfolio-item/area-supporto-e-inclusione-sociale](http://www.cribenevento.it/portfolio-item/area-supporto-e-inclusione-sociale)

# Conclusions

“  
***National Red Cross Societies across Europe are committed to combatting homelessness in all its forms, and to support, provide care and bring dignity whenever is needed.***”

Homelessness continues to be a growing social crisis across the EU, an issue which has only been further worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU has recognised this and has sought to address the issue through the EPSR and its Action Plan, and importantly through the Lisbon declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness. This latest action has been signed by national ministers, representatives of EU Institutions and civil society organisations. The challenge now is to implement these commitments into tangible actions at the national, regional, and local levels.

This publication showcases examples from National Red Cross Societies' integrated services supporting people who find themselves homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The work of National Red Cross Societies is anchored in the belief that meeting the needs of vulnerable people is a fundamental step in the process of providing dignity to people in need, and to offering sustainable solutions to people experiencing homelessness. From stable partnerships to sustainable and durable solutions, this publication has exhibited successful examples of Red Cross teams meeting the immediate and long-term needs of people experiencing homelessness.

**Red Cross Approach - Combatting Homelessness in Europe** represents the first publication on homelessness from the Red Cross EU Office at the EU level. Above all, it presents a commitment from all National Red Cross Societies across Europe to combatting homelessness in all its forms, and to support, provide care and bring dignity whenever is needed. National Red Cross Societies across the EU play a key role in combatting homelessness. They have been a consistent presence at the frontline of service provision and a vital support for people in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. National Red Cross Societies bring with them a wealth of experience in combatting homelessness through their services but also through mobilising their large volunteer network to reach out to people in need. The Red Cross stands ready and committed to play its role, together with others, at the European, national and local levels to end homelessness by 2030.

# Annex: An action pillar of social rights to address homelessness

The architecture behind the 20 principles of the EPSR<sup>31</sup> offers multiple possibilities to address homelessness. As presented in this publication, the Red Cross approach on homelessness provides specific examples of how National Red Cross Societies implement daily the EPSR by using the three Red Cross pillars on homelessness presented in this publication.

Chapter I: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market		
1. Education, training and life-long learning	Related Commission action: European Skills Agenda	<p><b>Red Cross pillars 1 and 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Preventing homelessness and providing support to those at risk</li> <li>» Housing solutions to exit homelessness</li> </ul> <p>AT, BE, CZ, DE, DK, FR, EL, HU, IT, LV, LU, PT, ES, SE</p>
2. Gender equality	Related Commission action: Gender equality strategy, Pay transparency proposal	<p><b>Red Cross pillars 1, 2 and 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Preventing homelessness and providing support to those at risk</li> <li>» Providing immediate assistance to those who find themselves homeless</li> <li>» Housing solutions to exit homelessness</li> </ul> <p>AT, BE, CZ, DK, FR, HU, IT, LV, LU</p>
3. Equal opportunities	Related Commission action: EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025	<p><b>Red Cross pillars 1, 2 and 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Preventing homelessness and providing support to those at risk</li> <li>» Providing immediate assistance to those who find themselves homeless</li> <li>» Housing solutions to exit homelessness</li> </ul> <p>AT, BE, CZ, DE, DK, EL, FR, HU, IT, LV, LU, PT, ES, SE, NO</p>
4. Active support to employment	<p>Related Commission action: Youth Employment Support package</p> <p>Upcoming Commission action: Action Plan for the Social Economy</p>	<p><b>Red Cross pillars 1, 2 and 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Preventing homelessness and providing support to those at risk</li> <li>» Providing immediate assistance to those who find themselves homeless</li> <li>» Housing solutions to exit homelessness</li> </ul> <p>AT, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, FR, HU, IT, LV, LU, PT, ES, SE, NO</p>

31 European Commission (2020) The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles. Online, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

## Chapter II: Fair working conditions

5. Secure and adaptable employment	Upcoming Commission action: Initiative to improve the working conditions in platform work	<b>Red Cross pillars 1 and 2:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Preventing homelessness and providing support to those at risk</li> <li>» Providing immediate assistance to those who find themselves homeless</li> </ul>
		CZ, DE, DK, EL, HU, IT, LV, LU, PT, RO, ES, SE
6. Wages	Related Commission action: Proposal for a Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages	-
7. Information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals	-	-
8. Social dialogue and involvement of workers	-	-
9. Work-life balance	-	-
10. Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection	Related Commission action: EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027  Upcoming Commission action: Initiative to improve the working conditions in platform work	-

### Chapter III: Social protection and inclusion

11. Childcare and support to children	-	<p><b>Red Cross pillars 1, 2 and 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Preventing homelessness and providing support to those at risk</li> <li>» Providing immediate assistance to those who find themselves homeless</li> <li>» Housing solutions to exit homelessness</li> </ul> <p>AT, BE, HR, CY, CZ, DE, DK, FR, EL, HU, IE, IT, LV, LU, PL. PT, RO, SI, ES</p>
12. Social protection	-	-
13. Unemployment benefits	-	-
14. Minimum income	-	-
15. Old age income and pensions	-	-
16. Healthcare	-	<p><b>Red Cross pillars 1, 2 and 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Preventing homelessness and providing support to those at risk</li> <li>» Providing immediate assistance to those who find themselves homeless</li> <li>» Housing solutions to exit homelessness</li> </ul> <p>AT, BE, CZ, DE, DK, FR, EL, HU, IT, LV, LU, PT, RO, ES, SE, NO</p>
17. Inclusion of people with disabilities	Related Commission action: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030	<p><b>Red Cross pillars 1, 2 and 3:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Preventing homelessness and providing support to those at risk</li> <li>» Providing immediate assistance to those who find themselves homeless</li> <li>» Housing solutions to exit homelessness</li> </ul> <p>BE, BG, HR, CY, CZ, EE, FR, DE, EL, HU, IE, NO, RO, SK, SI, ES</p>

18. Long-term care	-	-
19. Housing and assistance for homeless people	Related Commission action: European platform to combat homelessness	<b>Red Cross pillars 1, 2 and 3:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Preventing homelessness and providing support to those at risk</li> <li>» Providing immediate assistance to those who find themselves homeless</li> <li>» Housing solutions to exit homelessness</li> </ul>
		AT, BE, CZ, DE, DK, FR, EL, HU, IT, LV, LU, PT, RO, ES, SE, NO
20. Access to essential services	-	<b>Red Cross pillars 1, 2 and 3:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Preventing homelessness and providing support to those at risk</li> <li>» Providing immediate assistance to those who find themselves homeless</li> <li>» Housing solutions to exit homelessness</li> </ul>
		AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, DK, FI, FR, EE, EL, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, LU, PL, PT, RO, ES, SE, SI, SK, NO

Notes: AT: Austria, BE: Belgium, BG: Bulgaria, CZ: Czechia, DE: Germany, DK: Denmark, EE: Estonia, FI: Finland, FR: France, EL: Greece, HR: Croatia, CY: Cyprus, HU: Hungary, IE: Ireland, IT: Italy, LT: Latvia, LV: Lithuania, LU: Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, NO: Norway, PL: Poland, PT: Portugal, RO: Romania, SK: Slovakia, SI: Slovenia, ES: Spain and SE: Sweden.

# The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

## Humanity

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The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

## Impartiality

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It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

## Neutrality

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In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

## Independence

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The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

## Voluntary service

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It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

## Unity

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There can be only one Red Cross or one Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

## Universality

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The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.