OECD Toolkit to Combat Homelessness

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Foreword

Across the OECD, homelessness remains a persistent challenge, with more than 2 million people estimated to be experiencing homelessness in a given year. While the measurement of homelessness continues to improve, methodological challenges complicate data collection and cross-national comparison. Furthermore, while governments at different levels have put in place homelessness strategies and introduced preventive measures and targeted support to people experiencing homelessness, much remains to be done to design, implement, evaluate, and scale-up effective homelessness policies.

The *OECD Toolkit to Combat Homelessness* brings together the latest research and policy practice to guide policy makers in developing better policies to address homelessness. Organised around nine "building blocks," the Toolkit provides guidance in *policy design*, in how to engage stakeholders, strengthen the evidence base, and embed systematic monitoring and evaluation into policy making. It stresses the need to shift *policy focus* towards prevention, the provision of tailored, low-barrier services, and long-term housing solutions, rather than relying on short-term emergency responses. Finally, it addresses critical dimensions of *policy delivery*, including establishing more sustainable funding and financing streams, strengthening the capacity of local governments and front-line service providers, and building political support for policy reform. Drawing on a growing body of evidence, each building block proposes guidance and good practice examples to inspire policy makers and service providers to replicate what works.

The Toolkit is one of three core outputs – along with a set of *Country* Note*s on Homelessness Data* and a *Monitoring Framework: Homelessness Data and Measurement* – to help improve how governments measure and develop public policies to address homelessness. Developed with support from the European Commission, these outputs contribute to the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH), established in the Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness in 2021, which commits EU member states to work towards ending homelessness by 2030 through a person-centred, housing-led, and integrated approach.

Table of contents

FIGURES

TABLES

Executive summary

As of 2024, more than 2 million people in OECD and EU countries were experiencing homelessness each year. With the COVID-19 crisis renewing attention to the issue, there is growing momentum to improve how governments measure and respond to homelessness.

The *OECD Toolkit to Combat Homelessness* provides guidance for policy makers to prevent people from becoming homeless, support people who are experiencing homelessness, and provide sustainable pathways out of homelessness. It is organised around nine building blocks, which together support policy makers to design integrated, people-centred, housing-led strategies. Policy makers do not need to address all blocks at once. Depending on the country context, they can focus first on the most pressing priorities.

Block 1 – Strategies, stakeholders and inclusion. More than half of OECD and EU countries have national homelessness strategies in place. Effective strategies define and assess the scale and scope of homelessness; set measurable targets to reduce homelessness; co-ordinate initiatives across relevant policy domains (including housing, health, and social protection); and embed systematic monitoring and evaluation into the policy making process. In developing national strategies, policy makers should meaningfully engage diverse stakeholders, including people and institutions within and outside government and people with lived experience of homelessness. The Toolkit's nine building blocks provide a useful framework for strategy development, grounded in integrated, people-centred approaches that safeguard the rights of people experiencing homelessness.

Block 2 – Measurement: Definitions, data and drivers. Reliable homelessness data enable policy makers to monitor trends, allocate resources efficiently, and develop evidence-based policies. Yet methodological challenges stymie homelessness measurement and cross-country comparison. Data collection should be designed to meet a pre-defined policy purpose and follow a clear, consistent statistical definition, where feasible drawing on the ETHOS Light Typology (a widely used framework to assess and compare homelessness based on different living situations). Disaggregating data by relevant socio-demographic characteristics and assessing the structural, institutional and/or individual drivers of homelessness can bolster prevention measures and facilitate tailored policy supports. Governments should also establish a standardised, consistent data collection and monitoring system, which may draw on multiple approaches. More guidance to strengthen measurement, including a self-assessment tool, is in the *OECD Monitoring Framework: Measuring Homelessness in OECD and EU countries*.

Block 3 – Monitoring and Evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes strengthen governments' capacity to develop policies grounded in evidence of what works. Systematic M&E in the homelessness sector remains rare, representing a clear gap in understanding the most effective policies and programmes. Robust M&E frameworks should begin by identifying policy objectives, indicators, and the baseline context, with pre-determined timeframes to carry out evaluations. This includes setting aside dedicated resources to establish and sustain the process throughout the policy life cycle. Training and partnerships with academia and/or the private sector can improve in-house M&E skills. Results from M&E processes should be designed before policy interventions and incorporated in policy-making processes, including by adapting existing measures to improve policy impact.

Block 4 – Prioritising prevention. Prevention is one of the most effective tools to address homelessness, but is too often under-resourced and underutilised. Leveraging existing social policies and housing supports (including social protection schemes and affordable and social housing) and addressing imbalances between property owners and tenants in the private rental market can be first steps to strengthen prevention efforts. More needs to be done to generalise upstream prevention through targeted, timely support to high-risk groups, such as vulnerable youth and individuals leaving institutional settings. There is also scope to scale up efforts to support people in crisis, including through eviction prevention measures. To prevent rough sleeping, emergency accommodation options should be accessible and safe for people of all backgrounds. The potential for novel approaches to prevention, such as those relying on artificial intelligence (including machine learning) and big data sources, should be further explored.

Block 5 – Long-term housing solutions: Housing-led and Housing First. Housing-led and Housing First approaches – which provide unconditional, long-term housing for people experiencing homelessness, and (in the case of Housing First) relevant wraparound services – are central to the paradigm shift away from emergency accommodation. There is broad consensus and strong evidence that such solutions are an effective, resource-efficient pathway to housing stability in a broad variety of contexts, even if there are short-term costs to securing long-term housing. While housing-led approaches are gaining ground and, in some countries, form the backbone of government policy, there is scope to scale up implementation. Governments can set regional targets, make better use of the existing housing supply, and monitor outcomes and cost savings. Housing-led schemes should be tailored to consider the needs of specific groups (e.g. women, youth, people who identify as LGBTI).

Block 6 – Low barrier, tailored services. Governments should do more to help people experiencing homelessness access the social and health services they need. In light of the vast differences in the type and intensity of service needs of people experiencing homelessness, a timely needs-assessment can identify relevant supports at an individual level. Eliminating administrative, logistical, and social barriers to mainstream health and social services should be prioritised, including by training service providers and co-ordinating and/or co-locating health and social services. Facilitating access to low-barrier medical services (such as Overdose Prevention Centres and street medicine) has also proven effective. Job training and sustained employment support may help expand job opportunities for people who are able to work.

Block 7 – Funding and financing. Homelessness entails high human and financial costs. Governments may fund homelessness interventions by other actors (e.g. lower levels of government, NGOs), and/or may seek funding (e.g. from supra-national, philanthropic or private entities) for housing and homelessness programmes. As funders, governments should align funding and incentive structures with clear policy objectives; remove bottlenecks to long-term, integrated projects that combine housing and service elements; and mandate M&E as part of funding obligations. As fundraisers, governments at all levels should map potential funding sources and technical assistance needs; develop a pipeline of projects; and address technical assistance gaps within local governments and homelessness services.

Block 8 – Leadership, co-ordination, and capacity. Homelessness policies span diverse policy areas and engage many actors within and outside government. Nevertheless, services tend to be fragmented and under-resourced. Governments should establish a clear policy lead on homelessness, with the necessary mandate, capacity, and resources, and clarify roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders. Better service co-ordination, both horizontally (across policy areas) and vertically (across levels of government), can be encouraged through case managers, single entry points, and information sharing systems. Improving working conditions, training, and other support to local governments and frontline staff should also be prioritised, given their vital role in homelessness service delivery.

Block 9 – The political economy of reform. Homelessness is a policy area that is ripe for reform. Governments can elevate the issue on the political agenda by strengthening the evidence base, assessing the scale and scope of the challenge, and monitoring public interventions to identify "what works". Strategic,

evidence-based communication can engage, inform, and mobilise the public, while facilitating further research and policy development. Individuals and civil society organisations have a role to play by raising the profile of homelessness support policies, encouraging the expansion of social and affordable housing, and holding government accountable. Broad-based coalitions, along with homelessness "champions", can help depoliticise the issue and reinforce policy continuity beyond electoral cycles.

While the Toolkit presents the latest available homelessness research to provide a strong foundation for evidence-based policy making, important evidence gaps in the homelessness sector nonetheless remain. This is notably the case in terms of data collection, M&E, and cost-effectiveness research. Addressing these gaps will go a long way to support efforts to end homelessness in OECD and EU countries.

How to use this Toolkit

Homelessness remains a pressing challenge in OECD and EU countries, with over 2.2 million people considered experiencing homelessness in official government statistics at last count (OECD, 2024[1]). The COVID-19 crisis shed renewed urgency on the issue, as governments rapidly introduced emergency support and temporary regulatory changes (such as cash transfers, eviction moratoria and mortgage forbearance schemes) to address the heightened economic and health risks associated with the pandemic (OECD, 2021[2]). Since the pandemic, most temporary pandemic-related housing support measures have been phased out. Meanwhile, household budgets have been further strained by a cost-of-living crisis and increasing housing costs, which rose in all but three OECD countries: Colombia, Finland and Italy (OECD, 2024[1]). Access to social and affordable housing remains a challenge for many households, particularly low-income and vulnerable households.

There is renewed momentum to improve the measurement of homelessness and housing exclusion, and to design and implement public policies to end homelessness. In 2023, the UN Secretary-General presented its first global homelessness report, *Inclusive Policies and Programmes to Address Homelessness,* emphasising the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the specific challenges faced by disadvantaged groups, while underscoring the need for continued efforts to improve knowledge and policy in this area (United Nations, 2023[3]). Across OECD and EU countries, national and subnational authorities are strengthening measurement and assessment tools and introducing dedicated national homelessness strategies that tend to emphasise homelessness prevention and Housing First approaches, which provide immediate, long-term housing to individuals with high and complex service needs and enable them to exercise control over their support services (discussed further in Block 5 of this Toolkit). Indeed, as of 2023, two-thirds of OECD and EU countries reported having a national homelessness strategy, action plan or agreement in place (OECD, 2024[1]). Housing issues broadly, and homelessness specifically, increasingly rank among the top policy concerns of the general population. According to the 2022 OECD *Risks that Matter* survey, half of respondents are worried about not being able to access affordable, adequate housing in the next year or two, with young people aged 18-29 being most concerned (OECD, 2023[4]). In June 2021, all member states from the European Union signed the Lisbon Declaration to launch the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH), thereby committing to work towards ending homelessness by 2030, and notably to end rough sleeping (Box 1) (European Commission, 2021[5]).

The *OECD Toolkit to Combat Homelessness* provides guidance to policy makers to prevent people from becoming homeless, support people who are experiencing homelessness, and provide sustainable pathways out of homelessness. It represents a key contribution to EPOCH over the course of 2023-25. Moreover, it aligns with the various treaties and resolutions enforced by the United Nations (UN) on homelessness prevention and the right to adequate housing (Box 2). Such treaties and resolutions are binding for UN members, which include all OECD countries.

Box 1. The Lisbon Declaration: A commitment by EU countries to work towards ending homelessness by 2030

The *Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness*, signed by representatives from EU countries in June 2021, aims to work towards ending homelessness by 2030 so that:

- No one sleeps rough for lack of accessible, safe and appropriate emergency accommodation.
- No one lives in emergency or transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on to a permanent housing solution.
- No one is discharged from any institution (e.g. prison, hospital, care facility) without an offer of appropriate housing.
- Evictions should be prevented whenever possible and no one is evicted without assistance for an appropriate housing solution, when needed.
- No one is discriminated against due to their homelessness.

To work towards this objective, national, regional and local authorities commit to:

- Promote the prevention of homelessness, access to permanent housing and the provision of enabling support services to the homeless.
- Welcome the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of these policy measures.
- Support our policy measures with adequate funding and, when appropriate, make use of EU funding as a lever to improve the way we address homelessness.
- Share good practices in combatting homelessness.

Source: European Commission (2021), Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness.

Box 2. Homelessness and adequate housing in international human rights law

A number of binding international treaties and resolutions enforced by the United Nations require states to prevent homelessness and to secure the right to adequate housing. These include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and resolution 2020/7 of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Article 11 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognises:

- The right of everyone to an adequate standard of living (…), including adequate food, clothing and housing and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

Resolution 2020/7 of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations on affordable housing and social protection systems for all to address homelessness:

- Calls upon Member States to collect disaggregated data on demographics, such as by age, sex and disability, related to homelessness and establish categories of homelessness, accompanying the existing measurement tools, and encourages Member States to harmonise

the measurement and collection of data on homelessness to enable national and global policy making (para. 12).

- (…) Encourages all actors to build a broad-based partnership at all levels to prevent people from falling into homelessness, support those experiencing homelessness and develop long-term sustainable solutions to end homelessness (para. 35).

Similarly, resolution 76/133 of the General Assembly of the United Nations:

- Urges Member States to consider people experiencing homelessness in designing, implementing, creating and evaluating policies, programmes and strategies for full, equal, meaningful, effective, constructive and sustainable participation in society and access to affordable, stable, safe and adequate housing, as part of the human right to an adequate standard of living (…) (para 4.)

Additionally, target 11.1 under the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda seeks to:

- Ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.

Source: United Nations (1967), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (2020), Resolution 2020/7; United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 76/133; United Nations (2023), Sustainable Development Goals.

What is the purpose of the toolkit?

This Toolkit:

- **Provides evidence-based guidance** to policy makers, practitioners and service providers to improve both the measurement of homelessness and the public policies to address homelessness;

- **Proposes a set of building blocks** to guide policy makers and practitioners throughout the policy-making process, while recognising the cross-cutting nature of the challenge and the range of types and intensity of support needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness;

- **Presents a range of good international practices** that illustrate how the proposed recommendations can be implemented in OECD and EU countries, while accounting for distinct country contexts;

- **Complements the OECD Monitoring Framework: Measuring homelessness in OECD and EU countries** (OECD, Forthcoming[6]), which supports governments to improve the measurement and monitoring of homelessness, and the series of **Country Notes on Homelessness Data** (OECD, 2024[7]) that present the latest data, statistical definitions, and data collection approaches in OECD and EU countries.

How is the Toolkit structured?

Overarching structure: Nine building blocks of good policy practice to combat homelessness

The Toolkit features nine building blocks (Figure 1), each of which represents a key dimension of good policy practice to combat homelessness. Together, the building blocks aim to support policy makers through different phases of the policy-making process, organised along three main themes:

- **Policy design**: Address critical points of the policy making process, from setting strategic guidance, engaging stakeholders and developing policy (Block 1), strengthening measurement and assessment of homelessness (Block 2), and embedding systematic monitoring and evaluation into policy making (Block 3).

- **Policy emphasis**: Focus on core policy priorities that shift from a reliance on emergency and crisis responses to prioritise prevention (Block 4), secure long-term housing solutions and generalise housing-led and Housing First approaches (Block 5), and provide low-barrier, tailored support and wraparound services (Block 6).

- **Policy delivery**: Recognise the importance of effective structures, systems and communication to deliver public policies, including how to mobilise funding and financing and align incentive structures (Block 7), strengthen leadership, co-ordination and capacity (Block 8), and manage the political economy of reform to functionally end homelessness (Block 9).

Figure 1. Building blocks of the OECD Toolkit to Combat Homelessness

POLICY DESIGN	**1** Strategies, stakeholders and inclusion	**2** Measurement: Definitions, data, drivers	**3** Monitoring and evaluation
POLICY EMPHASIS	**4** Prioritising prevention	**5** Long-term housing solutions: Housing-led and Housing First	**6** Low-barrier, tailored services
POLICY DELIVERY	**7** Funding and financing	**8** Leadership, co-ordination and capacity	**9** The political economy of reform

Underlying each building block: Relevance, operational issues, good practices and guidance

Each building block includes the following:

- An introduction that outlines the **relevance** of the building block, highlights key data and reviews the latest evidence and remaining gaps in research. It draws on country responses to the 2023 OECD QuASH, other OECD databases, as well as research and policy practice.

- A set of common **operational issues** facing policy makers and practitioners, accompanied by **good practices** in OECD and EU countries. The operational issues build on the discussion of the evidence base in the relevance section. They are framed as key questions by policy makers and practitioners, and aim to identify key components and/areas to improve with respect to the building block. The relative importance of each component will vary, depending on the starting point of each country, city or community. Meanwhile, the good practice examples are intended to provide concrete implementation guidance on specific aspects of each operational issue in different country contexts.

- A series of **proposed recommendations** that constitute the fundamentals for success. The recommendations distil the main lessons from the building block and identify concrete areas of action for policy makers and practitioners.

Selection criteria for the good practices presented in this Toolkit.

The good practice examples featured in this Toolkit are selected based on a set of criteria that draws on existing OECD work – including the Network on Development Evaluation (EvalNet) of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and, more broadly, the preparatory work of the *OECD Youth Policy Toolkit* (OECD, 2024[8]) – and adapted to the context of homelessness. Consistent with other frameworks, a good practice example does not need to meet all of the proposed criteria to be included in the Toolkit. Further, the relevance of the different criteria may be different across interventions. The proposed selection criteria outlined below are intended to guide the process of selecting a good practice from a pool of potential country examples:

- **Effectiveness**: The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results. Where possible, interventions that have been rigorously evaluated will be prioritised in the selection of examples to be featured in the Toolkit. Where rigorous evaluations have not been conducted, the Toolkit will feature interventions that have demonstrated measurable impacts, or for which there have been positive expert appraisals.
- **Coherence**: The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector, or institution. The determination of good country practices will also prioritise interventions that are consistent with the guidance of more than one building block proposed in this Toolkit: for instance, a national homelessness strategy (Block 1) that aligns with the country's statistical definition and data on homelessness (Block 2) and includes a core policy focus on prevention (Block 4) and Housing First (Block 5). In some cases, an intervention is featured in more than one Building Block, if it illustrates multiple recommendations in the Toolkit.
- **Replicability**: The extent to which the intervention could potentially be scaled up within a given country, and/or replicated in a different country context.
- **Geographic diversity**: The extent to which the intervention reflects an under-represented geographic area relative to the overall selection of good practice examples.
- **Innovation**: This criterion will be considered in the case of a potentially innovative, cutting-edge or promising intervention, for which measurable results are not yet available. In these cases, the Toolkit will indicate when an intervention shows promise, but lacks the evidence to confirm its effectiveness.

Who is the Toolkit for?

This Toolkit is designed primarily for national, regional, and local policy makers and practitioners working on homelessness, social policies, housing, and related issues.

Nevertheless, because effective homelessness policies cut across multiple policy domains and engage people and institutions working across levels of government and outside the public sector, the Toolkit aims to also address other stakeholders. This may include, for instance, statistical agencies; representatives from non-government organisations, non- and low-profit organisations and service providers; housing developers and providers; foundations, charities and faith-based organisations; and the commercial sector.

How to use the Toolkit?

Together, the building blocks represent a cross-cutting, whole-of-government approach to improving the measurement of homelessness and the design and implementation of public policies to address homelessness.

Each block is an important part of an integrated policy approach and interrelates with other blocks. The blocks do not need be addressed all at once and rather sequenced. In a first phase, policy and decision makers may wish to focus on two or three blocks, which represent the most pressing policy priorities when designing, prioritising, and delivering homelessness policies. Subsequent phases could concentrate on additional blocks.

What are the key recommendations in this Toolkit?

Building on the evidence and international experience, Table 1 summarises the main recommendations to combat homelessness, which are organised around the nine building blocks of this Toolkit. Further rationale is presented in each block.

Table 1. Summary of main recommendations to combat homelessness.

Building block	Fundamentals for success
Policy design	
1. Strategies, stakeholders and inclusion	• Develop a strategy to end homelessness, which defines and assesses the scale and scope of homelessness; sets out core priorities and measurable targets; identifies proposed actions, involves responsible actors from the beginning, and links to other relevant policies (such as housing and social protection); and embeds systematic monitoring and evaluation. • Identify and engage diverse stakeholders in solving homelessness, including people and institutions within and outside government with a range of policy expertise, practical experiences and perspectives. • Engage people with lived experience of homelessness meaningfully and systematically in all stages (strategy, programme design, and operation) of the policy cycle, including through creating appropriate incentive structures. • Develop strategies and public policies that promote inclusion and safeguard the rights of people experiencing homelessness.
2. Measurement: Definitions, data, drivers	• Ensure that homelessness data collection is policy-relevant – that is, that data collection is designed and implemented to meet a clear policy purpose. In particular, aligning data collection efforts with a clear, measurable policy commitment to end homelessness (or specific types of homelessness) can be helpful. • Develop a clear, consistent statistical definition of homelessness, upon which data collection efforts are based, drawing on the ETHOS Light Typology where feasible. • Collect disaggregated data by different types of homelessness (e.g. ETHOS typology) and key demographic characteristics of relevance in a given country context to facilitate in-depth assessments and to tailor interventions accordingly. • Undertake efforts (including through partnerships with competent research entities and NGOs) to assess the structural, systemic, institutional and/or individual drivers of homelessness in your country, city or community context, to improve the capacity to prevent homelessness and help people exit homelessness. • Establish a standardised, consistent data collection and monitoring system, which may draw on multiple data collection approaches, and improve data coverage of hard-to-reach groups (including by collecting data from a broad range of service providers, e.g. beyond emergency shelters and temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness). *[cf. OECD Monitoring Framework (OECD, Forthcoming[6]) for additional recommendations to strengthen data collection, reporting, and monitoring]*
3. Monitoring and evaluation	• Monitor and rigorously evaluate programmes by identifying policy objectives, indicators, and baseline context at the beginning of the policy design stage and carry out evaluations with stakeholders at pre-determined stages of the policy process. This can be supported by putting in place at the outset a results framework and establishing an M&E group for effective oversight.

- Identify from the start the data and evidence to be collected *ex ante* and *ex post* and the resources needed to collect and analyse the data.
- Build in-house monitoring and evaluation skills, including the ability collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data, create/manage budgets and evaluate outcomes, by conducting regular training and collaborating with academia and the private sector.
- Create incentives for policy evaluation and allocate dedicated resources to set up and sustain robust monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes throughout the policy life cycle and determine whether the evaluation should be internal, external, or hybrid.
- Incorporate evaluation results in policy-making processes and adapt measures with this evidence where needed to improve the impact of interventions.

Policy emphasis

4. Prioritising prevention	- Leverage existing social policies and housing supports to reduce the risk of homelessness, including social protection schemes and access to affordable and social housing. - Ensure balanced rights and protections of property owners and tenants in tenancy agreements and related legislation. - Provide targeted, timely support to people due to be discharged from any institution (e.g. prison, hospital, care system or facility) to secure appropriate housing and providing, where needed, tailored wraparound services to address their specific needs and facilitate social integration (cf. Block 6). - Provide targeted assistance to people facing imminent housing loss (e.g. people at risk of eviction, victims/survivors of intimate partner violence) to help them find an appropriate housing solution. - Ensure access to safe, quality emergency accommodation with low barriers of entry to prevent individuals from sleeping rough and guaranteeing that facilities are welcoming and safe for all individuals. - Assess *ex ante* the specific needs and resources required to connect people experiencing homelessness to housing solutions in the aftermath of large-scale climate events or natural disasters. - Explore novel approaches to prevention, including early warning systems, using big data technologies. To facilitate this, governments could consider how to standardise data collection across systems as much as possible.
5. Long-term housing solutions: Housing-led and Housing First	- Pursue housing-led and Housing First as core policies to provide housing solutions alongside comprehensive wraparound services, tailored to an individual's support needs. - Facilitate rapid transitions into appropriate long-term housing, using a detailed needs assessment and a housing-led approach for individuals with low to moderate support needs. - Leverage the existing housing supply and social protection system to facilitate long-term housing solutions, including through social rental schemes, co-operation agreements with social housing providers, and other opportunities to mobilise housing in the private stock. - Tailor housing-led and Housing First programmes to the needs of specific socio-demographic groups, such as youth, LGBTI, women, older people, Indigenous groups, and migrants, ensuring inclusivity, appropriate housing solutions, and targeted support. - Track the progress and effectiveness of housing-led and Housing First programmes through systematic monitoring and evaluation and rigorous research. - Scale up housing-led and Housing First programmes to end homelessness, including by leveraging mainstream social services to support housing retention, setting regional targets, using research and evaluation to track outcomes and cost savings, and advocating for a system-wide shift in homelessness policy.
6. Low-barrier, tailored services	- Carry out a timely needs assessment to identify individual needs and circumstances of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness (including people leaving institutional care) and ensure that individuals with high-service needs receive the support they need. - Eliminate administrative, logistical, and social hurdles to accessing services, including through training to mainstream service providers. - Co-ordinate and, where possible, co-locate, health and social services to facilitate targeted, treatment and care to meet individuals' needs that extend beyond housing. - Facilitate access to low-barrier medical services, including Overdose Prevention Centres, street medicine, and mental health support. - Strengthen access to employment opportunities for people who are able to work through training and sustained support.

Policy delivery

7. Funding and financing	For funders: - Identify and communicate policy objectives to be achieved and align funding and incentive structures accordingly. - Remove bottlenecks to funding integrated, long-term projects that combine both housing and service elements. - Mandate quality monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks as part of funding obligations.

	• Ensure transparency in funding decisions and budget allocations related to homelessness. • Lay the foundation for long-term funding and financing for affordable and social housing, including through (revolving) fund systems, as well as systemic solutions to scale up Housing-led and Housing First solutions. For fundraisers: • Map potential (supra-national, national, sub-national and non-public) funding sources, along with technical assistance needs. • Develop a pipeline of projects that are ready to finance, including scalable projects. • Address technical assistance needs in the homelessness services sector to develop skills to attract and manage funding. More generally: • Adapt lessons from climate and energy funding and financing schemes to the homelessness and social policy sector. • Effectively communicate the rationale, the importance, and the social and economic benefits of funding Housing First programmes to the broader population.
8. Leadership, co-ordination and capacity	• Establish a clear policy lead on homelessness and clarify the roles and responsibilities of different actors (provider, financier, regulator), ensuring that the agency has the necessary mandate, capacity and resources. • Strengthen horizontal and vertical co-ordination – and, where possible, encourage integration – of critical homelessness services. • Encourage information sharing and mutual learning across different levels of government and relevant authorities, NGOs, and the private sector, including through national networks such as Housing First hubs. • Engage a range of relevant stakeholders in support service networks and co-create homelessness service delivery with impacted individuals. • Improve conditions and develop capacity and training for local governments and frontline staff in the homelessness sector.
9. The political economy of reform	• Elevate the issue of homelessness on the political agenda through an evidence-based, housing-led approach. • Build broad-based coalitions to depoliticise the issue of homelessness. • Engage, inform, and mobilise the public to support homelessness reform, including through strategic, evidence-based communication tools to increase public awareness of "what works", based on rigorously evaluated interventions. • Regularly report data on people experiencing homelessness and make key indicators publicly accessible to facilitate research and policy development and promote transparency and accountability. • Regularly review government's progress towards policy objectives, as well as the evidence base to inform policy decisions and make adjustments where needed. • Identify, engage and support potential policy entrepreneurs and "champions" on homelessness, including outside government, to leverage their expertise and reinforce policy continuity beyond electoral cycles.

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United Nations (2023), *Inclusive policies and programmes to address homelessness: Report of the Secretary-General (A/78/236)*, https://social.desa.un.org/publications/inclusive-policies-and-programmes-to-address-homelessness. [3]

1 Strategies, stakeholders and inclusion

Block 1 discusses the development of effective national homelessness strategies, which should identify clear priorities, set measurable targets, and engage a broad range of stakeholders. Drawing on OECD and EU country practices, it highlights key elements of effective strategies, such as setting priorities for prevention, shifting towards housing-led and Housing First approaches, and embedding monitoring and evaluation into policy making. This block explores how such strategies can promote inclusion, ensure co-ordination across policy areas, and meaningfully involve people with lived experience of homelessness throughout the policy-making processes.

Relevance and key data

Developing strategic guidance – which may take the form of a national homelessness strategy, a national policy framework or action plan – is often an important first step to help governments define priorities, determine clear and measurable goals and the corresponding actions and resources to achieve them, and convene relevant actors to define and pursue a common objective. Such strategic planning processes have been adopted in the public sector to set the policy agenda, and as a means to "reinvent" government operations to better meet high service demands and fiscal constraints" (Berry, 1994[1]). This makes strategic planning tools especially relevant in the field of homelessness, given its cross-sectoral complexity and the (often) limited availability of public resources to effectively address the challenge.

In recent years, many OECD and EU countries have introduced, or renewed, homelessness strategies. According to the 2023 OECD Questionnaire on Affordable and Social Housing (QuASH), 26 of 43 respondent countries (60%) report having a national homelessness strategy, action plan or agreement in place (Box 1.1). Seventeen countries (40%) report that they do not have a current national strategy. However, a number of these countries report the existence of recent or current strategic tools for policy making, including homelessness strategies at regional or local level (**Austria** and **Iceland**). **Australia** and **Slovenia** are currently developing a national homelessness strategy. In other countries, homelessness is addressed in other strategic plans relating to housing, national development, social inclusion, or social welfare. Table 1.1 presents the strategy, action plan or agreement in place at national level to combat homelessness in OECD and EU countries (OECD, 2024[2]).

> ### Box 1.1. The OECD Questionnaire on Affordable and Social Housing (QuASH): A valuable tool for cross-national comparison of housing and homelessness
>
> The **OECD Questionnaire on Affordable and Social Housing (QuASH)** is a dedicated online survey to governments that collects data and information on housing supply and demand, as well as information on specific housing policy measures in over 40 countries. The QuASH is circulated to governments every two to three years, with rounds in 2016, 2019, 2021, and 2023. Country responses support updates to the OECD Affordable Housing Database (OECD, 2024[2]) and ongoing OECD work on affordable and social housing and homelessness.
>
> The QuASH is organised into thematic sections that cover a core set of housing-related topics. This includes key housing data (relating to, among other things, housing construction, social housing, housing vacancies, evictions); housing governance arrangements; and public policies for affordable housing (including demand-side measures to support homeowners and tenants, including cash benefits and first-time homeowner programmes, as well as supply-side support to affordable and social housing developers).
>
> Nevertheless, each round of the QuASH is tailored to some extent to reflect the OECD's work programme and thematic priorities: some topics are added or expanded, while others are dropped or streamlined. The 2023 QuASH included an extended focus on homelessness to gather evidence on data, statistical definitions, data collection approaches, and policies and prevention measures. Country responses to this section have served as a rich and heretofore unmatched source of cross-national information on homelessness, and a basis for the *Country Notes on Homelessness Data* (OECD, 2024[3]), *OECD Monitoring Framework* (OECD, Forthcoming[4]), and this *Toolkit*.

Nevertheless, fewer than half of countries with a national strategy report that the strategy includes an explicit commitment to end homelessness, though all European Union member states have pledged to work towards ending homelessness in the Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (European Commission, 2021[5]). In several countries, national strategies commit to

reducing homelessness (for instance, to reduce homelessness by 25% by 2025 in the **United States**), or to end specific types of homelessness, such as street homelessness (**Spain**).

Table 1.1. Many countries have a national strategy, action plan or agreement to combat homelessness in place

Countries with a dedicated national strategy, or a broader strategy addressing homelessness.

Country	National strategy or action plan	Name of dedicated strategy, action plan or agreement for homelessness	Other strategy or guidance in place that addresses homelessness
Australia	(Under development)	*National Housing and Homelessness Plan*	Under the National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness, the federal government will provide financial support to states and territories to support people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness and ensure the effectiveness of Australia's social housing and homelessness services. Funding will amount to AUD 1.8 billion [USD 1.17 billion] per year (including a homelessness funding component of AUD 400 million [USD 260 million]). Plus, states and territories are required to match their proportion of homelessness funding.
Austria	No		Integrated strategies at regional/provincial, and local level
Belgium	Yes	*Inter-federal Co-operation Agreement,* involving all the federated and federal entities	*Integrated Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Homelessness* (2020-24) (Flanders)
Bulgaria	No		Addressed in the *National Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion Strategy 2030*
Canada	Yes	Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy	Strategies at the province, territory, and municipality level
Chile	Yes	Barrios Calle Cero policy	
Colombia	Yes	Public Social Policy for Street Dwellers	The *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2022-26* (*National Development Plan 2022-26*) includes an objective of promoting the social integration of people experiencing homelessness through access to services (including housing).
Costa Rica	Yes	National Policy for the Comprehensive Care of People in Situation of Abandonment and Street Situation (2016-2026)	
Croatia	No		Addressed *National Development Strategy* (2030)
Czechia	Yes	Included in Social Inclusion Strategy (2021-2030)	
Denmark	Yes	The Foundation for Mixed Cities. - more affordable housing and a way out of homelessness	
Estonia	No		The *Social Welfare Act (2016)* addresses the provision of housing for those without shelter
Finland	Yes	Programme to end long-term homelessness by 2027	
France	Yes	*Second Housing First Plan* (Deuxième plan quinquennal pour le Logement d'abord (2023-2027)	Regional governments have developed homelessness strategies
Germany	Yes	National Action Plan Against Homelessness ("Together for a Home")	Regional governments have developed homelessness strategies
Greece	Yes	National Action Plan to Combat Homelessness	
Hungary	No		*National Nursing and Care Strategy,* which covers homelessness.

Country	National strategy or action plan	Name of dedicated strategy, action plan or agreement for homelessness	Other strategy or guidance in place that addresses homelessness
Iceland	No		Regional governments have developed homelessness strategies
Ireland	Yes	Housing for All - a New Housing Plan and Youth Homelessness Strategy	
Israel	No		
Italy	Yes	National Plan of Social Interventions and Services (2021-2023)	
Japan	Yes	Law on Special Measure for Self-Sufficiency Support for the Homeless. Basic Policy for Self-Sufficiency Support for the Homeless	Regional governments have developed homelessness strategies
Korea	Yes	The 2nd Comprehensive Plan for Welfare and Self-Reliance Support of the Homeless (2021-2025)	Regional governments have developed homelessness strategies
Latvia	No		*Social Services and Social Assistance Law* provides homelessness services
Lithuania	No		
Luxembourg	No		
Mexico	No		
Netherlands	Yes	Dutch National Action Plan on Homelessness: Housing First	Regional / municipal governments have developed homelessness strategies in line with national strategy Programma Een thuis voor iedereen | Home | Volkshuisvesting Nederland *(A Home for All – Housing for Vulnerable Groups)*
New Zealand	Yes	*Te Tauākī Kaupapa Here a te Kāwanatanga mō te Whakawhanake Whare, Tāone anō hoki* (Government Policy Statement on Housing and Urban Development)	*MAIHI Ka Ora* (*The National Māori Housing Strategy*) *Fale mo Aiga* (*Pacific Housing Strategy and Action Plan 2030*) *Better Later Life – He Oranga Kaumātua 2019 to 2034 Strategy*
Norway	Yes	National Strategy for Social Housing Policies (2021-24), We All Need a Safe Place to Call Home	
Poland	Yes		Strategy of Development of Social Services, Public Policy until 2030 (with a Perspective until 2035)
Portugal	Yes	The National Strategy for the Inclusion of People Experiencing Homelessness 2025-2030	Municipal governments, regional governments and NGOs are present in the *Planning and Intervention for Homeless People Centres (NPISA)*
Romania	Yes	National Strategy regarding the Social Inclusion of Homeless People for 2022 -2027	*National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction 2022-27 National Housing Strategy 2022-50 Housing Law no.114/1996 Law 292/2011 on Social Assistance and Law 196/2016 regarding the Minimum Inclusion Income* also provide specific measures for homeless people and social housing
Slovak Republic	Yes	National Concept for the Prevention and Ending of Homelessness	Regional governments have developed homelessness strategies
Slovenia	(Under development)		*Resolution on the national social assistance programme* (2022-30)
Spain	Yes	National Strategy for Combatting Homelessness in Spain 2023-2030	Regional and local governments have developed homelessness strategies
Sweden	Yes	The Government's Strategy to Combat Homelessness 2022-2026	
Switzerland	No		Regional and local governments have

Country	National strategy or action plan	Name of dedicated strategy, action plan or agreement for homelessness	Other strategy or guidance in place that addresses homelessness
			developed homelessness strategies
Türkiye	No		
United Kingdom	Yes	Ending Rough Sleeping Strategy for Good (England) Ending Homelessness Together Homelessness Strategy 2022-2027 (Northern Ireland) Ending Homelessness Together: Updated Action Plan 2020 (Scotland) Ending Homelessness Together Monitor: Strategic Outcomes & Indicators 2024 (Scotland) Strategy for Preventing and Ending Homelessness 2019 (Wales)	The *Homelessness Act 2002* requires each local authority to review homelessness in its area and to develop a new homelessness strategy every five years (England) Scotland has an action plan, as well as a monitor to measure the impact of the plan – to demonstrate whether and where progress is being made. The Monitor provides a reporting framework to measure progress on 10 structural and strategic outcomes.
United States	Yes	All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness	Ending Homelessness Before It Starts: A Federal Homelessness Prevention Framework State, county, and city governments have developed homelessness strategies

Source: (OECD, 2024[2]), OECD Affordable Housing Database and (OECD, 2024[3]), *OECD Country Notes on Homelessness Data*, available at www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/affordable-housing/homelessness.html.

Inclusion should be a central tenet in homelessness strategies and public policies, as well as in the design and delivery of homelessness services and housing solutions. People experiencing homelessness face discrimination across various aspects of daily life, including limited access to essential resources (like clean drinking water) and services, denial of housing opportunities by landlords, and significant barriers when seeking employment (Gille et al., 2024[6]). These forms of discrimination not only perpetuate their marginalisation but also make it difficult for individuals to break the cycle of homelessness. In practice, this means making inclusion and anti-discrimination a central premise in both *principle* (e.g. designing people-centred policies and services with low barriers to entry, Block 6) and in *practice* (e.g. meaningfully engaging people experiencing homelessness or with lived experience of homelessness in the development of homelessness strategies, policies and programmes).

The Toolkit's nine building blocks can provide a useful framework for strategy development, grounded in people-centred approaches that safeguard the rights of people experiencing homelessness.

Common operational questions

While several OECD and EU countries have developed strategic guidance at national level, including through national homelessness strategies, more can be done to strengthen existing strategies and encourage their development where they do not yet exist.

As outlined in the discussion that follows, both the *content* of the strategy, as well as the *process* to design it, matter. The following set of operational questions is intended to guide policy makers and practitioners in developing, or strengthening, homelessness strategies at national, regional or municipal scale:

- What are the key components of effective homelessness strategies?
- How to engage diverse stakeholders in the design of a homelessness strategy?
- How – and when – to engage people with lived experience of homelessness in the policy making process?
- How can policy be designed to promote inclusion and safeguard the rights of people experiencing homelessness?

What are the key components of effective homelessness strategies?

Strategic guidance can take different forms and should be tailored to the specific national, regional, and local contexts. Nevertheless, in general, effective guidance should include the following elements, which reflect all nine building blocks proposed in this Toolkit, and resonate with many of the key elements discussed in O'Sullivan (2022[7]):

- A clear **definition** and **comprehensive assessment** of the scale and scope of homelessness, citing recent and relevant data, disaggregated by relevant socio-demographic groups and, where feasible, ETHOS Light categories, as well as comparative trends in data; Block 2 in this Toolkit provides a number of recommendations to strengthen homelessness assessment, in terms of definitions, data and drivers.
- A set of **core priorities and measurable targets**: Core priorities could focus on prevention efforts (Block 4), a fundamental shift from a reliance on emergency accommodation and traditional "staircase" models to Housing First and housing-led solutions (Block 5), and the provision of low-barrier, tailored wraparound support services to individuals who need it (Block 6).
- A set of **proposed actions** to address the challenge, identifying who will be responsible for carrying them out, by when, and with what resources; Blocks 7 and 8 provide recommendations to mobilise funding and financing, and good governance to, e.g. avoid sharing mandates across government levels without the necessary funds and institutional support to follow through.
- **Coherence with related public policies and strategies**, notably relating to housing affordability and social protection.
- Systemic **monitoring and policy evaluation** of the proposed actions; Block 3 discusses strategies to embed monitoring and evaluation in the homelessness policy making process.
- **A clear policy lead to encourage accountability and engagement of a range of stakeholders** across policy areas and ministries, including with **people with lived experience of homelessness**; Block 8 provides recommendations to engage and co-ordinate across a range of actors and institutions.
- **An electoral mandate, and/or recognised need, for policy reform**; housing affordability and homelessness are indeed policy issues that are considered "ripe" for reform in many countries. Block 9 provides guidance on the "ingredients" to successful policy reforms that can be applied in the realm of homelessness.

There are many approaches to developing strategic guidance, as demonstrated by the varied experiences of, for example, **Finland**, **Norway**, the **Slovak Republic** and **Scotland** (the **United Kingdom**).

A consistent national approach to end homelessness, with clearly articulated responsibilities among varied stakeholders

In **Finland**, homelessness has been a recurrent feature of the government's policy agenda since the late 1980s. The government introduced its "Housing First" (Block 5) approach in 2007, as part of its first national homelessness strategy, Paavo I (2008-11) (Juhila, Raitakari and Ranta, 2022[8]). Housing First has consistently been at the core of subsequent national strategies, including Paavo II (2012-15) and the current Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness. Finland is one of the few OECD countries to have recorded a consistent and significant decline in homelessness over recent decades. The total population of individuals experiencing homelessness has dropped by 80%, from over 18 000 in 1987 to less than 3 500 in 2023. Meanwhile, long-term homelessness declined by over 70% between 2008 and 2023, to around 1 000 individuals (The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA), 2024[9]). Finland's consistent strategy engaged co-ordinated efforts from the central government, local authorities and NGOs to commit budgeted resources and set achievable targets for housing development and

acquisition (Pleace et al., 2015[10]). For instance, the national strategies have emphasised the key role of NGOs in developing and acquiring housing in the private sector and providing tenant support, as well as ensuring the availability of services to vulnerable youth and adults and facilitating the transitions for individuals leaving institutions, such as prisons or health centres (Pleace et al., 2015[10]).

Norway's long-term housing-led strategies have helped cut homelessness in half over the past decade (Halseth, Larsson and Urstad, 2022[11]). Distinct from Housing First, housing-led models emphasise the provision of immediate, long-term housing, but are rather targeted towards people with limited (or no) service needs (Block 5). In Norway, national policy outlines the responsibilities of different actors in addressing homelessness, whereby the central government "sets goals and provides a framework through laws, regulations and financial tools, such as loans and grants"; public health and welfare services are charged with directly providing services to people experiencing homelessness; and municipalities, in co-operation with NGOs, have a key role in supporting disadvantaged groups in the housing market, and for planning and renovating housing and providing infrastructure. Since 1999, five successive government-led strategic projects addressing homelessness have followed a housing-led approach. This continuity has helped to provide the time and resources to build capacity within municipalities and among other stakeholders to make systemic changes to their approach to social welfare and social housing, which have helped to reduce homelessness (Dyb, 2019[12]).

An integrated homelessness prevention strategy that cuts across government departments

The **Slovak Republic's** national homelessness strategy, the *National Concept for the Prevention and Ending of Homelessness (2023)*, sets a target of ending homelessness by 2030. For the first time, the strategy provided a definition of homelessness in the Slovak Republic, which guided an assessment of the prevalence, drivers and average duration of homelessness, drawing on existing statistical resources, including population census data, local-level homelessness counts, administrative data, and EU-SILC micro-data. The strategy identifies several priority areas: prevention, housing affordability, health, employment and social security, social services and legal protection. Each priority area includes a specific objective, and several draft measures. For instance, the strategy proposes to develop a consistent and regular data collection method on homelessness, including hidden and rural homelessness, to inform evaluations on policy measures. In addition, the prevention priority area aims to create an integrated homelessness prevention model with systemic co-ordination among government departments. To achieve this objective, the strategy discusses, among other measures, the creation of an independent supra-departmental unit to co-ordinate and implement homelessness prevention policies and financial support to help those at risk of homelessness stay in their homes. The strategy is complemented by an action plan with measurable indicators, targets with a specified deadline, and responsible actors and sources of funding.

Guidance to local authorities on supporting people experiencing homelessness

In 2018, in **Scotland** (the **United Kingdom**), the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities jointly published the *Ending Homelessness Together Action Plan* (since updated in October 2020). Based on detailed homelessness statistics, including data on support needs, pathways and duration of homelessness and existing housing services, the action plan highlights five actions to end homelessness. With a fund of GBP 50 million (USD 63 million), the plan discusses several policy measures to be implemented for each action, often with a specified deadline. To sustain momentum and track progress, a Monitoring Framework has been established to measure achievements across ten structural and strategic outcomes. As part of the Action Plan, the Code of Guidance on Homelessness was updated to provide further guidance to local authorities on legislation, policies and practices to prevent and resolve homelessness. Grounded in a human rights approach, the Code of Guidance describes the powers, duties and responsibilities of local authorities for the prevention of homelessness, handling of

applications for homelessness services, inquiries into homelessness, and the provision of accommodation. In addition, local authorities collect data regarding every homelessness assessment, which is shared with the Scottish Government monthly and published every six months.

How to engage diverse stakeholders in the design of a homelessness strategy?

In terms of process, the engagement of a range of actors and institutions in the development of strategic documents is essential to help build, or reinforce, collaboration and increase buy-in and accountability (Baptista and Marlier, 2019[13]), ultimately contributing to more effective homelessness reduction (Lee, McGuire and Kim, 2018[14]). This includes reaching across policy domains, and to actors within and outside government. The cross-cutting nature of homelessness calls for collaboration with diverse stakeholders and institutions, including relating to, among other things, housing, public health, social services, and employment. Cross-sector collaboration can help to facilitate the exchange of experiences and ensure a common approach. In particular, involving NGOs, which in many countries play a significant role in providing services for individuals experiencing homelessness (Valero and Jang, 2016[15]; Nambiar and Mathew, 2022[16]; Allen, 2016[17]), can contribute to more effective public policies and improved outcomes (Doberstein, 2015[18]; Lee, McGuire and Kim, 2018[14]).

> *"Pressure cooker" sessions to convene a range of stakeholders to draft a National Action Plan*

In the **Netherlands**, the National Action Plan on Homelessness was jointly developed by representatives from, among others, diverse ministries, people with lived experience, interest groups, youth panels, youth providers, NGOs, judicial partners, academia and research institutes, municipalities and the private sector. The drafting of the Action Plan included four thematic sessions with over 200 participants to discuss barriers and solutions to homelessness prevention and access to housing. The process also included two intensive "pressure-cooker" writing weeks with interim review sessions for those involved in the field. The implementation process of the National Action Plan on Homelessness includes partnerships with people with lived experience, corporations, healthcare providers, welfare organisations, local advocacy organisations and other stakeholders.

> *Convening a cross-section of actors to align systems and funding*

In **Canada**, *Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy* is a community-based programme focused on the prevention and reduction of homelessness. Advisory Boards, composed of a wide range of stakeholders, including from municipal, provincial or territorial governments, NGOs, and for-profit enterprises, must be established to engage community members, identify priorities, recommend projects, and support the response to homelessness at the community level.

Box 1.2. Potential stakeholders who could be engaged in the design and implementation of homelessness strategies and policies

The following list is not exhaustive, and some actors may be more relevant than others in a particular country or local context:

- National government: ministries, including those relating to housing and infrastructure, social welfare, health, employment, education and skills, migration, taxation and benefits, criminal justice.
- Regional and municipal authorities, including those relating to housing and infrastructure, social welfare, health, employment, migration.
- NGOs and civil society organisations, including providers of housing, health and social support, tenant organisations, migrant organisations.
- Police and public safety representatives.
- Representatives from communities that may be disproportionately affected by homelessness.
- People with lived experience of homelessness (see also Box 1.3).
- Researchers/experts.
- Human rights organisations/ombudspersons.
- Tribal governments, where relevant.

How – and when – to engage people with lived experience of homelessness in the policy making process?

In addition, engaging individuals who have experienced homelessness first-hand can help to design and improve service delivery and housing solutions and to identify potential bottlenecks that are grounded in the real-world experiences and knowledge of those who have experienced homelessness (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 2021[19]; Padwa et al., 2023[20]; Barker and Maguire, 2017[21]; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HUD), 2021[22]; ASPE, 2022[23]; ASPE, 2022[24]). Outreach can be done via advocacy organisations working with impacted communities (such as tenant and homelessness associations), direct service providers, and/or by reaching out to community leaders (through churches, schools, etc.) to identify individuals with first-hand experience. Financially compensating people for their time is strongly encouraged. Box 1.3 provides some examples of ways in which people with lived experience can be meaningfully involved in homelessness policy making.

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Box 1.3. Potential ways to engage people with lived experience of homelessness in homelessness policy design and implementation

The following list is not exhaustive, and some means of engagement may be more relevant than others in a particular country or local context:

- Co-create homelessness strategies, toolkits, policies and programmes. Where relevant, consider opportunities to offer training in communication and public speaking for people with lived experience, to strengthen their role in contributing to the design and implementation of public policies.
- Partner, from the beginning, in the design and implementation of housing-led and Housing First interventions.
- Engage in the design and delivery of services to people experiencing homelessness, particularly in terms of identifying and overcoming bottlenecks to accessing services.
- Provide peer support to people experiencing homelessness and share information.
- Help develop homelessness measurement/enumeration frameworks.
- Engage in regular monitoring and evaluation exercises, to assess the effectiveness of policy interventions from the user's / beneficiary's perspective.
- Be hired as staff members.

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Engaging people with lived experience to design and implement a national homelessness strategy

In **Spain**, inclusive and participatory measures have played an important role in the development of the *National Strategy for Combating Homelessness (2023-30)*, with a specific objective aimed at fostering the engagement of people experiencing homelessness. The strategy also emphasises direct involvement of those with lived experience in awareness programmes, along with providing training activities to empower them to actively participate in shaping their future and overcoming homelessness (Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030, 2023[25]). Concrete examples include: individuals with lived experience led discussion groups to generate proposals that were channelled through civil society entities, and provided feedback on the draft strategy at a dedicated event. Inputs from both activities informed the national strategy (Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030, 2023[25]). The inputs from people with lived experience generated concrete ideas, such as revising assistance requirements, establishing protocols for supporting individuals in obtaining social benefits, regularising the status of those in irregular situations to facilitate employment opportunities, enhancing collaboration between care systems, and conducting campaigns to combat discrimination and stigmatisation, which have all been incorporated into the national strategy (Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030, 2023[25]).

The Government of **Canada** also redesigned its homelessness strategy to include people with lived experience. Further, the National Housing Council of Canada, which was established to monitor the impact of the new housing strategy, also included members with lived experience.

Engaging people with lived experience to design and operate Housing First programmes

The Housing First programme in the Liverpool City Region (LCR) (the **United Kingdom**) stands out for its emphasis on actively engaging people with lived experience of homelessness in all stages of the programme, including service design, monitoring, evaluation, and the recruitment process of programme staff. The organisational chart of the LCR's Housing First model includes a dedicated department focused

solely on lived experience (Campbell Tickell, 2022[26]). Individuals with lived experience of homelessness played a crucial role in initiating the programme (Blood et al., 2017[27]), and they continue to contribute actively to inform policy development and service delivery to the programme's beneficiaries and influence the governance of the programme as a whole (MHCLG, 2021[28]). For instance, during the recruitment of practitioners in the Housing First team, the initial interview is conducted by a panel from the Lived Experience Team, with their interview score comprising a 50% of the overall recruitment score (Campbell Tickell, 2022[26]; LCRCA, 2022[29]).

Ireland's Housing Agency published a Peer Support Specialist Toolkit to encourage the integration of individuals with lived experience into Housing First staff teams. The toolkit provides guidance on how to train, certify, and incorporate peer specialists into the programme. The recommendation highlights how peer-specialists can provide relatable and empathetic support to clients by sharing personal recovery stories, while maintaining healthy boundaries and practicing self-care (Tsemberis, 2020[30]). An evaluation by the National Housing First Implementation Evaluation Team (NHFIE) on the first two years of the implementation of Housing First nationwide found that, while peer representation is rare, it generally has a strong positive impact on service recipients (Greenwood, Byrne and O'Shaugnessy, 2022[31]).

How can policy be designed to promote inclusion and safeguard the rights of people experiencing homelessness?

Legislation and practices that penalise people experiencing homelessness – including, among other things, laws that make it illegal to sleep, sit, or store personal belongs in public spaces; ordinances that punish people for begging or removing items form rubbish bins; or sweeps of areas in which people who are experiencing homelessness are living (Evangelista, 2013[32]) – have been shown to be counterproductive and costly. Research from the United States has demonstrated significant cost savings from redirecting enforcement spending towards housing and support services (Hauber, 2024[33]). Even punitive interactions that do not result in arrest (such as move-along orders, citations, and destruction of property) limit the access of people experiencing homelessness to services, housing, and jobs, while damaging their health, safety, and well-being (Herring, Yarbrough and Marie Alatorre, 2019[34]), (Westbrook and Robinson, 2020[35]). While it is important to engage the public safety sector in the policy making process, law enforcement should not be the primary tool to address homelessness.

Adopting a human-centred approach to national strategies and public policies, which guarantees a minimum level of support

Portugal's national homelessness strategy and public policy approach guarantee a minimum level of housing and social support to all individuals who are identified as needing assistance. The guiding principle of the national strategy is defined as a "person-centred approach" that is based on human rights and human dignity, equality and non-discrimination, in recognition that homelessness is a complex social problem. It will be important to evaluate the impacts of this approach over the medium to long term.

Enacting rights-based and anti-discrimination legislation, including laws that prohibit targeting individuals engaging in life-sustaining activities, such as sleeping in public spaces

Over the years, **Scotland** (the **United Kingdom**) has shifted its approach to homelessness, moving away from crisis response to increasingly prioritising prevention and decriminalisation. In 1982, *the Civic Government (Scotland) Act* repealed Section 4 of *the Vagrancy Act 1 824*, which had criminalised rough sleeping – a law that remains in effect in England and Wales. Further, the *Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act 2003* marked a pivotal change by gradually eliminating the distinction between priority and non-priority applicants for housing assistance. The Act aimed to ensure that, by 31 December 2012, all individuals assessed as unintentionally homeless would be entitled to settled accommodation. In

November 2012, the Scottish Parliament approved the *Homelessness (Abolition of Priority Need Test) (Scotland) Order 2012*, solidifying this commitment. As of 31 December 2012, the priority need test for homeless households was abolished, guaranteeing that all unintentionally homeless households have the right to settled accommodation. More recently, the issuance of *The Homeless Persons (Suspension of Referrals between Local Authorities) (Scotland) Order 2022* allows people experiencing homelessness to make a homelessness application for accommodation wherever they wish, prior to which there needed to be proof of a local connection to an area.

In **Brazil**, Law No. 14,489/2022, known as the "Father Júlio Lancellotti Law", which entered into force on 11 January 2023, amends the City Statute to prohibit hostile architecture in public spaces. The law seeks to ensure that public spaces, their furnishings, and their connections to private areas remain accessible to everyone by banning the use of hostile materials, structures, equipment, and construction techniques intended to deter or exclude individuals experiencing homelessness, and other vulnerable groups.

In Washington, D.C. the **United States**), the Human Rights Enhancement Act of 2022 adds "homeless status" as a protected trait under the D.C. Human Rights Act, prohibiting discrimination against individuals experiencing homelessness in employment, housing, public accommodations, government services, and educational institutions. The Act sets out that employers cannot take adverse actions based on homeless status, housing providers cannot make decisions influenced by it, public service providers cannot deny access, and schools cannot discriminate in admissions. The Act also mandates that law enforcement officers receive training on issues related to homelessness, including an understanding of the protections afforded under the Act and guidance on how to refer allegations of discrimination to the D.C. Office of Human Rights. Additionally, it establishes that the *Eviction Record Sealing Authority and Fairness in Renting Amendment Act of 2022* enables the Superior Court of the District of Columbia to seal eviction records in certain circumstances and permits individuals to file complaints if discriminated against based on their sealed eviction records. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such local legislation depends to some extent on policies of higher levels of government. Supporting local initiatives that help people experiencing homelessness overcome administrative hurdles and meet basic human needs.

The provision of a mailing address and/or post office box free of charge have helped people experiencing homelessness overcome administrative hurdles, for instance, to open a bank account or apply for and receive social benefits. In Sydney, **Australia**, Australia Post offers a 12-month free post office box service for individuals experiencing homelessness, providing them with a secure mailing address at a participating post office. This service allows individuals to receive important documents, such as identification, government correspondence, and job application responses, which are crucial for reconnecting with society and accessing support services.

Similarly, in London (the **United Kingdom**), the pilot project, ProxyAddress tested during 2020 and 2021, provided a temporary address for people experiencing homelessness, helping them manage essential administrative tasks through an app. The app matched applicants with donated addresses from willing property owners, including councils and housing associations, which provide addresses of empty properties or those under construction. This temporary address could be used for receiving important documents, accessing services, and applying for jobs. Royal Mail partnered with the scheme to ensure that all physical mail was forwarded to the service user, regardless of their current location, with the app updating address details in real time. During the pilot period, 47 out of 49 participants moved into stable accommodation within six months, demonstrating the initiative's effectiveness in helping individuals transition out of homelessness – exceeding the expected results. The pilot was set to be tested in additional cities. A similar project in the **Netherlands** is featured in Block 6.

Access to public toilets is increasingly recognised as essential for creating urban spaces that are inclusive of individuals experiencing homelessness, with significant implications for health, dignity, and fundamental human right to water and sanitation (Meehan, Odetola and Griswold, 2022[36]). The challenges faced by people experiencing homelessness in accessing public bathrooms are often underlain by the contradiction

between limited access to facilities and the criminalisation of public urination and defecation (Hochbaum, 2019[37]). Research highlights the urgent need to reevaluate the approach to public sanitation, focusing on dignity, equity, and public health. Accessible, clean, and safe public toilets are vital public resources and integral components of urban infrastructure that can significantly enhance inclusivity for those experiencing homelessness (Damon, 2023[38]).

The challenges surrounding hygiene are particularly severe for people experiencing homelessness who menstruate, as they often face difficulties in accessing clean toilets and bathing facilities. This scarcity of safe spaces makes it difficult to manage menstruation hygiene effectively. Additionally, the unavailability of essential products compounds their struggle, forcing them to navigate the dual stigma of both menstruation and homelessness (Gruer et al., 2021[39]; Sommer et al., 2020[40]). To address this issue, the Period Project, with 13 chapters mainly along the East Coast of the **United States**, distributes menstrual products to those in need, notably to individuals experiencing homelessness. Packs are distributed to people in shelters, those living on the streets, and young menstruators in schools who lack access to menstrual care. Since its inception in 2015, the Homeless Period Project has distributed over 240 000 Period Packs, making a significant impact on vulnerable communities.

Fundamentals for success

Evidence from countries that have reduced homelessness highlight the importance of a co-ordinated, long-term approach to combat homelessness over the course of multiple administrations and election cycles. This building block emphasises that developing comprehensive homelessness strategies can help in creating long-term, co-ordinated policy responses that address the complex and multifaceted aspects nature of homelessness.

Effective strategies often involve setting clear goals, allocating resources and engaging diverse stakeholders, including people with lived experience, to help ensure policies fulfil their intended consequence. However, there is currently a lack of rigorous evaluations to determine which types of strategy (and which elements) are most effective in achieving this goal. Many countries have developed increasingly detailed national strategies in the recent years in different formats (Szeintuch, 2024[41]). It will be important to monitor and evaluate the results obtained by these different approaches to draw lessons. Nonetheless, common themes emerge and crucial aspects have been identified which countries can consider when drafting or revising their strategies.

Building on these operational issues, the following recommendations can help policy makers and practitioners in developing strategic guidance, engaging stakeholders, and developing inclusive policies:

- Develop a strategy to end homelessness, which defines and assesses the scale and scope of homelessness; sets out core priorities and measurable targets; identifies proposed actions; involves responsible actors from the beginning; and links to other relevant policies (such as housing and social protection); and embeds systematic monitoring and evaluation.

- Identify and engage diverse stakeholders in solving homelessness, including people and institutions within and outside government with a range of policy expertise, practical experiences and perspectives.

- Engage people with lived experience of homelessness meaningfully and systematically in all stages (strategy, programme design and operation) of the policy cycle, including through creating appropriate incentive structures.

- Develop strategies and public policies that promote inclusion and safeguard the rights of people experiencing homelessness.

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2 Measurement: Definitions, data and drivers

Block 2 discusses the critical role of robust data collection in creating the evidence base for homelessness policies. Reliable data, grounded in a clear, consistent definition of homelessness, enables policy makers to monitor trends, allocate resources effectively, and develop evidence-based strategies. In practice, measuring homelessness is fraught with methodological challenges, making cross-country comparison difficult. This block outlines ways to strengthen data collection approaches and improve the quality and coverage of homelessness data.

Relevance and key data

Effective homelessness policies rely on a regular assessment of the scale, drivers, and scope of the challenge. A consistent statistical definition and standardised data collection methods for homelessness enable policy makers to monitor trends, strategically target interventions, optimise resource allocation and make evidence-based decisions (Busch-Geertsema, Culhane and Fitzpatrick, 2016[1]; Hermans, 2023[2]). Moreover, data collection can enhance public service delivery, foster collaboration through shared understanding, spark innovation and bolster government accountability (van Ooijen, Ubaldi and Welby, 2019[3]). However, data collection should always be considered as a means towards sounder homelessness policies, rather than an end in and of itself (Hermans, 2023[2]).

In practice, measuring homelessness is fraught with methodological challenges (Drilling et al., 2020[4]), making cross-country comparison of homelessness statistics difficult (OECD, 2024[5]).

Methodological challenges to measuring homelessness

A number of methodological challenges and limitations stymy a comprehensive assessment of the state of homelessness in OECD and EU countries, and render cross-country comparison difficult. This section summarises the discussion of methodological issues and proposed solutions to strengthen data collection on homelessness that are developed in further detail in the *OECD Monitoring Framework: Measuring Homelessness in OECD and EU countries* (OECD, Forthcoming[6]) and the OECD Affordable Housing Database (indicator HC3.1) (OECD, 2024[7]).

A complex, dynamic phenomenon that is hard to measure

As research has shown, homelessness is a complex phenomenon, resulting from both "macro" and "micro" circumstances, and affecting an increasingly heterogeneous population (Lee, Shinn and Culhane, 2021[8]). Some individuals experience a short period of homelessness or housing instability, while others – generally a smaller share of the population – experience prolonged periods of homelessness or transition in and out of homelessness over the course of several weeks, months or years (i.e. "chronic homelessness"), and may have higher social support needs (OECD, 2015[9]; OECD, 2020[10]). The dynamic nature of homelessness can be hard to capture in data collection exercises: street counts, for instance, which are generally conducted at a specific point-in-time, thus "miss" individuals who are not experiencing homelessness at the moment of the count. This diversity is also reflected in the different pathways into homelessness that have been observed across countries (Box 2.1).

> **Box 2.1. There are many different pathways into homelessness**
>
> Research has pointed to *structural factors*, *institutional and systemic failures* and *individual circumstances* (or a combination of these) that may contribute to an individual becoming homeless (see (OECD, 2020[10]). Depending on the country, some factors may be more or less relevant:
>
> - **Structural factors** include tight housing market conditions, labour market changes, poverty, a shrinking social safety net, migration policies, or reductions in housing allowances. Research has identified a correlation between homelessness and rising housing costs; other studies have pointed to a link between homelessness levels and increasing aggregate poverty rates (Baptista and Marlier, 2019[11]; Quigley, Raphael and Smolensky, 2002[12]). In the United States, the shortage of affordable and social housing has been found to be a major factor in contributing to homelessness, particularly in high-cost urban areas (Colburn and Page Aldern, 2022[13]).
>
> - **Institutional and systemic failures** refer to the higher risk of housing instability among people transitioning out of institutional settings (such as youth or foster care, the criminal justice system, the military, or hospitals and mental health facilities). In France, for instance, around one in four homeless adults born in the country was previously in foster care or known to child welfare services (FAP, 2019[14]). In Canada, research has found that youth experiencing homelessness are much more likely to have been involved with the child welfare system than the general public (Gaetz et al., 2016[15]); a national youth homelessness survey conducted in 2019 revealed that more than seven in ten people who first experienced homelessness before the age of 16 had a record with child protection services (Bonakdar et al., 2023[16]). Other drivers can include racism (see, for example, (Olivet et al., 2021[17]; Paul et al., 2019[18])) and sexism (for a discussion of the gendered dimensions of homelessness see (Bretherton, 2017[19])), homophobia, and transphobia (see, for instance, (Ecker, Aubry and Sylvestre, 2019[20])).
>
> - **Individual circumstances,** including traumatic events, such an eviction or job loss, a personal crisis (family break-up or intimate partner violence), child poverty, and health issues (mental health or addiction challenges) are also correlated with homelessness (see, for instance, (Johnson et al., 2015[21]; Ministry of Housing, 2019[22]; Piat et al., 2015[23]). Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a leading cause of homelessness among women (OECD, 2023[24]; Sullivan et al., 2023[25]).

Absence of a harmonised definition of homelessness, resulting in considerable cross-country differences in what it means to be homeless

There is no internationally agreed definition of homelessness, and countries' statistical definitions vary considerably. In the European Union, many countries use the ETHOS Light framework, which aims to provide a "common language" for assessing and comparing different types of living situations of people experiencing homelessness (Table 2.1). Most official homelessness statistics at national level cover ETHOS Light categories 1, 2, and 3 (rough sleepers and people staying in emergency or temporary accommodation). A smaller share of official statistics include ETHOS Light 4, 5, and 6 (people staying in institutions, living in non-conventional dwellings, or doubling up with family and friends) (cf. the OECD Affordable Housing Database (OECD, 2024[7]) and the *OECD Monitoring Framework* (OECD, Forthcoming[6])). Further, some national homelessness statistics cover living situations that go beyond the ETHOS Light typology. In many OECD countries outside the EU, homelessness data can be aligned to a large extent with the ETHOS Light categorisation; however, in some cases – such as the **Netherlands**, the **Slovak Republic** and the **United Kingdom** – it is not as straightforward.

Table 2.1. Harmonising the definition of homelessness: ETHOS Light typology

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

Source: (FEANTSA, 2007[26]), *ETHOS Light: European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion*, www.feantsa.org/download/fea-002-18-update-ethos-light-0032417441788687419154.pdf.

There are, nevertheless, limits to the implementation of the ETHOS Light typology. For instance, some national homelessness statistics cover living situations that go beyond the ETHOS Light typology. For example, **Australia**'s statistical definition includes people living in an inadequate dwelling, a dwelling without tenure or with an initial tenure that is short and not extendable, or in a dwelling that does not allow them to have space for social relations. In **New Zealand**, the definition includes – in addition to people that could be considered in ETHOS Light 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 – people living in uninhabitable housing, which is operationalised as people living in a dwelling that lacks one of six basic amenities: drinkable tap water, electricity, cooking facilities, a kitchen sink, bath or shower, and/or a toilet. Other types of living situations of relevance in some countries (such as allotments in **Poland**, or bed and breakfasts in the **United Kingdom**) are not explicitly included in the ETHOS Light typology.

A range of data collection methods to assess homelessness, but that may underreport or "miss" specific types of homelessness or socio-demographic groups

Official statistics are based on different data collection methods, including, among other things, street counts, survey-based methods, and administrative data (Box 2.2), and many countries rely on more than one approach to cover different types of living situations and socio-demographic groups. Each data collection approach presents strengths and weaknesses and is better suited to capture certain experiences of homelessness relative to others and generates varying levels of depth of information about individuals experiencing homelessness and their pathways into homelessness (cf. *OECD Monitoring Framework* (OECD, Forthcoming[6]) and corresponding *Country Notes on Homelessness Data* (OECD, 2024[27])). The data collection approaches discussed in this section are based on those that underpin the official homelessness statistics in OECD and EU countries, even if other collection approaches may be used.

Box 2.2. Six common approaches to collect data on homelessness in OECD and EU countries

The *OECD Monitoring Framework* (OECD, Forthcoming[6]) outlines six approaches to collect data on homelessness. These approaches are *not* mutually exclusive: in practice, countries frequently design surveys/counts that blend these approaches. These include:

- **Street counts:** an estimate of the number of people sleeping rough at a point-in-time;
- **Service-based methods:** information obtained from a broad range of service providers that support people experiencing homelessness;
- **Population censuses and Household surveys:** a count or a sample of a given population at a point in time (e.g. Population Census; special module on homelessness in household survey);
- **Administrative data:** records collected by different institutions/organisations (e.g. health data, criminal justice records, social services data, etc.) and used to extrapolate the number of people experiencing homelessness;
- **Advanced sampling methods:** a statistical method, such as "capture-recapture," comparing independent samples from two or more sources of data to estimate the total number of people experiencing homelessness;
- **By-name lists and Information management systems on homeless individuals:** the collection of comprehensive demographic and identifying information on people experiencing homelessness, which may be collected via *registry weeks*.

The Framework summarises the main characteristics of each data collection approach, including, among other things, a general description of the approach; the type of count generated (point-in-time or flow); the source(s) of information (e.g. data from service providers; direct observation through a street count); the ETHOS Light groups typically covered (see Table 2.1); the strengths and limitations of the approach; the scope and depth of information collected; and common implementation challenges.

Nevertheless, the design and implementation of many standard data collection approaches often fail to account for some population groups, including, among others, women, youth/children, people who identify as LGBTI, racial and ethnic minorities, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, and people living in rural communities (see the *OECD Monitoring Framework: Measuring Homelessness in OECD and EU countries* (OECD, Forthcoming[6])). This can lead to an undercount of homelessness among such groups, and thus an underestimate of the total number of people experiencing homelessness. There are many reasons behind this:

- In some cases, the underreporting of certain socio-demographic groups is driven by the specific ways in which they experience homelessness, which are not well captured in standard data collection exercises. For instance, some socio-demographic groups are more likely to rely on informal networks of family and friends in a first instance, rather than formal emergency accommodation (e.g. shelters); this can be driven by the sentiment that traditional shelter settings and social services are not well adapted to their needs, do not feel safe, and/or because of past experiences or expectations of discrimination or stigma. Rural homelessness tends to be underreported because some of the most common data collection approaches are not well suited to assess homelessness in rural areas: street counts can be impractical in expansive, non-urban areas, and service-based methods may not be effective or reliable in areas that are service-poor.
- In other cases, the housing situation of socio-demographic groups that are characterised, for various reasons, by high mobility (such as Indigenous communities or Roma) may be harder to capture and quantify in official statistics.

- In addition, there may be limitations to the data collection approach: while service-based counts are the most prevalent data collection approach among countries and offer many advantages, there is no systematic approach across countries to determining *which* types of services and emergency or temporary accommodation are included in data collection efforts, and which are left out, presenting a challenge for cross-country comparison.

Box 2.3. Challenges to measuring homelessness among migrants in OECD and EU countries

In OECD and EU countries, comprehensive, comparable data on homelessness among migrants do not exist. Fewer than half of OECD and EU countries report the share of migrants in national homelessness statistics. The other 20 countries do not report homelessness statistics disaggregated by origin. While most data on homelessness among migrants use citizenship as the basis of migrant status, some countries only include in official homelessness statistics migrants with legal residence, and/or professional and personal ties to the country.

Many of the broader methodological challenges that stymie homelessness measurement and cross-country comparisons (discussed throughout this Block) *also* affect the extent to which migrants are counted (or missed) in official homelessness statistics. These include differences in how countries define and measure homelessness, which likely result in an underestimate of homelessness generally, and often particularly so among migrants.

Yet in addition to these general challenges, there are different cross-country approaches to data collection that are specific to the case of migrants – notably relating to asylum seekers and refugees. In 11 OECD and EU countries, official homelessness statistics explicitly include people staying in temporary accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees; by contrast, in at least 20 countries, official homelessness statistics exclude individuals staying in such accommodation.

In countries for which disaggregated data on homelessness among migrants are available, estimates suggest that migrants are overrepresented among individuals experiencing homelessness. Data cannot, however, be readily compared across countries.

To strengthen the evidence on homelessness among migrants, governments may consider relying on multiple, co-ordinated approaches to collect data on homelessness; expanding the types of surveyed accommodation and support services to include low-barrier services that are accessible to migrant populations; and, where feasible, including information on country of birth in homelessness data collection.

Note: For cross-country data availability on the share of migrants experiencing homelessness, refer to the detailed table in (OECD, 2024[28]). Source: (OECD, 2024[28]), *Challenges to measuring homelessness among migrants in OECD and EU countries*, https://doi.org/10.1787/b9855842-en.

Cross-country differences in the periodicity and geographic coverage of homelessness statistics

There are also important cross-country differences in the periodicity and the geographic coverage of official homelessness statistics. Some data collection approaches collect point-in-time (PIT) data (capturing a snapshot of homelessness in a specific location at a specific point-in-time), while others collect flow data (for instance, providing an estimate of the number of shelter users over the course of a year). PIT and flow data cannot be meaningfully compared. Moreover, the geographic coverage of official statistics also varies across countries and may only reflect the situation in the capital city (**Iceland**) or in selected cities and towns (such as **Belgium**, **Colombia**, **France** or **Italy**).

Common operational questions

Accordingly, there is considerable scope to improve the assessment of homelessness in OECD and EU countries, grounded in robust data and an understanding of the drivers of homelessness. Robust data should underpin all phases of policy making, including the development of homelessness strategies (Block 1) and monitoring and evaluation (Block 3); the implementation of effective policies relating to prevention (Block 4), long-term housing solutions (Block 5) and wraparound services (Block 6); as well as policy management, relating to funding and financing (Block 7), governance (Block 8) and the political economy of reform (Block 9).

The following set of operational questions is intended to guide policy makers and practitioners in identifying important focus areas to strengthen the assessment of homelessness in their country, city or community context; the relative importance of each component below will depend on the current state of data collection:

- What kind of statistics are needed to help address the policy objectives?
- What are key considerations for a statistical definition of homelessness?
- How to assess the main drivers of homelessness?
- How to improve the quality and coverage of homelessness data?

Recommendations about how – and why – to improve the communication of homelessness data to key stakeholders and the broader public are addressed in Block 9. These are complemented by guidance on some of the more technical dimensions of data collection, monitoring and reporting, and a self-assessment tool, in the *OECD Monitoring Framework* (OECD, Forthcoming[6]).

What kind of statistics are needed to help address the policy objectives?

Ensuring data collection is policy-relevant and identifying suitable data collection approaches for the country context

Data collection on homelessness should be designed and implemented with clear policy objectives in mind; in other words, data collection should serve a clear policy purpose, rather than be an end in itself. Such efforts can be enhanced by aligning data collection efforts with a clear, measurable policy commitment to end homelessness (or specific types of homelessness, such as rough sleeping or chronic homelessness). Identifying the policy objectives is a first step to determining what types of statistics are needed, and what types of data collection approaches are most suited and feasible.

The following questions can help determine the most appropriate data collection approaches to consider:

- **What are the biggest policy priorities with respect to homelessness, and what form(s) of homelessness are to be addressed as a priority?** A public policy objective to reduce rough sleeping could aim to assess people who are living rough, as well as people who may be at-risk of rough sleeping, and/or those who have recently experienced rough sleeping. To this end, different data collection approaches could be considered, ranging from street counts and service-based methods, among others. In contrast, an effort to develop public policies to address "hidden homelessness" – generally understood to refer to people whose living situation corresponds to one of the categories outlined in the ETHOS Light typology (see Box 2.1), but who do not appear in official statistics on homelessness – would require a different approach to data collection (discussed further in the *OECD Monitoring Framework: Measuring Homelessness in OECD and EU countries* (OECD, Forthcoming[6])). Aligning data collection approaches with policy targets – as exemplified by the "Ending Homelessness Framework" of the Centre for Homelessness Impact in the **United Kingdom**, for instance – can be a useful approach.

- **What type(s) of information and level of detail are needed for policy purposes?** Collecting disaggregated data – including by type of living situation and key demographic characteristics – strengthens the evidence base about the scale and scope of the challenge, and can help to identify at-risk groups and be used to tailor interventions accordingly. Nevertheless, long questionnaires that aim to understand past and present living situations, drivers, services and housing needs and personal history can be a useful tool in some cases – but they are costly. The depth of information during the data collection process should be well aligned with policy needs and resources. Moreover, regardless of the approach(es) selected, privacy and confidentially must be assured, given the sensitive personal information that may be collected and its potential for misuse.
- **What resources are available to undertake data collection efforts?** This includes financial resources, as well as human resources, in terms of civil servants as well as non-public actors (NGOs, private sector, civil society, citizens) of who may, in some cases, contribute to design, implement and support data collection efforts (e.g. public authorities, research institute, NGO/private sector, civil society, etc.). Considerations should cover the data collection process, as well as the analysis and policy phases.

The following illustrations reflect the different types of data collection approaches that could be adopted; more information on countries' data collection approaches are detailed in the *OECD Country* Note*s on Homelessness Data* (OECD, 2024[27]).

Using research and survey results to inform the development of a national homelessness strategy

Brazil's *National Survey on the Homeless Population*, conducted in 2007 and 2008 and covering 71 cities and more than 300 000 individuals, helped to inform the development of a number of national policies and programmes, including the National Policy for the Homelessness Population. The policy, developed as a rights-based approach, notably included measures to ensure access to public health, education, social security, social assistance, housing, and other key areas; and the development of specialised help centres for people experiencing homelessness (World Without Poverty: Brazil Learning Initiative, 2016[29]).

Comprehensive surveys of people experiencing homelessness to facilitate an in-depth understanding of their needs and living conditions

In **Colombia**, the Census of Street Dwellers is a street count implemented over a five-year period in different regions. The Census collects a wide range of information on people experiencing homelessness, including:

- **Demographic information**: sex, geographical location, place of birth, ethnicity, sexual orientation, level of education (literacy, highest level of educational attainment achieved).
- **History of homelessness**: location of initial period of homelessness, principal reason for homelessness, length of period of homelessness, principal reason for why they continue to experience homelessness.
- **Survival and support networks**: income generation, closest family member(s), receipt of aid, origin of aid, knowledge of social services and programmes.
- **Health and substance use**: human functioning, overall health, dental or health problems from the last 30 days, presence of diseases, consumption of psychoactive substances.
- **Safety and security**: overall sense of safety, aggressions of which they have been victims.

The extensive information aims to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the needs and living conditions of people experiencing homelessness, to help guide decision-making. Colombia's dedicated strategy to prevent and combat homelessness, the *Public Social Policy for Street Dwellers,* leverages data from the

Census of Street Dwellers on the socio-demographic characteristics of people experiencing homelessness to inform policy design.

Leveraging integrated academic knowledge to analyse statistical data

Health researchers in the **United States** sought to develop and validate a classification model of homelessness using a linked dataset of integrated administrative records from multiple state-maintained databases which contained a sample of over 5 million individuals (Byrne et al., 2020[30]). The model used a logistic regression to predict cases of homelessness and identify targeted interventions to mitigate the risk of adverse health outcomes. This initiative underscores the potential value of collaborating with researchers across different sectors to help governments make better use of statistical data.

Using data and research to inform public policy

Across **Belgium**, data collection and research on homelessness, in co-operation with local and regional governments, have enabled many local authorities to refine their homelessness policies by incorporating relevant new insights on rural vs. urban homelessness, gender, and (mental) health. These efforts are organised in collaboration with a diverse group of stakeholders, and the results are widely communicated, generating media coverage and informing public debate on policies aimed at addressing homelessness (Koning Boudewijnstichting, 2024[31]). Similarly, the city of Paris (France) developed new services targeting women experiencing homelessness following the first street count, *Nuit de la solidarité,* in 2018 (City of Paris (France), 2024[32]),

What are key considerations for a statistical definition of homelessness?

A clear, consistent statistical definition along ETHOS Light typology, where feasible, that aligns with data collection methods

Regardless of the scope of a country's statistical definition of homelessness, the definition should i) provide a clear indication of the groups and the types of living situations that are included (drawing, for instance, on the different living situations proposed by the ETHOS Light typology), and ii) align with the data collection approaches *en vigueur.* In addition, data collection efforts that rely on surveys of support services should be clear about the scope of services to be surveyed; this could cover, among other things, emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness, food banks, day centres, shelters and support services for victims/survivors of domestic violence, accommodation for migrants, youth services, etc.

In **Sweden**, the statistical definition of homelessness includes people living in the following types of housing situations, which are in many cases relatively straightforward to map to ETHOS Light categories:

- Acute homelessness: rough sleeping; people staying in emergency accommodation, women's shelters, etc. (ETHOS Light 1, 2).
- Longer-term housing solutions with unstable tenancy: people with transitional supported accommodated housing and a lease of a Housing First unit.
- Short-term housing solutions: people living with family or friends or people with temporary sublet contracts who have been in contact with social services (ETHOS Light 6).
- People in institutional care, category housing or penal institutions who are within three months of leaving and do not have a place to stay (ETHOS Light 4).

The definition includes clear requirements to be considered as experiencing homelessness (such as the three-month period prior to release from an institution), as well as some level of specification on the types

of institutions to be considered (such as category housing or penal institutions), helping to facilitate the standardisation of data collection efforts across service providers.

Official homelessness statistics in **Australia** are drawn from the *Population Census*, conducted every five years, and based on a statistical definition that is developed along six operational categories:

- People living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out.
- People living in supported accommodation for the homeless.
- People staying temporarily with other households.
- People living in boarding houses.
- People in other temporary lodgings.
- People living in "severely" crowded dwellings (defined as living in a dwelling which requires five or more extra bedrooms to accommodate the people who usually live there).

Official homelessness statistics thus cover a wide array of living situations that would be categorised under ETHOS Light categories 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, in addition to living situations that go beyond the ETHOS Light Typology (such as people living in severely crowded dwellings) and that are not considered in the homelessness definitions of most OECD or EU countries. In addition, Australia collects data through the Census on people who are "marginally housed" and may be at risk of homelessness, but nevertheless who are not classified as homeless and are thus not included in national homelessness statistics:

- People living in other crowded dwellings.
- People in other improvised dwellings.
- People marginally housed in caravan parks.

In **Scotland** (the **United Kingdom**), both the definition of homelessness, and therefore the statistics, have a prevention element, including people and/or households who will experience homelessness within the next two months (this could be extended to six months in forthcoming legislation). Statistics are produced every six months using Local Authority data, with a focus on:

- People and/or households who were sleeping rough prior to their application.
- People and/or households who are in temporary accommodation (and lengths of stay).
- People and/or households with children/dependents.
- Main reason for experiencing homelessness.
- Case characteristics, including support needs.
- Length of open cases from assessment to settled accommodation.

How to assess the main drivers of homelessness?

As discussed in the previous section, there are different pathways into homelessness, including structural factors, institutional and systemic failures, and individual circumstances (Box 2.1). These factors vary in salience across different country, city and community contexts. For instance, the high cost of living and a shortage of affordable and social may be a primary factor in contributing to housing instability and homelessness in one context, while gaps in social protection or in access to public support may be a more relevant factor in another context. Similarly, high rates of substance use in some countries and/or local contexts – including, notably, with respect to opioids (discussed in Block 6) – may be a significant contributing factor to (as well as a consequence of) homelessness, but play a relatively insignificant role in others. Further, systemic and institutional barriers to housing and social services are faced by some groups of the population. Understanding the distinct drivers of homelessness at the structural, systemic and individual levels allows policy makers and practitioners to improve their ability to prevent homelessness and to support people in crisis in developing sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

Including questions about individual pathways and trajectories in standard data collection efforts on homelessness

In **Spain**, the Survey of the Homeless People (EPSH) collects data on the socio-demographic characteristics of people using accommodation assistance centres and restoration centres collected through a questionnaire-based interview, including the reasons why they began to experience homelessness and the time they have experienced homelessness for. In 2022, the primary reasons cited by interviewees for experiencing homelessness included starting over after migrating from another country, job loss and evictions. Approximately one-third of respondents began experiencing homelessness less than a year prior to the survey, 27% had experienced homelessness for one and three years, and about 40% had experienced homelessness for over three years (INE, 2022[33]). Similarly, in **Colombia**, the *Census of Street Dwellers* incorporates a survey that seeks to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of people experiencing homelessness (OECD, 2024[34]), including the reasons for experiencing homelessness and its duration. In 2021, the two main reasons reported by respondents for experiencing homelessness were the use of psychoactive substances and family challenges and conflicts. Additionally, almost 62% of respondents had been experiencing homelessness for over five years (DANE, 2021[35]).

In **Canada**, the Co-ordinated Point-in-Time Counts, *Everyone Counts,* gathers socio-demographic characteristics of people experiencing homelessness through a survey, including reasons for housing loss. In the Third Nationally Co-ordinated Point-in-Time Counts, corresponding to 2020-22, not having enough income for housing and substance use issues were the most commonly reported reasons. Regarding the duration of homelessness, 50% of respondents reported experiencing homelessness for the entire 12 months prior to the survey (Infrastructure Canada, 2024[36]).

Partnering with external researchers to conduct in-depth studies on the drivers of homelessness

In the **United States**, the Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative (BHHI) at the University of California assessed the drivers of homelessness in the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness (CASPEH) (Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, 2023[37]). In collaboration with local governments, the BHHI conducted the study at the request of the California Health and Human Services Agency. The study employed a mixed-methods approach that included surveys and in-depth interviews. It found that a combination of structural factors such as high housing costs and individual vulnerabilities (e.g. discrimination, family/social conflict, exposure to violence, incarceration) increase the risk of experiencing homelessness. The study highlights that, alongside violence, social conflict and household changes –whether violent or not –were significant precursors to homelessness, especially for those lacking affordable housing and adequate income. The study highlighted that the average age of people experiencing homelessness is increasing, marginalised groups tend to be overrepresented and there is a high prevalence of mental health conditions and substance use among people experiencing homelessness. The CASPEH survey provided important insights on the drivers of homelessness in California, highlighting the value of external expertise in homelessness research.

How to improve the quality and coverage of homelessness data?

Relying on multiple data collection approaches to assess different forms of homelessness

There is no single experience of homelessness, nor a typical profile of a person experiencing homelessness. Research has found that people may experience homelessness on a chronic or temporary basis; their living situations are diverse, ranging from sleeping rough, to staying in shelters or temporary accommodation, to sleeping with family and friends; and that different socio-demographic groups (such as

women, youth, LGBTI and migrants) may be more or less likely to experience different types of homelessness relative to others. As mentioned, women are less likely to sleep rough, and more likely to first stay with family or friends before turning to emergency accommodation; others, including LGBTI or migrants, may face barriers and/or discrimination in accessing shelters and services for the homeless. Many annual point-in-time counts tend to take place in late autumn and winter, which risks underestimating the number of people sleeping rough, when weather conditions are less temperate. To reflect this diversity and overcome the data limitations, many countries thus rely on multiple data collection approaches to develop official homelessness statistics.

For instance, the **United States** assesses different forms of homelessness through five data collection approaches, which each covers different subgroups and ETHOS Light categories:

- The *Annual Point-in-Time Count*, which collects information from both sheltered and unsheltered individuals across the United States at a single point in time using a street and shelter count performed by volunteers.
- The *Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, which presents information from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), a case-level information system managed by each Continuum of Care (CoC) on clients to homelessness services.
- The *US Census and American Community Survey*, which includes outreach efforts to enumerate people experiencing homelessness through a questionnaire.
- An annual count on the number of adults and children seeking services from domestic violence shelter programmes, which is conducted through a single 24-hour survey period.
- In addition, the US Department of Education's National Center for Education monitors the number of homeless students identified by public schools each year. Their definition includes any child who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (Lowell and Hanratty, 2022[38]; U.S. Department of Education, 2023[39]).

In **Czechia**, a comprehensive census conducted in 2022 built on a previous census and expanded the coverage of ETHOS categories (OECD, 2024[40]):

- Conducted in 2019, the *Homeless People Census* sought to support the creation of a database with socio-demographic information on people experiencing homelessness, with a specific focus on those without a roof and without an apartment – ETHOS Light 1, 2, 3 and 4 -. For this, street counts were conducted, and service-based methods, capture-recapture methods were utilised.
- The *Census of People from Selected Categories of the ETHOS Classification* builds on the *Homeless People Census* by focusing on groups that are harder to detect, such as people staying in unconventional dwellings and people staying with family and friends (i.e. ETHOS Light 5 and 6) through administrative data and service-based methods.

Further, combining data collection approaches that provide both point-in-time and flow estimates allows for a better understanding of the transitional nature of homelessness. In **Canada**, six collection methods are used to collect information on people experiencing homelessness:

- *Everyone Counts*, a co-ordinated point-in-time count of rough sleepers, people staying in shelters, and people in transitional housing programmes.
- *National Shelter Study*, an annual estimate of the number of people who access emergency shelters over the course of the year.
- *Shelter Capacity Report*, a report on the capacity of emergency homeless shelters, transitional housing programmes, and domestic violence shelters.
- *Canadian Housing Survey*, a survey on housing needs and households' experiences, including previous experiences of homelessness.

- *National Census*, which provides point-in-time information from people staying in shelters.
- *Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS)*, a web-enabled case management system for service providers to collect information on individuals experiencing homelessness. The data from this system (and similar systems) contribute to the National Shelter Study and the Shelter Capacity Report.

The combination of different approaches has also helped to cover a broad range of information on potentially hard-to-reach subgroups of people experiencing homelessness (e.g. unaccompanied youth, people staying with friends or family, LGBTI individuals, and First Nations, Métis or Inuit people). Nonetheless, coverage limitations exist across subgroups.

Casting a wider net in surveyed service providers to enumerate people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness and harder-to-reach socio-demographic groups

Surveying a wide range of services in service-based methods can help capture a broader spectrum of homelessness experiences and improve coverage of individuals who are often underreported in official statistics. This includes people who may seek to avoid detection during street counts by selecting more concealed locations, as well as those who access services that are not covered by existing approaches (e.g. service-based methods). Conducting preliminary qualitative research (including through semi-structured interviews, for instance) to identify locations and services where specific, hard-to-reach populations are more likely to be found can facilitate more effective sampling. Specific adaptations to the design and implementation of street counts and service-based methods can also be envisaged.

In **Germany**, national statistics on people experiencing homelessness are based on two complementary survey-based collection methods, which have been carefully designed to minimise the risk of double counting:

- The *Annual Reporting of People Sleeping in Shelters for the Homeless*, which provides annual point-in-time information on people staying in registered shelters.
- The *Biennial Survey to Count People Sleeping Rough and People Staying with Family/Friends*, which collects information from a broad range of service providers (food banks, health clinics, youth centres, etc.) that aim to support people sleeping rough and people staying with family or friends.

In **Belgium**, a wide array of services is involved in the data collection efforts, including general social services not directly linked to homelessness. Data collection involves night shelters, public and non-profit social services, health institutions like hospitals, psychiatric facilities and refugee centres. Further, low-threshold services, including drop-in centres and social restaurants and social housing companies play a key role in data collection on homelessness, ensuring people experiencing hidden forms of homelessness are counted.

The *OECD Monitoring Framework: Measuring Homelessness in OECD and EU Countries* (OECD, Forthcoming[6]) discusses a range of additional strategies that can improve data coverage, notably of hard-to reach groups, and to assess "hidden homelessness", including:

- **Modifying existing data collection approaches** to better account for the homelessness experiences and service usage patterns of hard-to-reach groups. For instance, in London (the **United Kingdom**), a collaboration among NGOs and local authorities led to the Women's Census of Rough Sleeping, designed to better capture the extent of rough sleeping among women, since women are often less visible in street counts and less likely to engage with outreach teams. Outreach services identified locations frequented by women experiencing homelessness, and conducted the count over a week, rather than a single night, between 7 PM and 7 AM, including at least one daytime shift. Outreach workers were also trained in "trauma-informed outreach" to enhance the sense of safety and control among the women they assisted.

- **Adjusting the frequency of data collection (where relevant).** Resources-permitting, it can also be relevant to consider collecting data on a more regular basis, in cases where data collection is infrequently or irregularly conducted. For instance, counts that do not occur on at least an annual or bi-annual basis could be exercised more regularly. Further, even annual point-in-time counts have their limitations: conducting point-in-time counts (such as street counts) biannually, for instance both a winter and summer count, can help account for changing environmental and social conditions.

- **Linking administrative data** across systems, such as social services, housing authorities, and healthcare providers, can help identify hard-to-reach populations, including individuals who may not engage with traditional homelessness services. Administrative data from multiple agencies can provide information about housing status over time and reveal patterns of service usage, helping to detect individuals facing housing insecurity who might otherwise be overlooked. For example, in **Finland**, the Housing Finance and Development Centre (ARA) circulates comprehensive surveys to municipalities, which collect and report data from various sources, including social welfare and housing service registers, municipal rental housing applicant registers, the Social Insurance Institution's register, and the Digital and Population Data Services Agency's Population Information Register. This broad range of data sources enables the collection of nationwide homelessness data, covering five categories of the ETHOS Light framework, including ETHOS Light 6 (OECD, 2024[27]).

Fundamentals for success

Robust homelessness data are the foundation to understanding the scope and scale of the challenge, and to developing effective public policies. To address the persistent methodological challenges and data gaps in the field of homelessness, there are a number of recommendations for policy makers and practitioners to strengthen homelessness data collection efforts. This Block provides guidance and good practice examples to improve data quality, consistency and comparability. Recommendations thus relate to the identification of different data collection approach(es), the rationale for selecting them and the coherence across different approaches; ways to assess the main drivers of homelessness; considerations for developing a robust statistical definition; as well as decisions about the type(s) of information, and level of detail, that is needed for policy purposes. Across OECD and EU countries, many governments are rethinking their approaches to collect homelessness data, proposing innovative methods, and investing in more robust data collection efforts.

Building on the operational issues and good practice illustrations described above, the following recommendations can thus help policy makers and practitioners strengthen the assessment of homelessness:

- Ensure that homelessness data collection is policy-relevant – that is, that data collection is designed and implemented to meet a clear policy purpose. In particular, aligning data collection efforts with a clear, measurable policy commitment to end homelessness (or specific types of homelessness) can be helpful.

- Develop a clear, consistent statistical definition of homelessness, upon which data collection efforts are based, drawing on the ETHOS Light Typology where feasible.

- Collect disaggregated data by different types of homelessness (e.g. ETHOS typology) and key demographic characteristics of relevance in a given country context to facilitate in-depth assessments and to tailor interventions accordingly.

- Undertake efforts (including through partnerships with competent research entities and NGOs) to assess the structural, systemic, institutional and/or individual drivers of homelessness in your

country, city or community context, to improve the capacity to prevent homelessness and help people exit homelessness.

- Establish a standardised, consistent data collection and monitoring system, which may draw on multiple data collection approaches, and improve data coverage of hard-to-reach groups (including by collecting data from a broad range of service providers, e.g. beyond emergency shelters and temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness).

Further discussion of the additional means to strengthen data collection, reporting, and monitoring, along with a self-assessment tool to identify opportunities to strengthen data collection, is detailed in the *OECD Monitoring Framework: Measuring Homelessness in OECD and EU countries* (OECD, Forthcoming[6]) and in Block 9:

- Explore opportunities to measure "hidden homelessness" and to improve data coverage of hard-to-reach groups in homelessness statistics.
- Ensure the privacy and confidentiality of individuals experiencing homelessness by obtaining informed consent, storing data securely, and using anonymised data where suitable.
- Regularly report data on people experiencing homelessness and make key indicators publicly available to facilitate research and policy development and promote transparency and accountability (Block 9).

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3 Monitoring and evaluation

Block 3 examines the importance of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks to inform homelessness policy and practice. It outlines how systematic M&E enables evidence-based decision-making, improves accountability, and facilitates more efficient use of public resources. Given that systematic M&E in the area of homelessness is unfortunately rare, this block explores ways to improve M&E in the area of homelessness and highlights the benefits of early planning, baseline research, and a focus on both individual and systemic outcomes.

Relevance and key data

Robust and credible evidence generated by monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes enables evidence-based decision making, and helps governments show that the use of public resources and the decisions they make translate into desired outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation are distinct: policy *monitoring* is a measure of policy implementation to ensure that planned activities are on track and that any changes in the underlying conditions are accounted for; it provides evidence to measure performance, identify implementation challenges, and bolster accountability and efficiency. Meanwhile, *evaluations* assess the actual or potential impacts of policy interventions, based on their relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, and process (OECD, 2019[1]; OECD, 2023[2]). By fostering knowledge, contributing to strategic decision-making, and increasing accountability (OECD, 2019[1]), M&E supports governments in designing policies with interventions that are proven to be effective, and in adapting current measures where needed. Data and timelines for monitoring and evaluations exercises are distinct. OECD (2023[2]) emphasises the need to plan for evaluation early on in the process, in terms of identifying the measures to be evaluated, and the data and evidence to be collected before implementation and during the timeframe of the intervention. Figure 3.1 summarises key evaluation criteria (OECD, 2023[2]), underscoring the multi-dimensional nature of issues to be considered.

Figure 3.1. Key evaluation criteria

Note: OECD elaboration.
Source: (OECD, 2023[2]), *Boosting evidence-based policy making for economic development policies in Italy*, www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/topics/policy-sub-issues/economic-surveys/italy-boosting-evidence-based-policy-making-for-economic-development-report-2023.pdf

While M&E processes are often organised at the programme level, over half of OECD countries have legal frameworks that regulate and standardise public policy evaluations across projects (OECD, 2020[3]). However, systematic M&E in the area of homelessness is unfortunately rare (Baptista and Marlier, 2019[4]). Few countries have established M&E frameworks to assess homelessness policies, and earmarked funding for M&E is generally insufficient or non-existent. When M&E exercises are undertaken, baseline

research is often missing, and data are not regularly collected at more than one stage of the intervention. Evaluation also tends to be focused on individual change, rather than systemic outcomes or the context behind interventions which may impact programme success (Pauly, Wallace and Perkin, 2015[5]). Evaluations of Housing First programmes are a notable exception; such evaluations have been instrumental in demonstrating the effectiveness of housing-led interventions (compared to other types of interventions) and in helping to correct course where needed (Baptista and Marlier, 2019[4]).

The recommendations relating to M&E have been informed by the OECD Recommendation on Public Policy Evaluation, which offers valuable insights on improving evaluations (Box 3.1) (OECD, 2022[7]) and work undertaken by the OECD to strengthen evidence-based policy making for economic development (OECD, 2023[2]).

Box 3.1. The OECD Recommendation on Public Policy Evaluation

The OECD Recommendation on Public Policy Evaluation, adopted in 2022, aims to establish robust institutions and practices that promote the use of public policy evaluations. The Recommendation refers to public policy evaluation as the structured and evidence-based assessment of the design, implementation or results of a planned, ongoing or completed public intervention.

The Recommendation calls on adherents to:

- Institutionalise evaluation from a whole of government perspective, by conducting and using public policy evaluations systematically, and by fostering demand for evaluations inside and outside the executive.
- Promote the quality of evaluations, by planning and managing evaluations so that they are fit-for-purpose, as well as by establishing standards and mechanisms, and developing skills and capacities.
- Conduct evaluations that impact decision-making, by embedding them into decision-making processes, and by publicising and communicating their results.

Source: (OECD, 2022[7]), OECD Recommendation of the Council on Public Policy Evaluation, https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0478.

There is currently no international standard – including agreed upon methodologies, data and/or indicators – for monitoring and evaluating homelessness policies and programmes. While generic M&E frameworks can be used, further efforts are required to provide international guidance on adapting M&E frameworks to the homelessness sector. For instance, standardised indicators to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of homelessness policies across countries would help further isolate the aspects of homelessness policies that are most efficient. Future OECD work will aim to further develop this dimension.

Common operational questions

M&E processes should guide homelessness interventions throughout their life cycle to ensure that they are working as intended and reaching their goals. From the outset, this means articulating the purpose and objective(s) of the policy intervention and developing a results framework with relevant indicators, which can be based on existing data collection methods (Block 2). This also includes determining priorities and evaluating existing interventions to prevent and address homelessness to adapt to ongoing challenges (Blocks 4, 5 and 6). Throughout the policy lifecycle, M&E processes can help consolidate learning on

homelessness across countries and sectors, contributing to a stronger evidence base for the effectiveness of specific interventions in different contexts.

The following set of operational questions is intended to guide policy makers and practitioners in strengthening monitoring and evaluation of homelessness interventions:

- When should M&E be implemented in the policy design stage? What are the first steps to develop a robust, results-based M&E framework?
- How can M&E skills be developed in-house, and when should an external expert be used?
- How to create incentives for policy evaluation?
- How can M&E findings be used to better inform policy making?

When should M&E be implemented in the policy design stage? What are the first steps to develop a robust, results-based M&E framework?

Developing a comprehensive results framework at the outset of homelessness interventions

To better understand the impact of a homelessness intervention, M&E should be considered from the beginning. Ideally, a comprehensive results framework should be designed and set in place at the start of the intervention. The framework should explicitly articulate the logic of change behind the intervention of interest – that is, how and why the intervention is expected to achieve its objective(s), including causal relationships and underlying assumptions and risks (OECD, 2023[8]; OECD, 2023[2]). For each level of the results chain, a brief set of indicators should be developed, and where possible, baseline values assigned to each of them. The results framework is an explicit articulation of the different levels of results expected from a particular policy or programme, which could take the form of a graphic display, matrix, and/or summary (World Bank, 2012[9]).

Results frameworks help policy makers identify trends in the outcomes of interest. This baseline exercise can be particularly useful to monitor and assess how well a policy or programme is performing against planned targets, and therefore facilitate an evidence-based approach to M&E.

For instance, the National Strategy to Combat Homelessness in **Spain** (2023-30) integrated an M&E framework from the outset of the policy implementation process:

- First, a results framework identifies overarching objectives, goals, measurable indicators and expected results. The framework makes use of secondary data sources to assign a baseline value to each indicator, providing a starting point for future comparisons.
- To ensure M&E continues throughout the policy cycle, the Spanish strategy includes a monitoring system, which includes biennial progress reports, a monitoring dashboard based on the established indicators, and a biennial programming of measures to adapt the guidelines of the strategy based on current progress.
- The strategy also foresees a mid-term evaluation in 2028 and a final evaluation in 2030.

Establishing an M&E group for effective oversight of homelessness policies

Monitoring and evaluating homelessness interventions requires regular and consistent oversight and adaption. Establishing working groups that bring together key stakeholders, including different levels of government, housing and service providers, NGOs, and people with lived experience, can help to ensure that interventions are being rigorously monitored and evaluated through a multidisciplinary, collaborative, unbiased approach. The inclusion of people who work directly with people experiencing homelessness, along with people with lived experience who use the service or programme being monitored or evaluation,

helps ensure that evaluations remain grounded in and responsive to direct feedback from the target population.

In **Portugal**, the *National Strategy for the Integration of Homelessness People: Prevention, Intervention and Monitoring, 2017-23,* included the creation of the Strategy Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Group (GIMAE), which is composed of a range of public (e.g. ministries, public institutes, local authorities) and private (e.g. NGOs, research institutes) stakeholders (Baptista, 2018[10]). The GIMAE meets bimonthly to assess the progress of the strategy and is responsible for preparing a biennial Action Plan and annual evaluation reports. Each annual evaluation reports on progress towards the strategic objectives, constraints to achieving the objectives, and suggestions for improvement. The biennial Action Plans include consultations with partner entities and people with lived experience of homelessness and provides updated goals and strategic objectives. The creation of the GIMAE signalled a process of continued M&E from the outset of the Strategy; the group continues to meet regularly.

Identifying from the start the data and evidence to be collected ex ante and ex post and the resources needed to collect and analyse the data

Identifying the data and evidence to be collected before implementation and during the timeframe of the intervention is a critical step (OECD, 2023[2]). Some data may exist already within public administration but require linking – a process that takes time and resources. Other data may not be readily available within the public administration and will need to be acquired. For instance, recent OECD work with Italy found that, based on three counterfactual evaluations using micro-level data over the past three years, around 60% of time and resources were spent in linking existing databases within the same public administration (OECD, 2023[2]). This is especially salient with respect to homelessness, given the cross-cutting nature of the issue and relevant policy areas. There are a wide range of methods that can be considered.

How can M&E skills be developed in-house, and when should an external expert be used?

Training sessions can help build M&E skills in-house

There are numerous examples of M&E training opportunities for civil servants:

- In **Ireland**, the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) supports the development and enhancement of M&E practices within the government through capacity building. IGEES staff, who come from diverse backgrounds including economics and statistics, are integrated across various levels of government and are specifically trained in M&E (OECD, 2020[3]).

- In the Latin American region, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) offers an online course on skills to design an M&E framework, to ensure the public programmes they manage generate greater public value (IDB, 2024[11]). The course targets professionals from Latin America who have responsibilities in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes fostering social development. This includes staff from public institutions, non-governmental organisations, academic centres, and international organisations. Similarly, the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES) delivers an online course that aims to teach participants how to design and develop performance indicators as a tool for monitoring and evaluating public programmes (ECLAC, 2024[12]). The course targets public officials from central and sub-national governments and more broadly, people involved in any stage of policy making.

Evaluations of policy interventions can be conducted internally, commissioned to independent external actors, or a combination of both

Similarly, examples of outsourcing M&E are common:

- In **Korea,** the framework act on government performance evaluation recommends that all government agencies design a yearly internal evaluation plan to identify the main policies they will evaluate in a given year. Once an evaluation is conducted, this is transferred to the Government Performance Evaluation Committee (GPEC), the actor in charge of overseeing all government's performance and evaluation systems (OECD, 2020[3]).
- In **Portugal**, the main policy programme aiming to simplify processes for businesses and citizens (Simplex) is evaluated trough joint internal and external peer reviews. On the internal level, project managers have the mandate to systematically report on the progress of the project. Reporting is made publicly available and incorporates insights from key stakeholders and partners, enabling citizens to regularly consult the programme's progress. Further, external evaluators such as academics and officials from the European Commission participate in the programme evaluation (OECD, 2020[3]).

How to create incentives for policy evaluation?

Provide financial resources to local initiatives to participate in national programmes to build up the evidence base

In the **United Kingdom**, the Test + Learn and the Systems-Wide Evaluation programme, launched in 2023 with a budget of GBP 15 million (USD 19 million), will work with local governments and people with lived experience to conduct rigorous evaluations and trials of programmes that aim to end rough sleeping and reduce homelessness. Expected to run until January 2027, the programme will evaluate eight interventions, including, among other things, the provision of employment specialists to facilitate immediate access to paid employment for people experiencing homelessness and people sleeping rough with high support needs; rough sleeping outreach with a health specialist to assess the impacts of people with more acute health needs; the provision of financial support to people with a history of rough sleeping to help them cover costs relevant to exiting homelessness; and time-limited accommodation and immigration advice for people with limited access to mainstream housing and support services due to their immigration status. Most evaluations will be conducted through randomised control trials. The programme was commissioned by the Department of Levelling Up and will be implemented by the Centre for Homelessness Impact.

Including legal obligations to conduct policy evaluation and assigning resources to collect data through surveys

Not explicitly part of the homelessness field, **Italy**'s Start-up Act mandates the annual monitoring of measures supporting start-ups and innovative SMEs, with a report submitted to Parliament by 1 September each year. The report includes detailed data on the uptake of the measures, geographical distribution, and business performance, ensuring ongoing evaluation of their effectiveness (OECD, 2023[2]).

How can M&E findings be used to inform policy making?

Ensuring that policy makers directly engage and respond to evaluation results through pre-determined adaptation processes

M&E processes provide little benefit if policy makers do not engage with the results. From the beginning of the policy cycle, M&E processes should consider how policy makers will engage with the results. This may include requiring policy makers to directly respond to the results through mid-term reports, which include pre-designated action areas.

In Tokyo, **Japan**, *the Implementation Plan for Homeless Self-Reliance Support*, which is currently in its fourth phase, regularly analyses and evaluates interventions to support people experiencing homelessness. Based on the data collected on the number of users, their demographic information, and the success rate of programmes, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government adapts its programmes to better suit the needs of people experiencing homelessness. For example, a recent evaluation found that, while employment counselling and placement services were helping to connect people experiencing homelessness to job opportunities, many individuals did not remain employed for long. Therefore, the programme was adapted to provide support for longer periods of time to help people make a smoother and longer lasting transition into employment. To further inform evaluations, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government holds review meetings with academic researchers, NGOs, facility managers and government departments.

Outside the homelessness sector, the *Prospera*[1] Conditional Cash Transfer programme in **Mexico** demonstrates how programme implementation has been adapted to respond to evaluation findings. The programme's ultimate objective was to foster the development of human capital through three separate components: education, health, and nutrition. The programme had a strong evidence-based design, and a wide range of rigorous impact evaluations were conducted over the years. These evaluations not only provided evidence of impact on the outcomes of interest, but revealed design and implementation challenges that had the potential to hinder the programme's results. As a result, the programme underwent several modifications, including the redesign of the health and nutrition components to incorporate nutritional supplements for pregnant women, breastfeeding women, and children under 5 years of age, as well as a behaviour change communication component.

Fundamentals for success

Monitoring and evaluation are distinct processes, enabling evidence-based decision-making, accountability and the improvement of policies by producing evidence on what works. Despite its significance, systematic M&E in the homelessness sector remains rare and rigorous evaluations (with a control group even rarer; most evaluations lack baseline data and a focus on systemic outcomes. Exceptions, such as Housing First programmes, demonstrate the benefits of evaluations showcase the strength of having robust evidence to adapt and scale up programmes. The OECD's Recommendation on Public Policy Evaluation and recent work by the OECD (OECD, 2023[2]) encourages governments to institutionalise and standardise M&E and provides concrete guidance for policy evaluation. Some countries have started devising integrated M&E frameworks which can improve oversight and guide long-term homelessness strategies. Skills development to carry out M&E, data collection and data linking, and funding for M&E are highlighted as critical challenges.

Building on these operational issues, the following recommendations can help policy makers and practitioners embed systematic monitoring and policy evaluation into policy making:

- Monitor and rigorously evaluate programmes by identifying policy objectives, indicators, and baseline context at the beginning of the policy design stage and carry out evaluations with

stakeholders at pre-determined stages of the policy process. This can be supported by putting in place at the outset a results framework and establishing an M&E group for effective oversight.

- Identify from the start the data and evidence to be collected *ex ante* and *ex post* and the resources needed to collect and analyse the data.

- Build in-house monitoring and evaluation skills, including the ability collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data, create/manage budgets and evaluate outcomes, by conducting regular training and collaborating with academia and the private sector.

- Create incentives for policy evaluation and allocate dedicated resources to set up and sustain robust monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes throughout the policy life cycle and determine whether the evaluation should be internal, external, or hybrid.

- Incorporate evaluation results in policy-making processes and adapt measures with this evidence where needed to improve the impact of interventions.

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Notes

[1] The programme was initially created as *Progresa* in *1997*, and renamed *Oportunidades Human Development Program* in 2002, and *Prospera Program of Social Inclusion* in 2014. The programme finalised in 2018.

4 Prioritising prevention

Block 4 examines homelessness prevention. Timely social and housing interventions to support people transitioning out of institutional or care settings, or people who are at risk of being evicted, can prevent homelessness before it occurs. Despite the proven effectiveness and cost-efficiency of preventive measures, many countries lack systematic implementation and sufficient resources for prevention. This block highlights opportunities to improve early intervention to mitigate the harmful effects of homelessness, including through using existing social and housing supports and exploring the potential for big data and new technologies to identify people at higher risk of homelessness.

Relevance and key data

One fundamental – and as yet, largely under-resourced and underutilised – way to address homelessness is to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. Homelessness prevention can be grouped into several types of measures (Fitzpatrick, Mackie and Wood, 2021[1]):

- *Universal prevention* refers to broad-based measures to prevent homelessness across the entire population, including, among other things, efforts to increase the supply of affordable housing, which have been proven effective in curbing homelessness (Schwan et al., 2018[2]), and social welfare regimes (including minimum income schemes) designed to reduce and prevent poverty (Stephens et al., 2010[3]).

- *Upstream prevention* targets high-risk groups, such as vulnerable youth and individuals leaving institutional settings (e.g. prisons, hospitals, youth care systems or facilities, centres for asylum seekers). Such prevention strategies aim to identify and provide personalised support to people who will be exiting institutions in the near future (Lutze, Rosky and Hamilton, 2013[4]; Cornes et al., 2019[5]; Johnson and Mendes, 2014[6]; Gaetz et al., 2018[7]). Such measures may also target other vulnerable groups who may face structural or systemic barriers to stable housing, such as women who are victims/survivors of intimate partner violence and young people who identify as LGBTI, as well as migrants (including those who are undocumented), who may lack access to, or knowledge of, mainstream public services.

- *Crisis prevention* focuses on measures to support people for whom homelessness is likely to occur within the foreseeable future, including people facing eviction or foreclosure. Support may include landlord-tenant mediation, legal advice and counselling, and/or financial assistance, which have proven to be effective in preventing homelessness (Shinn and Cohen, 2019[8]).

- *Emergency prevention* aims to assist individuals at immediate risk of rooflessness, especially those sleeping rough. Emergency accommodation, such as shelters, can help reduce the number of people sleeping rough (MHCLG, 2019[9]), but does not resolve homelessness (McMordie, 2020[10]).

Mobilising big data and new technologies can be effective in some contexts to identify individuals and households at risk of becoming homeless, and thus enable local authorities and/or NGOs or other stakeholders to reach out to propose support. In order for this to be possible, i) accurate and updated data disaggregated by population subgroup must be collected (Block 2), ii) data-sharing agreements of case management and wraparound services must be communicated across government ministries (e.g. through Memoranda of Understanding, Computer Matching Agreements, etc.); and iii) privacy and safety concerns (particularly with respect to vulnerable populations such as migrants) must be addressed. Thus, *before* mobilising big data and new technologies, the priority should be given to collecting quality data in a user-friendly environment (for instance, improving administrative data collection or a frequently updated case management system).

Many preventive measures have proven more effective – and more cost-efficient – than interventions that provide support *after* individuals have become homeless (Fitzpatrick, Mackie and Wood, 2021[1]; Culhane, Metraux and Byrne, 2011[11]). Along these lines, in recognition of the importance of homelessness prevention, the **United States** formally adopted the first-ever federal Homelessness Prevention Framework in September 2024, which is organised around three main categories of homelessness prevention: prevention (primary) programmes that promote stable housing; diversion (secondary) programmes that help people avoid homelessness; and rehousing and stabilisation (tertiary) programmes that help people quickly move into housing and promote stability once housed (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2024[12]). Additionally, the framework recognises the importance of universal supports in setting the foundation for housing stability and providing equitable opportunities for people to achieve optimal health and well-being.

Nevertheless, while there is increased attention to homelessness prevention policies, systematic implementation and adequate resources are lacking. Most homelessness policies "are not sufficiently preventive in focus", and countries have implemented limited, if any, prevention policies on a broad scale (Baptista and Marlier, 2019[13]). Universal prevention schemes vary considerably across countries, and in most countries are not systematically considered as a primary tool to prevent homelessness. To date, most prevention efforts fall into emergency prevention, with a growing number of initiatives – yet still representing a rather patchwork approach in most countries – focussing on crisis prevention. More efforts ae needed to shift prevention efforts upstream. Considerable gaps remain, and systematic prevention frameworks are rare. This signals an important missed opportunity to intervene early and avoid many of the "harms of homelessness" (Mackie, 2022[14]).

Common operational questions

Prevention programmes span many policy fields and include a range of interventions. The following set of operational questions is intended to guide policy makers and practitioners in strengthening and scaling up prevention efforts at critical points in time, and, more broadly, making prevention a (more) central component of homelessness strategies:

- How can existing social policies and housing supports be leveraged to prevent people from becoming homeless?
- How to develop upstream prevention schemes to support people who are transitioning out of institutional settings or are otherwise at high risk of homelessness?
- How to support households at risk of imminent housing loss?
- How to increase access to and improve the quality of emergency accommodation to avoid rough sleeping?
- As largescale climate events and/or natural disasters increase in frequency, how to plan for emergency housing solutions?
- How can big data, early warning systems, and/or new technologies support efforts to identify households at risk of homelessness?

How can existing social policies and housing supports be leveraged to prevent people from becoming homeless?

Universal schemes that can help to prevent homelessness vary significantly across countries due to differences in governmental structures, social policies and available resources. In some countries, robust national-level social safety nets to prevent poverty and large social rental stocks help to promote housing affordability and reduce the risk of homelessness.

One aspect of the social welfare regime can be measured in terms of public social spending. Rates vary widely across countries, ranging from over 30% of GDP in France to less than 8% of GDP in Mexico (Figure 4.1). OECD work found that the public social spending-to-GDP ratios increased by almost 3 percentage points, on average across OECD countries, during the COVID-19 pandemic, before declining almost as rapidly – falling from 23% on average in 2020 to around 21% in 2022 (OECD, 2023[15]).

Figure 4.1. Public social spending is worth 21% of GDP in 2022 on average across the OECD but levels differ greatly across countries

Public social expenditure as a percent of GDP, 2022 or latest available year
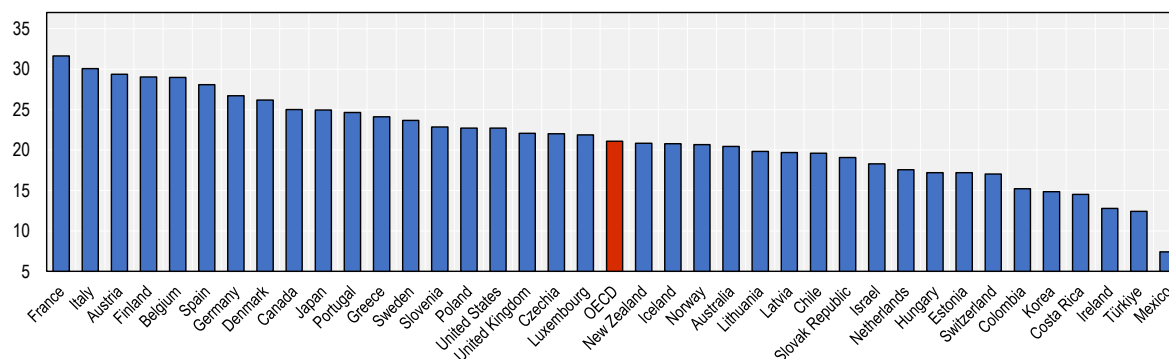
Note: For EU countries data for 2020-22 were estimated on basis of OECD Economic Outlook No 112 (November 2022) and DG ECFIN (2022), the European Union's Annual Macroeconomic database (AMECO) as in November 2022. For the United Kingdom, data for 2021 were estimated on basis of OECD Economic Outlook No 112 (November 2022) and National Accounts Blue Book 2022. For Korea and the United States, data for 2021-22 were estimated based on national budget data. Spending totals for 2020 and 2021 are subject to revision, but these are likely to be small; the estimates for 2022 are most likely to be affected by data revisions to spending and GDP. (p) refers to projections while € refers to estimates. OECD public social expenditure-to-GDP ratio for 2022 is estimated based on the trend in OECD 26. For Norway, the large increase in nominal GDP since 2021 is due to high energy prices (especially gas).

Source: (OECD, 2023[16]), OECD Social Expenditure database (www.oecd.org/social/expenditure.htm).

Considering the role of adequate minimum income schemes that minimise coverage gaps and record high take-up rates in preventing homelessness

In **France**, childless young adults who are not yet 25 years of age face stringent eligibility requirements to enrol in a minimum income programme (RSA): in addition to the income means test, they must have worked at least two years over the last three. This creates a "jump" in the number of recipients at age 25. Researchers exploit the age eligibility cutoff to assess the impact of the RSA on homelessness and find that the RSA benefit reduces homelessness by 20% among young adults aged 22-27. These results were further supported through interviews with RSA recipients (Locks and Thuilliez, 2023[17]).

Even when programmes are designed to provide adequate support to those in need, non-take-up remains a barrier to effective social protection coverage. Non-take-up refers to people who do not receive a social benefit or service for which they are otherwise eligible according to statutory rules and conditions. For example, **Belgium** estimates that between 37% and 51% of the eligible working-age people do not utilise social assistance. In **Germany**, the working-age minimum income benefit was estimated to have a non-take-up rate of 35-37% in 2020. The four primary barriers to programme take-up are i) insufficient or complex information, ii) "hassle costs" or cumbersome application procedures, iii) stigma, and iv) low-expected benefits. Linked data between administrative and social registries can help identify people enrolled in one programme and pre-fill or auto-enrol them in another. Digitalising access to social protection and live client support also help people who face challenges (Frey and Hyee, 2024[18]).

Increasing access to social and affordable housing as an important means to prevent homelessness

While social rental housing is available in most countries, there are significant cross-country differences in the definition, size, scope, target population and type of provider (Figure 4.2). For instance, in the **Netherlands**, **Austria** and **Denmark**, social housing comprises more than 20% of the total housing supply, playing a significant role as a "third sector" in the housing market, whereas in most OECD and EU countries, it constitutes less than 10% of the housing stock (OECD, 2024[19]).

Figure 4.2. Relative size of the social rental housing stock

Number of social rental dwellings as a share of the total number of dwellings, 2022 or latest year available
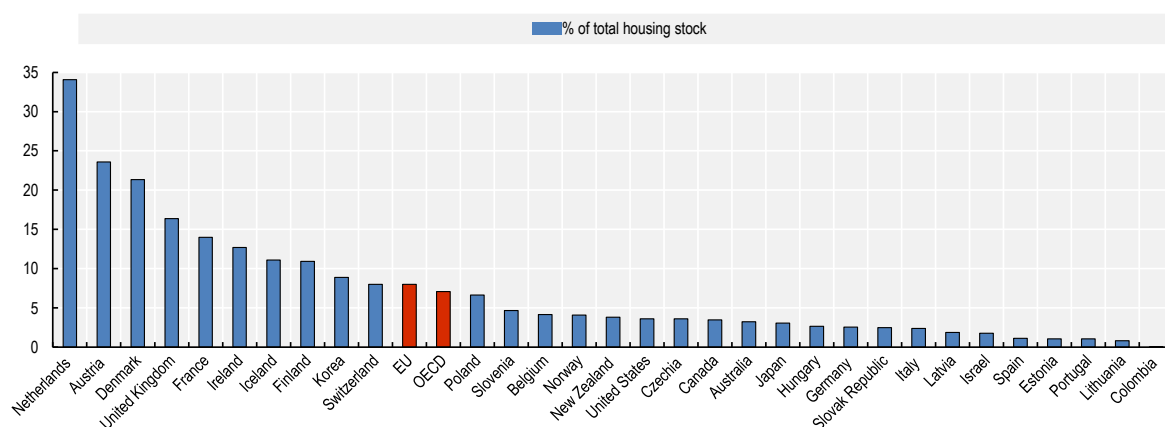
Note: Refer to the detailed notes in indicator PH4.2 in the OECD Affordable Housing Database.
Source: OECD Questionnaire on Social and Affordable Housing (QuASH), 2023, 2021, 2019 and 2016, and desk research.

In addition to the provision of social and affordable housing, means- and/or income-tested income transfers to households directed at supporting households in meeting their housing costs are widespread, available in more than 40 OECD and EU countries. They can cover costs relating to rent, payment of mortgage and/or interest, utilities, insurance and services; they can also be more narrowly designed to support the rental costs of tenants (e.g. "rent allowance"). In most countries, housing allowances are geared towards low-income households, and payment rates often depend on household size, housing costs and income. The coverage and generosity of these benefits vary widely across countries (Figure 4.3) (OECD, 2024[19]).

Figure 4.3. The reach and benefit level of housing allowances vary considerably across OECD and EU countries

A. Share of households receiving housing allowance, bottom and third quintiles of the disposable income distribution, in percent, 2022 or last year available
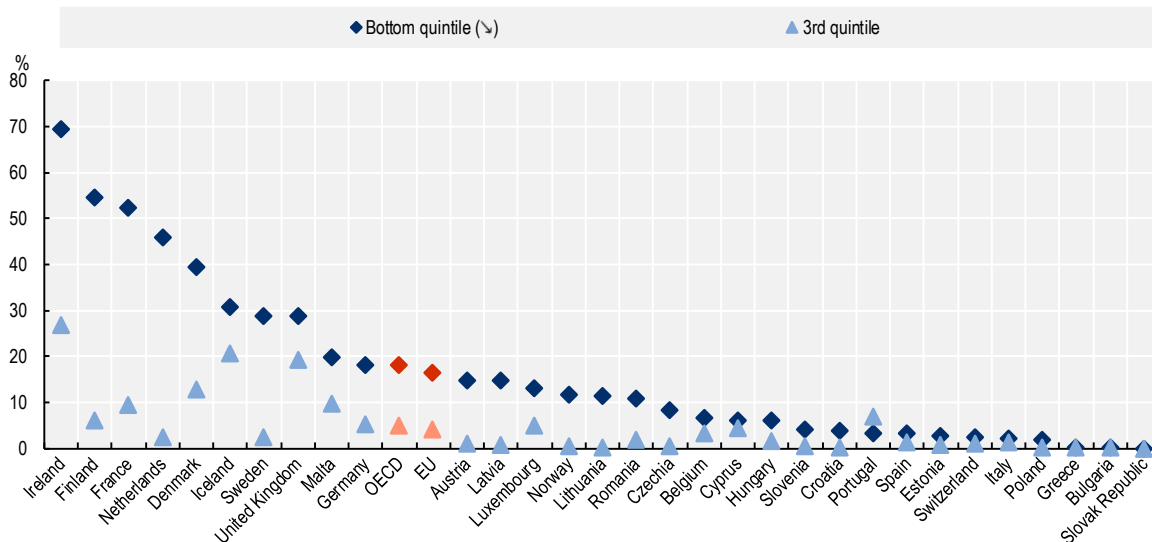
B. Average of rent allowance for four different family types earning at the 10th- or the 50th-percentile of the wage distribution, in percent, 2022
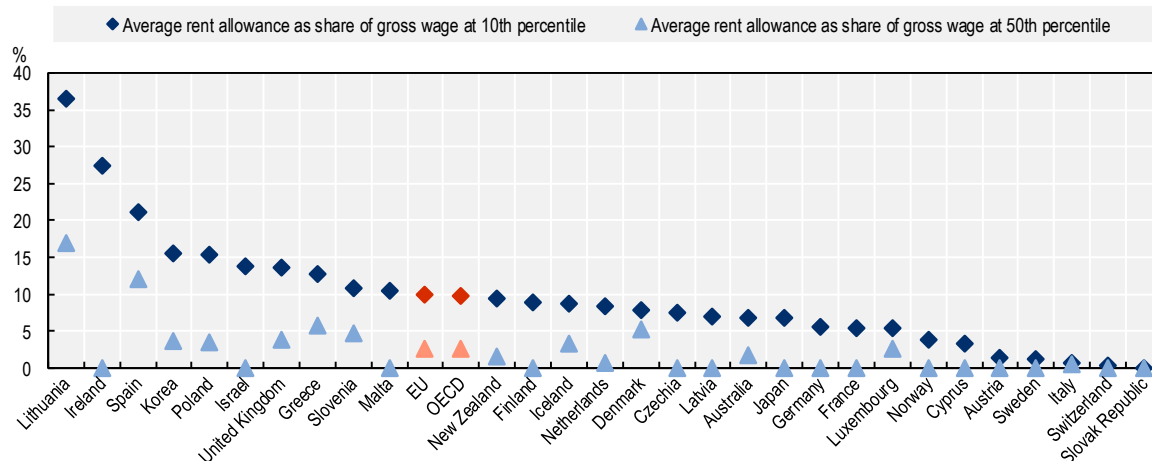
Note: Panel A. 1) No information available for Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Türkiye, or the United States due to data limitations. Only estimates for 100 or more data points are shown. 2) Quintiles are based on the equivalised disposable income distribution. Low-income households are households in the bottom quintile of the net income distribution. 3) Data for Switzerland and the United Kingdom refer to 2021, for Norway to 2020, for Iceland to 2018. 4) In the United Kingdom, net income is not adjusted for local council taxes and housing benefits due to data limitations. 5) In the Slovak Republic, a housing allowance (*Príspevok na bývanie*) does exist. However, it is received by a very limited number of people and linked to strict eligibility conditions.

Panel B. 1) Rent allowance calculated based on assumed rent of 20% of average wage. 2) Only shows central government housing allowance. Where no national scheme exists, a representative region was chosen, refer to country specific information for more details: www.oecd.org/els/soc/benefits-and-wages-country-specific-information.htm. 3) Full-time earnings are either at the 10th or the 50th percentile of the full-time wage distribution. No transitional benefits for entering the labour market are considered; social assistance but no unemployment benefits are considered. 4) The four family types considered are 1) single person, 2) single parent with two children aged 4 and 6, 3) one-earner couple and 4) one-earner couple with two children aged 4 and 6. Earnings are either at the 10th- or the 50th-percentile of the full-time wage distribution.

Further developing the supply of affordable and social housing is an important means to prevent housing insecurity and homelessness. In **Ireland**, the *Housing for all: A new Housing Plan for Ireland – Pathway 2* includes a range of universal homelessness prevention policies. For instance, the Pathway commits the government to building and improving social housing by calling for the delivery of 90 000 social homes by 2030 and increased funding to local authorities to acquire additional land for new-build public housing. In **Norway**, *the National strategy for social housing policies (2021-24): We all need a safe place to call home*, includes measures to increase housing affordability. Such measures include start-up loans to help people move from tenancy to ownership and increased housing allowances for renters. The national strategy also includes a plan to assess how to better support municipalities in improving the rental and owner-occupied housing markets, and an increase in funding to expand the stock of social housing for older people. Nevertheless, a large social housing sector is not by itself sufficient to prevent homelessness.

Developing social rental schemes to mobilise the existing stock for social purposes

Social rental schemes, which include Social Rental Agencies (SRA), can be effective in mobilising the existing housing stock for low-income and vulnerable households through an intermediary between low-income and/or vulnerable tenants and private landlords (see also the discussion of SRAs in the context of Housing First approaches in Block 5).

Social rental agencies (*Agences Immobilières Sociales*, AIS) are the main not-for-profit provider of affordable rental housing in **Belgium,** whereby AISs act as an intermediary between tenants and private landlords. Landlords receive a lower rent than what they would receive on the private market, and the tenants pay an even lower rent, with the AIS covering the difference through public subsidies. The rents that landlords receive are negotiated on a case-by-case basis. In exchange, landlords are guaranteed to receive the rental payment every month and never have an empty dwelling. The lease is signed between the tenant and the AIS. In Brussels-Capital, landlords who rent through AISs are exempted from paying the regional property tax (*précompte immobilier*).

In **France**, rental intermediation (*intermédiation locative*) is a mechanism to improve the affordability of rental housing, particularly for vulnerable populations who face difficulties in securing accommodation on the private market. Rental intermediation in France relies on two operational modes: (i) Social Rental Agencies (AIS), which are accredited by the local prefect to sign management mandates (*mandats de gestion*) with private owners. The AIS establishes the lease between the landlord and the tenant, ensures the maintenance of the dwellings and can offer a guarantee on the rent to the landlord, as well as social assistance to the tenant. The duration of lease must be at least three years, and in exchange landlords are eligible for a reduction in property income taxes up to 65% (depending on the rent reduction) as well as technical and financial assistance to renovate their dwellings; (ii) the Solibail rental intermediation mechanism allows property owners to rent their dwellings to an association or NGO at a reduced price for a minimum of three years. It is overseen locally by the Regional and Inter-Departmental Habitat and Housing Directions (*Direction Régionale et Interdépartementale de l'Hébergement et du Logement,* DRIHL), which establishes the list of public-interest NGOs and associations allowed to use Solibail (e.g. NGOs providing housing solutions to people experiencing homelessness). The association or NGO, as the formal tenant, pays rent to the landlord every month, on behalf of the individual tenant – meaning the landlord has a guaranteed rental income for the duration of the lease, even if the dwelling is vacant. The association can then rent out the dwelling to people in need of an affordable housing solution.

In **Spain**, the NGO Provivienda operates the Rental Mediation Programme, a social rental scheme, which mediates between property owners and individuals with low incomes and limited social support, to open

up opportunities in the rental market that would not otherwise be available. The programme focuses on individuals with low incomes and limited social support, including refugees, migrants, and people experiencing homelessness. To attract property owners to the programme, Provivienda offers and arranges multi-risk insurance guarantees for rental payment – even though unpaid rents are rare in the programme. Agreed rents are approximately 20% lower than market rents, but remain attractive for many property owners, particularly those with vacant properties. Provivienda also provides a range of services, including information and training to tenants and property owners on their rights and obligations under tenancy law; assessment of rental properties, including valuations and furniture inventories; selection and invitation of applicants for identified properties; and drafting of contracts and follow-up and assistance over problems, termination of contracts, and defaults. These services are provided free of charge. Provivienda also makes arrangements for those single people with limited social connections to move into shared flats.

Social Rental Agencies have been gaining in importance in **Poland**. In 2021, Poland introduced the Act of 28 May 2021 amending the Act on Certain Forms of Support for Housing Construction and Certain Other Acts, enabling municipalities to establish co-operation with SRAs, which act as an intermediary between flat owners and prospective tenants who cannot afford to rent a flat on market terms. SRAs assume the risks relating to non-payment or damages in the rented flats and can also offer additional social services for tenants. In Poland SRAs can be, for example, an NGO, a limited liability company or a joint stock company in which the municipality (or municipalities) holds more than 50% of the shares. Property owners have several incentives to set rent below market levels, including the exemption from tax on rental income, a guarantee of regular rent payments or relief from some administrative duties (which are taken over by the SRA). Starting from 1 January 2024, SRAs can also purchase the housing stock to carry out renovations and adapt dwellings that are vacant and/or of poor quality.

Balancing landlord-tenant protections and strengthening enforcement mechanisms

Regulations in the rental market can have implications for housing affordability and housing precarity. This includes, among other things, features of tenancy agreements (relating to contract duration and termination) and controls of initial rent levels and rent level increases. For instance, 13 OECD countries report controls on initial rent levels of at least a portion of the private rental housing stock. In two countries (**Norway** and **Türkiye**), regulated and/or negotiated rents apply across the entire rental sector (OECD, 2024[19]). Regulations may also include broader protections that prohibit discrimination in the housing market or determine a period in which evictions are suspended (such as winter eviction freezes). Several OECD countries have in place a winter eviction moratorium, including **Belgium**, **France**, **Ireland** and **Poland** (OECD, 2024[19]). There is a need to strike a balance in the design of tenancy regulations between ensuring a secure investment climate for (future) investors and landlords and securing good-quality affordable housing for tenants (OECD, 2021[20]).

Other schemes can support the protection of the rights and responsibilities of tenants and property owners and help prevent unlawful evictions and reduce homelessness. This can include, for instance, right to counsel in courts. A legal framework that sets out the conditions for the legal representation of tenants and property owners in disputes can protect both parties and ensure fairness. Access to legal representation can be an obstacle for some tenants in case of landlord-tenant disputes. In such cases, some form of legal support for tenants facing eviction is reported at the national or local level in countries such as **Australia**, **Finland**, **France**, the **United Kingdom** and the **United States**. For instance, in New York (**United States**), since the establishment of the Right-to-Counsel law the number of tenants represented by attorneys in court increased from 1% in 2013 to 63% in 2022, and in 78% of eviction proceedings with representation from lawyers, families were able to stay in their homes (Office of Civil Justice, 2022[21]).

Originally formed in 1910s, **Sweden**'s national tenant union, *Hyresgästföreningen* was institutionalised in the welfare state apparatus after the Second World War. The union sets up tenant associations across the country, negotiates rents on behalf of most tenants in Sweden, provides legal advice and services,

supports home improvement and beautification initiatives, holds local democratic decision-making processes, and works on tenant-centred housing policy both domestically and internationally. The organisation comprises over half a million members. Since 1978, the Tenancy Bargaining Act makes collective bargaining between tenant associations and landlords mandatory. The union bargains rent on behalf of 3 million tenants and rent increases have been limited to controlled amounts (0.8-2% annually) over the past decade (Hyresgastforeningen, 2017[22]; Statistical Sweden, 2019[23]; Ösgård, 2023[24]).

In Brussels (**Belgium**), the Regional Housing Inspection (*Direction de l'inspection régionale du logement*, DIRL) was created in 2003 to enforce the housing code (*Code du Logement*). This service investigates and enforces code violations, protects tenants against landlord retaliations, and removes non-compliant apartments from the housing market (FEANTSA and FAP, 2022[25]).

How to develop upstream prevention schemes to support people who are transitioning out of institutional settings or are otherwise at high risk of homelessness?

Some individuals at high risk of homelessness – including people leaving institutional settings (including prisons, foster or youth care, health facilities, and centres for asylum seekers), as well as specific socio-demographic groups who may face structural or systemic barriers to stable housing, such as victims/survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV), young people who identify as LGBTI, and migrants, among others – could particularly benefit from upstream prevention schemes.

Supporting out-of-care transitions to prevent youth homelessness

In OECD countries, poor transition processes can drive young care leavers into homelessness. For example, a study in **Australia** found that 54% of young people within four years of leaving out-of-home care (OHC) accessed homelessness services and one in three had multiple experiences of homelessness (AHURI, 2021[26]). In the **United Kingdom**, research found that a quarter of all young people experiencing homelessness were once in the care system (National Audit Office (United Kingdom), 2015[27]). LGBTI youth are likely overrepresented among young people experiencing homelessness and housing instability, which has detrimental impacts on their mental health. In the **United States**, over 28% of all and nearly half (44%) of Indigenous LGBTI youth have experienced homelessness or housing instability at some point. This is reported at higher rates among transgender and non-binary youth (The Trevor Project, 2022[28]).

In **Spain,** the Zaguan project managed by *Provivienda* provides people leaving or having left youth care with shared housing solutions along a number of transversal support services (Provivienda, 2023[29]). Such services include tailored job search support, support in finding housing, and psychological support.

In **Canada**, the Family and Natural Supports (FNS) approach is integrated into a range of prevention programmes, including (but not limited to) youth programmes. This approach is based on the finding that family conflict and/or family breakdown are the main driver of youth homelessness in most countries. FNS aims to foster connection and build the support network around the youth to prevent homelessness with a young person's chosen family; the approach has also generated benefits for mental health, education, and employment outcomes (Borato, Gaetz and McMillan, 2020[30]).

In places where this is not already the case, guaranteeing financial support for housing (including access to housing benefits) upon exiting care systems would be a positive step forward.

Identifying youth at risk of homelessness to offer tailored, family-centred support

In **Australia**, the Geelong project is an early intervention programme to help identify young people at risk of disengaging from or leaving school, experiencing homelessness, and entering the justice system. The project operates through a survey administered to students which allows to assess the risk of homelessness based on family-related conflict and identify young people who potentially may need

support. Intensive holistic care support is then provided through a youth-focused and family-centred approach, including individual or group counselling, and support for parents in developing skills to de-escalate conflict and set effective limits and boundaries. An evaluation of the Geelong Project found that between 2013-16, the number of adolescents entering the Specialist Homelessness Service in Geelong declined by 40% from a 10-year baseline (MacKenzie, 2018[31]).

In **Wales (the United Kingdom**), the Upstream Cymru screening tool models the Geelong project as it seeks to assess the risk of youth homelessness through a survey distributed to secondary school students and it looks to mitigate such risks through cross-actor collaboration, including schools and service providers (Mackie and Rees, 2024[32]). As of October 2023, 4 700 surveys were conducted across secondary schools in Wales. The results allowed to produce a composite risk measure that showed around 15% of students to be in high or immediate risk of experiencing homelessness. This model was first developed in **Australia** and similar work is being replicated in **Belgium**, **Canada**, **England** and **Scotland** (the **United Kingdom**) and the **United States**.

Preventing homelessness and promoting safe, stable housing stability for victims/survivors of intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a leading cause of homelessness in the OECD (see Box 2.1). Housing-related protection and support for survivors of IPV (who are often women and LGBTI individuals) is often overlooked. A lack of alternative housing can also lead people to remain in or return to violent relationships. Survivors of domestic violence are also more likely to face discrimination in the housing market, which can discourage survivors from reporting their abuse or seeking support (OECD, 2023[33]). Women experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable to poor physical and mental health outcomes. While emergency shelters can provide critical, immediate support, the integrated Housing First approach has reduced homelessness more effectively among victims and survivors.

In **Australia**, the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes (KWSITH) programme aims to support women and their children who have experienced family and domestic violence to stay in their own home, or in a home of their choice, where it is safe. Through the programme, the Australian Government funds state and territory governments, and select NGOs, to deliver services to improve the safety of women and their children. The programme provides a range of safety responses, such as risk assessments, safety planning, home security upgrades, and case management. The programme can help to prevent homelessness by offering greater housing stability for women experiencing violence, and providing an alternative to homeless shelters and emergency accommodation. This can also help reduce the strain on emergency accommodation providers (Australian Government, 2024[34]).

Providing housing support to migrant communities

In countries for which disaggregated data on homelessness among migrants are available, estimates suggest that migrants are overrepresented among individuals experiencing homelessness (OECD, 2024[35]). What is more, immigrants tend to be overrepresented among those living in poor housing conditions (OECD/European Commission, 2023[36]). For asylum seekers, the temporary nature of housing within host country reception systems, along with compounding conditions of poverty, may leave them vulnerable to homelessness.

In **France**, the AGIR programme (*Accompagnement global et individualisé des réfugiés*) provides individualised housing and employment support for refugees for up to 24 months. The programme offers, across numerous metropolitan areas, a one-stop shop to facilitate the integration process for refugees, including by supporting them in accessing housing and medical and social supports, as well as processes such as opening a bank account and obtaining a driver's license (Ministry of the Interior and Overseas Territories, 2024[37]).

In Newcastle upon Tyne, England (the **United Kingdom**), a Cross Council Migration Group was formed, which selected partner organisations responsible for identifying and supporting refugees at the point of transition off public entitlements to prevent homelessness. These partners offer refugees a variety of services and help them navigate the resources that can move them to housing stability.

Providing people in prisons with a safe housing solution for their re-entry

Comparative research shows there is an association between homelessness and people in the criminal justice system in EU countries, and high rates of contact with criminal justice system are present among the highest risk populations who are experiencing recurrent homelessness in Europe. For example, in Czechia a screening tool records that 60% of inmates were roofless, houseless, or in insecure housing (following ETHOS typology) at some point in the last three years before their imprisonment. Around a third of people released from Czech prisons in 2021 received a one-time Immediate Emergency Assistance (*Mimořádná okamžitá pomoc*) grant, which is a good proxy indicator for risk of homelessness (EOH, 2023[38]). In France, nearly 22% of people leaving prison reported having precarious accommodation or no housing available, and the Paris/Ile-de-France region reported nearly 12% of new prison arrivals as experiencing homelessness (Direction de l'administration pénitentiaire, 2020[39]). In England and Wales (the **United Kingdom**), 13% of individuals leaving prison between April 2023 and March 2024 were reported as experiencing homelessness upon release (UK government, 2024[40]).

In the **United States**, the California based Homecoming project provides daily subsidies to homeowners in exchange for providing a living space to a person exiting prison over a six-month period (Impact Justice, 2024[41]). Upon matching hosts and beneficiaries, both parties receive ongoing support services related to effective communication, problem-solving, decision-making, and collaboration. The goal of the initiative is to support the social re-integration process of people leaving prison while providing a temporary housing solution to prevent homelessness. A programme evaluation conducted in Alameda County (California) suggests that all beneficiaries (over 100) left the programme having secured a stable housing solution for their own and that 95% left either with a job or enrolled in a job training or an educational programme. Additionally, the Zero Returns to Homelessness initiative managed by the Department of Justice in the **United States** is a cross-system, multi-agency approach to expanding housing options and access for people returning from prison and jail. Strategies under this initiative include bridging silos across systems, conducting universal housing assessments, equitably connecting people to evidence-based housing solutions, lowering barriers to housing at the housing provider level, expanding the number of housing options available, and leveraging and combining a range of funding sources.

How to support households at risk of imminent housing loss?

Crisis prevention measures – notably relating to eviction prevention – are increasingly common. Around two-thirds of OECD and EU countries reported to the 2023 OECD QuASH that they provide specific support to households facing eviction – including, among other things, counselling, financial support, landlord-tenant mediation, and/or safety planning for survivors experiencing landlord sexual harassment or assault. Much of the support is provided by municipalities and NGOs, and the availability and type of support varies widely across local authorities.

In countries with relatively high eviction rates (see indicator HC3.3 in the OECD Affordable Housing Database (OECD, 2024[19]), measures to avoid evictions may be especially relevant as a prevention tool. In addition, countries with a large share of households in the bottom income quintile that are housing-cost overburdened – that is, those who are spending over 40% of their disposable income on housing costs – would also do well to consider crisis preventive measures.

It is important to emphasise that evictions do not systematically lead to homelessness, and that there are many pathways into homelessness, beyond evictions. Nevertheless, even when evictions do not directly

lead to homelessness, they often cause multiple and compounding negative outcomes for low-income tenants. A study based in the **United States** showed that an eviction order increased the probability of using an emergency shelter by 3.4 percentage points in the year following the eviction, representing a more than 300% increase relative to those who are not evicted. These estimates were substantially larger for African-American and female tenants (Collinson et al., 2023[42]).

Figure 4.4. A large share of low-income tenants in the private rental market are considered overburdened by housing costs in OECD countries

Share of population in the bottom quintile of the income distribution spending more than 40% of disposable income on mortgage and rent, by tenure, in percent, 2022
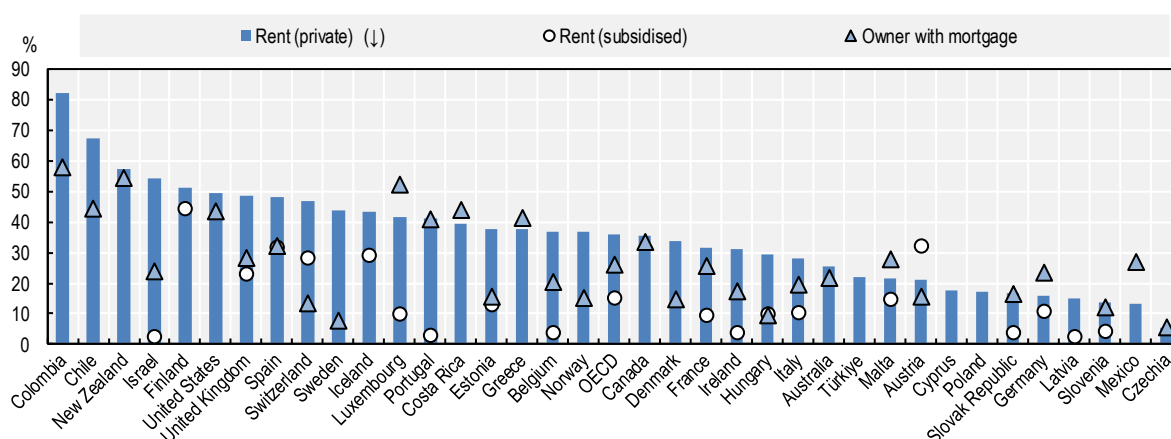
Note: 1) In Chile, Mexico, Korea and the United States gross income instead of disposable income is used due to data limitations. No data on mortgage principal repayments available for Denmark, Iceland, and Türkiye due to data limitations. 2) Results only shown if category composed of at least 100 observations. 3) Data for Australia, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom refer to 2021, Norway to 2020, Canada and Türkiye to 2019, Iceland to 2018, New Zealand and Israel to 2017 and Korea to 2012.
Source: (OECD, 2024[19]), OECD calculations based on the European Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC 2022), except for Switzerland (2021), Norway (2020), and Iceland (2018); the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics Survey (HILDA) for Australia (2021); the Canada Income Survey (CIS 2019); the Encuesta de Caracterización Socioeconómica Nacional (CASEN) for Chile (2022); the Gran Encuesta Integrade de Hogares (GEIH) for Colombia (2022); the Encuesta Nacional de Hogares (ENAHO) for Costa Rica (2022); calculations from the Bank of Israel for Israel (2017), the Japan Household Panel Study (JHPS 2022); the Korean Housing Survey (2021); the Encuesta Nacional de Ingresos y Gastos de los Hogares (ENIGH) for Mexico (2022); Household Expenditure Survey (HES, Stats NZ) for New Zealand (2017); Türkiye-National SILC (2020); Understanding Society – The UK Household Longitudinal Study (2021); the American Community Survey (ACS) for the United States (2021).

Supporting the role of housing counsellors who offer advice and connect people at risk of imminent housing loss with relevant services to avoid eviction

In **Finland**, the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA) provides grants to municipalities to hire and fund housing advisors (ARA, 2024[43]). Housing advisors design action plans to help clients address a variety of challenges, including eviction threats and rental arrears. Housing advisors conduct screening processes and work together with housing providers, NGOs, and social workers, which allows service referrals for clients.

In **Estonia**, the Estonian Debt Counsellors Association offers targeted support to households facing debt through debt advisors. Debt advisors offer comprehensive support to beneficiaries, including legal and financial counselling, as well as psychosocial support for life crises such as unemployment or illness. Additionally, they can assist households in negotiations with creditors (Estonian Debt Counsellors Association, 2024[44]). Debt advisors provide holistic support for beneficiaries, covering legal and financial

counselling, but also psychosocial support, including life crises. Moreover, debt advisors support households by mediating and negotiation with creditors.

In **Austria**, counselling centres provide counselling and support with the application process for *Wohnschirm, a* federal programme providing financial support to prevent evictions. If granted, two types of financial support exist: one assumes rent arrears, and another provides lump-sum support payments to enable beneficiaries to move into an affordable dwelling (Austrian government, 2024[45]). Since the start of the programme, over 11 700 households have received financial support; from these, 10 500 apartments have covered rent arrears, and 1 200 have received support to change their residence. The law is currently in force through the end of 2026.

In **Canada**, a number of tools are in use in different local context to help stabilise an individual's housing and prevent eviction, including:

- Rent banks (which provide short-term loans to cover rent arrears).
- Energy assistance payments.
- Community legal clinics to help tenants navigate landlord-tenant relations and advise tenants about their rights.
- Credit counselling agencies.
- Landlord-tenant mediation services (Homeless Hub, 2024[46]).

Supporting households at risk of foreclosure

Strategic political initiatives can protect countries from a massive increase in evictions during a period of crisis. The great financial crisis of 2007-08 had significant impacts on the housing and property system in **Greece,** putting homeowners at risk. In response, a moratorium on auctions of first housing and any property up to EUR 200 000 for debt towards the banks was introduced in 2009. The *Katseli law in Greece* allowed property owners threatened with foreclosure to apply for a debt moratorium, a rescheduling of repayments, or for interest to be cancelled. Around 60 000 households were placed under protection of this law between 2011 and 2013. While precise numbers on how many foreclosures were prevented by the law are difficult to ascertain, it is estimated that tens of thousands of households were safeguarded. In recent years, there has been a lot of pressure for the gradual liberalisation of this protective framework (Siatitsa, 2017[47]; FEANTSA and FAP, 2022[25]).

How to increase access to and improve the quality of emergency accommodation to avoid rough sleeping?

As further developed in Block 5, the provision of long-term housing as a core solution to end homelessness should be prioritised. Nevertheless, emergency shelters and temporary housing solutions will remain a necessary part of the response to prevent rough sleeping and support individuals and households in times of crisis.

Adapting emergency shelters and temporary accommodation to meet the needs of a range of socio-demographic groups

There is scope to adapt emergency shelters and temporary accommodation to better meet the needs of different socio-demographic groups. Traditionally, many shelters were typically frequented by – and thus, designed for – a predominately single, male clientele. Yet, there is in many places increased heterogeneity in the population in need of temporary accommodation – and thus, a need to ensure that such facilities meet the needs of a broader range of demographic groups, including women, families with children, LGBTI, among others.

In **Ireland**, the Ombudsman for Children undertook a survey of families with children staying in shelters to assess the specific challenges and needs of children, and developed proposed guidance to shelters to ensure a more welcoming environment. In **Germany**, the Diakonie Frankfurt and Offenbach facility adapted their emergency housing to better accommodate transgender women. As part of this process, they provided training to staff and engaged in consultations on how to improve the accessibility of shelters to transgender women, which included, among other things, transitioning from dormitory-style sleeping arrangements to private rooms, as well as private bathrooms.

Facilitating access to up-to-date information on shelters and services

Facilitating access to housing and related resources can help individuals navigate the range of available services. In **France**, the online platform *Soliguide* provides information on shelters and services across French territories to support individuals in vulnerable situations (including people experiencing homelessness). The services encompass a range of categories, including shelters and housing solutions, reception centres, activities, food, advice, training and employment, hygiene and welfare, material assistance, health services, specialised support, technology resources, and transport options. When a user interacts with *Soliguide*, the platform employs geolocation to identify relevant services, providing details about the service's nature, operating hours, transportation options, and potential access conditions such as accommodation for animals or disability-friendly features. The platform is accessible in eight languages: French, Arabic, English, Spanish, Russian, Portuguese, Persian, and Ukrainian. Evaluations of the platform suggest that users of the platform predominantly seek food aid, temporary shelters, emergency housing, and longer-term accommodation; in terms of performance impact, it is estimated that per EUR 1 invested in the platform, a EUR 1.93 social return on investment is obtained (Solinum, 2022[48]).

As largescale climate events and/or natural disasters increase in frequency, how to plan for emergency housing solutions?

Prevention measures are also relevant to support individuals in the aftermath of disaster. Climate change has resulted in more frequent and severe natural disasters (such as floods, fires, or earthquakes) that can displace people from their homes and put lives at risk. In the United States alone, an estimated one in ten residential properties were damaged by natural disasters in 2021 (CoreLogic, 2022[49]). This trend is particularly stark in wildfire-prone regions: in the western United States, for instance, residential structure loss due to wildfires increased by 246% between 1999 and 2020 (Higuera et al., 2023[50]). A recent survey in California (the **United States**) found that 2% of the state's homeless population had lost their shelter following a wildfire or natural disaster. Vulnerable and lower-income populations are also more likely to be entrapped in higher climate-risk areas, have higher barriers to evacuation, and need more resources to resettle post-disaster (Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, 2023[51]).

In February and March 2022, major floods struck the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales, **Australia,** leaving more than 4 000 properties uninhabitable and damaging another 10 849. The region had already been subject to flooding and bushfires between 2017 and 2021. Thus, the housing system was significantly constrained before the flood (e.g. high levels of homelessness, people living in compromised dwelling conditions, and applicants waiting for social housing), but the flooding exposed the level of "housing vulnerability" in the region due to the shortage of low-cost options in the private rental market and inadequate levels of social and transitional housing. After the floods, pre-existing housing support services were subsumed into the flood-response evacuation and emergency housing systems (including human resourcing and housing stock) (van den Nouwelant, 2022[52]). A 2024 audit found that the government quickly provided emergency accommodation to 1 440 displaced persons across 11 temporary sites, though the high demand led to challenges in terms of costs and co-ordination (Audit Office of New South Wales, 2024[53]; MacKenzie, 2024[54]).

In the **United States,** the US Department of Veteran Affairs, the US Department of Health and Human Services, and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development established an interagency group to offer guidance on preparedness for addressing the needs of people experiencing homelessness during emergencies. Building on the group's discussions, a toolkit was developed: *Disaster Preparedness to Promote Community Resilience* (Gin et al., 2020[55]). The toolkit is organised into three thematic areas: building an inclusive emergency management system, ensuring the preparedness of homeless service providers, and providing guidance for healthcare providers (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2017[56]).

In the aftermath of the 2023 earthquakes, the government in **Türkiye** has implemented several measures to address homelessness and support individuals in need of shelter. *The Accommodation Projects for the Homeless*, co-ordinated through the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations, provide temporary housing to homeless and isolated individuals, particularly during harsh winter conditions. These projects also cover essential needs, including cleaning, health services, basic food, and clothing, funded by the Social Assistance and Solidarity Encouragement Fund. Additionally, the *Shelter Assistance Programme* supports the repair and maintenance of homes deemed uninhabitable due to neglect or disaster, the construction of reinforced concrete and prefabricated houses, and the provision of household goods to citizens affected by the disaster.

How can big data, early warning systems, and/or new technologies support efforts to identify households at risk of homelessness?

In England (the **United Kingdom**), the Maidstone Borough Council implemented a data analysis model developed by a private company to support homelessness prevention. First implemented in 2019, this tool scanned databases from various service providers to identify potential risk factors, such as missed utility payments or participation in housing assistance programmes. Using this data, district authorities identified at-risk population groups and proactively contacted them to offer early intervention services to prevent homelessness, including housing payments. In the pilot year of the project, 650 alerts were generated for individuals at high-risk of experiencing homelessness and through early intervention, the homelessness rate reduced by 40% (Xantura, 2020[57]). The data analysis model also provided financial benefits. In its pilot year, the Maidstone Borough Council achieved a net saving of GBP 225 000 (USD 285 000) while societal savings amounted to GBP 2.5 million (USD 3.7 million), and administrative burdens were reduced by 61 days. An updated benefits-analysis revealed that in the January 2021 to November 2022 period, the predictive model yielded GBP 344 000 (USD 436 000) in savings. The Test + Learn programme (featured in Block 3) will expand this pilot to reach four other municipalities, along with a robust evaluation using a randomised controlled trial to understand its effectiveness. Also in the **United Kingdom**, Streetlink offers mobile phone self-reporting of rough sleeping.

In Los Angeles (the **United States)**, the California Policy Lab uses predictive models to identify and prevent homelessness. In 2019, an algorithmic predictive model that leverages both real-time and historical data from county agencies was launched. The model draws information from various sources, including emergency room visits, jail admissions, psychiatric hospitalisations, and individuals receiving cash or food aid who list the county office as their address. Based on these data, case workers reach out to at-risk individuals to provide tailored assistance, such as financial aid, food provision, and connection to social services (California Policy Lab, 2019[58]). In 2021, a more nuanced tool was launched: the Homelessness Prevention Unit. This tool also relies on county data linking but it only retrieves information from clients of the Department of Health Services and the Department of Mental Health who are stably housed. Based on linked data, the predictive model identifies individuals at high risk of experiencing homelessness; once identified, it reaches out and provides them with rental assistance and connections to other social services, including mental health and employment support. Further, it assigns an additional base monetary sum that

varies across beneficiaries. The goal of providing different amounts of money transfers is to measure the impact of increased financial assistance on programme outcomes. As of 2023, the evaluation of the pre-trial pilot phase of the programme suggests that 90% of the programme beneficiaries retained permanent housing during the programme.

Fundamentals for success

Much more can be done to make prevention a core component of homelessness strategies and to introduce and strengthen specific preventive policies. This includes maximising the impacts of universal prevention efforts, like the social protection system and housing support, and ensuring balanced tenancy regulations and legislation. There is also considerable scope to support people who are transitioning out of institutional settings or are otherwise at high risk of homelessness, as well as households who are facing eviction. While the provision of long-term housing solutions should be prioritised (cf. Block 5), emergency shelters and temporary housing solutions will remain an important part of the solution in times of crisis; sufficiently preparing for such times of crisis is essential. Further, ensuring that temporary accommodation is of high quality and adapted to meet the needs of a range of socio-demographic groups, including families with children, women, people who identify as LGBTI, and others. Finally, big data, early warning systems, and new technologies can support efforts to identify households at risk of homelessness, enabling social service providers to reach out to at-risk individuals and households to offer support. As mentioned, prevention can be both effective and more cost-efficient, relative to interventions that support individuals *after* they have become homeless (Fitzpatrick, Mackie and Wood, 2021[1]; Culhane, Metraux and Byrne, 2011[11]).

Building on these operational issues, the following recommendations can help policy makers and practitioners prioritising prevention of homelessness:

- Leverage existing social policies and housing supports to reduce the risk of homelessness, including social protection schemes and access to affordable and social housing.

- Ensure balanced rights and protections of property owners and tenants in tenancy agreements and related legislation.

- Provide targeted, timely support to people due to be discharged from any institution (e.g. prison, hospital, care system or facility) to secure appropriate housing and providing, where needed, tailored wraparound services to address their specific needs and facilitate social integration (cf. Block 6).

- Provide targeted assistance to people facing imminent housing loss (e.g. people at risk of eviction, victims/survivors of intimate partner violence) to help them find an appropriate housing solution.

- Ensure access to safe, quality emergency accommodation with low barriers of entry to prevent individuals from sleeping rough and guaranteeing that facilities are welcoming and safe for all individuals.

- Assess *ex ante* the specific needs and resources required to connect people experiencing homelessness to housing solutions in the aftermath of large-scale climate events or natural disasters.

- Explore novel approaches to prevention, where relevant, including early warning systems, using big data technologies. To facilitate this, governments could consider how to standardise data collection across systems as much as possible.

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5 Long-term housing solutions: Housing-led and Housing First

Block 5 explores the significant paradigm shift in homelessness policies towards unconditional, long-term housing solutions, exemplified by housing-led and Housing First programmes. These approaches prioritise immediate access to long-term housing without prerequisites related to employment, substance use or enrolment in specific programmes. Despite evidence of improved outcomes and cost savings, the implementation of these approaches remains limited in many OECD and EU countries. This block provides guidance on mobilising housing units, addressing intersectional needs, and improving evaluation to scale up housing-led and Housing First approaches to pursue systems change.

Relevance and key data

Since the 1990s, homelessness policies have undergone a significant paradigm shift among many experts, advocates and service providers to shift the focus of housing support away from a reliance on emergency accommodation towards the provision of unconditional, long-term housing solutions. This transition has paved the way for the adoption of Housing First and housing-led programmes in many countries. Housing First and housing-led approaches aim to provide long-term, immediate housing solutions to people experiencing homelessness, as distinct from "staircase models" that make access to housing contingent on the completion of counselling or treatment programmes (Box 5.1). There is broad consensus underpinned by strong evidence that Housing First and housing-led solutions are an effective and resource-efficient pathway out of homelessness and towards housing stability. They have proven successful for diverse populations in a variety of country contexts (Pleace, Baptista and Knutagård, 2019[1]; Jacob et al., 2022[2]). Providing long-term housing to people experiencing homelessness as quickly as possible maximises the benefits of stable housing (Busch-Geertsema, 2005[3]) and minimises the negative outcomes associated with emergency accommodation (McMordie, 2020[4]) and rough sleeping (Aldridge et al., 2019[5]).

In practice, there are broadly two approaches to the provision of immediate, long-term housing, depending on the complexity and intensity of an individual's service needs:

- Individuals with more complex challenges and higher-intensity service needs, including mental health conditions or substance use disorders, can be supported through Housing First programmes, which have been proven to lead to improved housing stability and health outcomes (Keenan et al., 2021[6]; Roggenbuck, 2022[7]; Tsai, 2020[8]).

- For individuals with low-service needs, the provision of housing and tailored, low-intensity assistance have been found to reduce homelessness and enhance housing stability (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 2016[9]) – these can be effectively addressed through housing-led models.

Box 5.1. What is Housing First? What is Housing-led?

Housing First

Housing First models provide tailored, intensive support for people experiencing homelessness with high and/or complex service needs by providing them with long-term, immediate housing and enabling them to exercise control over their support services (OECD, 2024[10]). A series of randomised controlled trials have shown that Housing First can produce greater housing retention among the chronically homeless compared to treatment-as-usual groups (Pleace, Baptista and Knutagård, 2019[1]). Importantly, Housing First does not mean housing *only*: the provision of tailored, targeted wraparound services is an essential part of the Housing First model (see Block 6).

Housing-led

Housing-led models emphasise the provision of long-term, immediate housing, but are rather targeted towards people with limited (or no) service needs. In short, housing-led solutions are generally understood to accommodate "people whose needs can be largely, or entirely, addressed by the provision of an adequate, affordable and secure home" (Pleace, Baptista and Knutagård, 2019[1]).

In the **United States**, Housing First programmes have been found to be cost-effective and to reduce homelessness and increase quality of life: every dollar invested in Housing First programmes results in USD 1.44 in cost savings. In **France**, an evaluation of the *Un chez-soi d'abord* Housing First programme

demonstrated significant savings, primarily through reduced use of services, with 70% of savings from fewer hospitalisations and 30% from reduced use of accommodation facilities. The programme's annual cost per person of EUR 14 000 has been found to be completely offset by the savings generated relative to traditional service models (Délégation interministérielle à l'hébergement et à l'accès au logement (DIHAL), 2024[11]). Housing First has also been shown to be a more efficient allocation of resources than traditional services in the **United Kingdom** and North America (Albanese, 2019[12]) and for youth in the **Netherlands** (CEBEON, 2023[13]). Indeed, providing housing assistance without preconditions improves employment outcomes for people able and willing to work and reduces health costs for people experiencing homelessness, making it therefore both rehabilitative and cost-effective, offsetting public service programme costs within 18 months (Cohen, 2022[14]), (Brennan et al., 2024[15]).

Nevertheless, while Housing First and housing-led approaches have been gaining ground for many years, they are not yet sufficiently widespread or scaled up in most OECD and EU countries. According to the 2023 OECD QuASH:

- 28 OECD and EU countries report that a Housing First and/or housing-led approach to homelessness exists; 8 countries report that such an approach does not exist.
- 16 OECD and EU countries report that a Housing First and/or housing-led approach to homelessness exists at *national* level; 12 countries report that this approach exists at the *regional level* in their country; and 25 countries report that a Housing First and/or housing-led approach to homelessness exists at *local level* in their country.
- Only six OECD and EU countries report data on the number of spaces available in Housing First units. Such data are not available in most other countries.

Common operational questions

The following set of operational questions aims to assist policy makers and policy advisors when introducing, scaling up, or improving existing Housing First and housing-led programmes:

- How to help people transition into long-term housing?
- How to implement and scale up housing-led and Housing First approaches to pursue systems change?
- How to mobilise housing units for housing-led and Housing First programmes?
- How can Housing First and Housing-led solutions support people's intersectional needs?
- How to measure the success of housing-led and Housing First programmes?

Subsequent Blocks provide further discussion on wraparound services (Block 6), funding and financing (Block 7), governing (Block 8), and building the political buy-in to scale and institutionalise Housing First approaches (Block 9).

How to help people transition into long-term housing?

Directing people to an appropriate housing solution through an in-depth needs assessment

In **Finland**, finding the right housing solution from the start is done through an in-depth needs assessment. People experiencing homelessness first visit a service centre where an in-depth interview is carried out to decide which type of housing solution is most suitable. During the search for the appropriate housing solution, people experiencing homelessness can stay in the service centre, free of charge. Options include i) support housing (accommodation provided with limited social support and guidance); ii) supported housing (which includes integrated social and healthcare services, such as cleaning, substance use

support, financial guidance and staff that is always present); and iii) other supported housing (additional forms of accommodation from different service providers (e.g. the Salvation Army)). Although there is no evaluation of housing readiness, people experiencing homelessness must participate in a discussion with a case worker who guides them to the appropriate housing support. Wraparound services are always provided on a voluntary basis (Juhila, Raitakari and Ranta, 2022[16]; Kaakinen, 2023[17]).

Making Rapid Rehousing a priority for households with low to moderate service needs

In the **United States**, Rapid Rehousing programmes aim to swiftly assist households in need of housing with the main goal of promptly ending homelessness and securing stable housing. Rapid Rehousing programmes offer the resources necessary for a smooth transition into stable, long-term housing. Rapid Rehousing can include a range of resources, including assistance in finding suitable housing, offering financial assistance to secure housing (e.g. security deposits, application fees, payment of rental arrears), rental assistance payments, and housing-related social support services. A dedicated case manager offers support to overcome barriers like credit issues or legal matters and other beneficiaries, together with volunteers, offer resources to improve overall well-being (USICH, 2018[18]). These programmes have shown effectiveness in reducing the number of families experiencing homelessness (Gubits et al., 2018[19]). Notable programmes include the *Rapid Re-housing Demonstration Program*, *the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program*, *Supportive Services for Veteran Families,* and *the Family Option Study* (Gubits et al., 2018[19]). The United States also provides transitional housing programmes, providing up to 24 months of temporary housing with supportive services for individuals and families. While both Rapid Rehousing and transitional housing can provide supportive services and varying lengths of housing assistance – ranging from a few months to two years – transitional housing can be better suited for individuals who need more support developing life skills to live independently or who need a safe place to stay while they search for stable permanent housing.

Scotland (the **United Kingdom**) is also developing rapid rehousing plans as part of the government's efforts to end homelessness.

Providing one-time unconditional cash transfers to help people experiencing homelessness find a home

In **Canada**, in a cluster-randomised trial, researchers tested if providing a solution for one of the main drivers of homelessness – lack of financial resources – can sustainably reduce homelessness. Fifty participants experiencing homelessness in Vancouver were given CAD 7 500 (USD 5 360) while 65 others were part of the control group. Results showed that cash recipients spent fewer days in homelessness, saved and spent more money, with no increase in frivolous spending. Researchers calculated that this saved CAD 777 (USD 555) per recipient in societal costs. Further experiments also highlighted public mistrust in individuals experiencing homelessness managing money and effective messaging to support cash transfer policies for homelessness reduction (Dwyer et al., 2023[20]). In the **United Kingdom**, the Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) is conducting three randomised controlled trials (RCTs) to test financial support projects, including one-off cash transfers for people sleeping rough and young people who age out of the care system (CHI, 2024[21]); these evaluations, for which interim findings are expected in autumn 2025, will be key to understanding the long-term impact of such programmes.

In the **United States**, similar programmes are being piloted across the country. One example is the *Denver Basic Income Project* (DBIP), that explores the feasibility and impact of providing regular, unconditional cash transfers to unhoused individuals and families in Denver. Led by the *University of Denver's Center for Housing and Homelessness Research*, this randomised controlled trial (RCT) compares three cash payment models. Year one results indicate significant improvements in housing stability, reduced time spent unsheltered, and substantial public cost savings. Ongoing monitoring of medium- and long-term outcomes will be essential to assess the programme's sustained impact (DBIP, 2024[22]). A similar

programme focussed on youth homelessness has been implemented in New York City (Morton et al., 2020[23]).

How to implement and scale up housing-led and Housing First approaches to pursue systems change?

Setting regional targets for the provision of new Housing First units based on actual needs and capabilities

In **Ireland**, the Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage in Ireland unveiled the Housing First National Implementation Plan from 2018 to 2021. Collaboratively, the Department and local authorities established regional targets for annual Housing First unit deliveries, informed by data and homelessness needs assessments. The overarching national objective was to provide 663 tenancies by 2021, facilitating the programme's inaugural expansion into all regions of the country. By October 2021, 722 Housing First tenancies had been established, surpassing the national target, and expanding the programme's reach across the nation (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Ireland), 2022[24]).

In 2022, the Irish Government introduced the Housing First National Implementation Plan for 2022-26, following a similar model as the previous plan. To ensure alignment of these defined targets with regional needs, the government drew on research conducted by The Housing Agency and engaged local governments in assessing Housing First needs along criteria set by the government. This comprehensive effort resulted in a commitment to make an additional 1 319 Housing First units available by 2026, strategically distributed across regions with a phased rollout from 2022 to 2026 (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (Ireland), 2022[24]). This approach has helped the government closely monitor progress and provide targeted support where needed, all within a framework based in the assessed needs of local communities, facilitating responsible and effective programme scalability.

Assessing housing outcomes and cost-savings to cement Housing First as the backbone of national homelessness strategy

As outlined in Block 1, Housing First has been a core strategy in **Finland** since 2008, with four consecutive government programmes committing to a strategy to end homelessness by 2027. The Ministry of the Environment takes a lead co-ordination function, collaborating with the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA), the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Health Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organizations (STEA). They actively direct funding to third-sector organisations for housing projects and the acquisition of apartments from the market, subsequently making these apartments available to be rented by people experiencing homelessness (Juhila, Raitakari and Ranta, 2022[16]). The funding structure is a blend of central and municipal government funding as well as funds from Finland's Slot Machine Association, RAY. Tenants pay a share of their income in rent (usually between 25-35%) (see further discussion of the funding structure in Block 7). Initial evaluations showed that while Housing First was a costly upfront investment, the intensified support and accommodation provided to people experiencing homelessness delivers annual savings of about EUR 21 000 due to the reduction in the numbers of hospital visits and use of rehabilitation services. These savings have helped make the case to scale up the programme (Centre for Public Impact, 2019[25]).

Combining intervention with research to monitor results

In Lisbon**, Portugal,** Housing First programmes have been steadily expanded and are supported by research to evaluate their outcomes. Since 2009, Lisbon's *Casas Primeiro* Housing First programme has provided immediate access to long-term housing and personalised support services for chronically

homeless individuals with mental health and addiction issues. The programme prioritises a housing solution, without treatment or sobriety prerequisites. Results of the two-year pilot study found a 90% housing retention rate, significant improvements in quality of life, housing satisfaction, and community integration, a decrease in alcohol and drug consumption by 68%, a reduction in emergency service utilisation by 87% and psychiatric hospitalisations by 90% (Ornelas and Duarte, 2018[26]). The programme offers dispersed individual apartments throughout the city and uses diverse funding sources (including public funds from national and municipal governments), private foundations and corporate donations. Occupants contribute 30% of their monthly income towards rent. In the last 10 years, combining intervention with research has been essential for establishing and expanding the programme. Since 2020, the programme has been implemented nationwide and currently offers over 400 spots.

Using rigorous evaluations to make the case to expand Housing First

In **France**, the Housing First programme, *Un chez-soi d'abord*, has recorded growth since its inception, from around 350 units in 2017 across four cities (Paris, Marseille, Toulouse and Lille) to 2 570 units in 32 cities in 2022 (Tinland et al., 2020[27]; Délégation interministérielle à l'hébergement et à l'accès au logement (DIHAL), 2023[28]). This substantial growth over a six-year period is underpinned by encouraging results from the programme's evaluation (Délégation interministérielle à l'hébergement et à l'accès au logement (DIHAL), 2023[28]), using a randomised controlled trial, which found that the initiative had led to reduced in-patient days, enhanced housing stability, and cost savings for individuals with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder who were experiencing homelessness (Tinland et al., 2020[27]; Loubière et al., 2022[29]). These findings prompted the government to expand and scale up the programme, extending it to medium-sized cities and rural areas as part of the government's *Logement d'abord* 2023-27 plan (Délégation interministérielle à l'hébergement et à l'accès au logement (DIHAL), 2023[28]).

New Zealand has made significant progress in expanding their programmes on Rapid Rehousing targeted for people with low to moderate service needs and Housing First for those with higher service needs (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 2023[30]; Litmus, 2023[31]). Housing First provision more than doubled over the 2020-22 period, reaching 2 468 individuals in 2022 (OECD QuASH 2023). Māori are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Since 2020, 58% of the households supported by the Housing First programme are Māori.

Mobilising Housing First Networks as advocates to shift the paradigm in homelessness policy

In the **Netherlands,** the Housing First network demonstrates how a network can help advocate for a shift from housing-led solutions co-existing with a more prominent staircase model to a focus on housing-led and Housing First approaches as a centrepiece of the strategy to tackle homelessness (Housing First Europe, 2023[32]). It also showcases the importance to assess and cater to specific needs of the person experiencing homelessness when providing services (Housing First Netherlands, 2021[33]). The first Housing First programme was established in the Netherlands in 2006, and many municipalities have adopted the model thereafter. However, the staircase model of tackling homelessness remains prominent. Thus, Housing First Netherlands, along with training and peer exchange activities, advocates for system change to shift away from the staircase model (Housing First Europe, 2023[32]). This paradigm shift is also reflected in the latest strategy on homeless in the Netherlands (National Homelessness Action Plan, 2022[34]).

How to mobilise housing units for housing-led and Housing First?

Mobilising housing in the private rental market through social rental agencies, which offer incentives to private landlords to lease their dwelling at an affordable rent

The *Coup de Pouce* programme in **Luxembourg**, operational since 2019 and backed by the Ministries of Housing and Family, Integration, and the Greater Region, offers a viable solution to find housing options for people experiencing homelessness. Through the social rental management system, the service rents private properties to extend housing to individuals and families in need. Dedicated social workers assist beneficiaries with their potential service needs that go beyond housing, ranging from training programmes to employment opportunities. This initiative stands out for its holistic approach that engages property owners, ensures rent security and offers tax exemptions of up to 50% on net rental income. The *Coup de Pouce* programme attempts to empower individuals to use local resources by applying a community-oriented approach.

In **Spain**, landlords renting their properties have fiscal deductions on their annual income tax return. Deductions vary depending on the characteristics of the dwelling rented, the conditions established on the rental contract – including the duration and the price – and the characteristics of the renter. Deductions range from 50% to 90%.

Additional examples of social rental schemes are discussed in Block 4.

Charging a dedicated government agency to scan the private housing stock to identify potential units and negotiate with owners

In Wallonia, **Belgium**, the Walloon Observatory on Homelessness created the *housing sensor* in 2013 to identify and utilise private housing units to provide Housing First and affordable housing. Operating in most major cities in the Walloon Region (e.g. Liège, Charleroi, Namur, Mons, La Louvière, Tournai), the *housing sensor*, which is a regional government agency made up of housing and homelessness experts, regularly scans the private housing stock to identify suitable housing units and negotiate directly with owners. Although owners typically receive lower rent in Housing First or housing-led programmes compared to the private market, the *housing sensor* makes participation more attractive by minimising risk. The *housing sensor assumes* the risk of tenants not paying rent or causing damages and can also act as efficient mediators if conflict arises. Tenants also receive support with administrative processes (i.e. signing the lease and performing inventories), moving in and applying for rent or social subsidies, further minimising the risk of non-payment or conflict between the tenant and the owner.

Developing co-operation agreements with social housing providers to reserve some units for Housing First

In **Austria**, the government adopted a new Housing First programme, in which 2 500 people are planned to receive their own homes over the next two years with apartments being supplied by non-profit housing associations and private providers (BMSGPK, 2024[35]). The programme builds on past Housing First experiences in Belgium, which functioned with co-operation agreements between social NGOs and social housing providers, which allocated a certain number of dwellings to Housing-First tenants (Housing Europe Observatory, 2018[36]). Lessons from these experiences found that strong partnerships between the different partners relied on clear division of roles and responsibilities (social housing providers acted as the landlord and manager of dwellings, while social services were delivered by the relevant NGO(s)); a continuity of co-operation between the partners and a good social mix within social housing units (avoiding the spatial concentration of Housing-First tenancies) (Housing Europe Observatory, 2018[36]).

Similarly, in **Belgium**, as part of a three-year test phase in eight cities, the Housing First Belgium programme supported 150 people experiencing homelessness with access to housing and intensive

support services. Housing-First tenants accessed public social housing through exceptional agreements with social housing landlords; monthly rental payments were largely supported by the tenants' primary income source (the minimum income scheme) (Housing Europe Observatory, 2018[36]).

Exploring the potential for small-scale collective, long-term accommodation with tailored services

In **France**, *pensions de famille* – small-scale, collective residential settings that propose a "family atmosphere – have been in place since a pilot project in 1997. Currently, around 22 000 people live in these structures, which offer an individual dwelling space, without a time limit, along with access to shared, communal spaces and hosts who provide additional, tailored support to residents.

How can housing-led and Housing First solutions support people's intersectional needs?

Engaging people with lived experience in the design and implementation of housing-led and Housing First solutions

When developing a Housing First programme, people with lived experience should be actively involved throughout the process to ensure that housing and related supports are best conceived to meet a range of needs. Approaches such as incorporating the feedback of impacted individuals during pilot phases, promoting peer-led outreach during rollout, and systemising peer-support in case service can make a programme more nuanced, egalitarian, and effective. Refer to Block 1 and Box 1.3 for further discussion and country examples.

Tailoring Housing-First to the specific needs of youth

Practical experiences have demonstrated that the Housing First model can and should be tailored to the specific needs of young people. Originally developed in **Canada** by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) was designed as a rights-based intervention aimed at individuals aged 13 to 24 who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing homelessness, based on the premise that the causes and conditions of youth homelessness are different from those of adults (Homeless Hub, 2024[37]). The model seeks to address the immediate housing needs of young people, while facilitating their transition to adulthood through the provision of age-appropriate supports relating to health, well-being, life skills, education and employment, and social inclusion. The model can be adapted to the needs of specific populations (e.g. care leavers, Indigenous youth), and housing solutions can vary, depending on the individual's needs (ranging from, for instance, facilitating safe returns to a family member's home through family reconnection, to supportive or transitional housing options). The five principles of Canada's HF4Y model include:

- A right to housing with no preconditions.
- Youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination.
- Positive youth development and wellness orientation.
- Individualised, client-driven supports with no time limits.
- Social inclusion and community integration (Homeless Hub, 2024[37]).

Interventions based on the Canadian model have been replicated in various countries.

Ireland has put in place the Housing First for Youth programme to help address the specific needs of vulnerable youth. The programme, managed by the NGO Focus Ireland, takes a holistic approach, prioritising housing stability for young individuals, regardless of their background or the causes of their homelessness. By providing secure housing and age-appropriate support services, the programme

empowers young people, equipping them with the skills needed for independent living. Unlike Housing First programmes for adults, the programme recognises that young people may frequently change residences and offers flexible, tailored services that adapt to their needs. Housing First for Youth in Ireland has achieved zero homelessness among programme participants, a 96% sustainment rate, tenancies for 76% of young people, and access to education or employment for nearly a third of participants. This approach not only provides immediate housing solutions but also focuses on long-term stability and independence, effectively breaking the cycle of youth homelessness. Collaborations with partners such as local authorities and Ireland's Child and Family Agency have allowed for resource pooling and expertise sharing, contributing to the programme's success and sustainability. Additionally, under the national Youth Homelessness Strategy, a housing-led intervention named Supported Housing for Youth (SHY) is currently being developed.

In **France**, the *logis jeunes* project in Lyon supports youth aged 18 to 21 transitioning out of care by offering tailored assistance, including housing. The institution managing the project holds the tenancy of multiple dwellings, allowing beneficiaries to sublet housing for 18 months, with the option to transition to tenancy (Eurocities, 2023[38]). Additionally, it provides support in securing alternative housing tailored to beneficiaries' needs and preferences. In 2023, 14 people entered the programme and 12 exited it. Of those exiting the programme, half transitioned to independent living (ACOLEA, 2024[39]).

In **Spain**, the H4Y FUTURO project provides housing solutions for people experiencing homelessness aged 18 to 25. Jointly managed by *Provivienda and Hogar Sí,* the project follows the Housing First for Youth methodology, providing immediate housing access while allowing participants flexibility in planning their transition to independent living, ensuring their active involvement in this process (Provivienda and Hogar Sí, 2023[40]). Based on a preliminary evaluation comparing baseline data with data collected seven months into the programme, 92% of participants remained housed. When asked about their perception on the possibility of moving into autonomous housing within the next year, on a scale of 1 to 7, the average response was 4.94.

Tailoring Housing-First to the specific needs of veterans

In the **United States,** more than 35 000 veterans experienced homelessness in January 2023, according to the latest point-in-time count, an 8% increase from the year before (VA Homeless Programs, 2024[41]). The Department of Veteran Affairs housed 46 552 Veterans experiencing homelessness in permanent housing by the end of 2023 and provided them with wraparound services (Diaz, 2023[42]), (United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2024[43]). The majority of veterans housed through the Department's homelessness programmes moved into rental apartments with short or long-term subsidies. A smaller percentage were housed through rentals without a subsidy, through home ownership or through permanently reuniting with family or friends.

Developing transitional Housing programmes with a gender perspective

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a leading cause of homelessness and can harm physical and mental health and financial outcomes (OECD, 2023[44]). The Domestic violence Housing First (DVHF) model in the **United States** aims to support recent survivors of domestic violence who are or are at risk of becoming homeless. A group of researchers from Michigan State University, in collaboration with the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, studied the effects of DVHF through a quasi-experimental, longitudinal study in comparison to services as usual (SAU) (e.g. support groups, counselling, advocacy, and referrals). They found that victims/survivors who received the DVHF intervention experienced improved housing stability, safety, and mental health over two years compared with those who received SAU. Victims/survivors who received DVHF also reported higher prosocial behaviours from their children compared to parents who received SAU (Sullivan et al., 2023[45]; OECD, 2023[44]). The **Australian** programme, Keeping Women Safe in Their Homes, is another relevant example, discussed in Block 4.

Young people who identify as LGBTI are over-represented among the youth population experiencing homelessness, and family conflict is the leading cause of youth homelessness. In February 2016, the YMCA Sprott House opened **Canada**'s first transitional housing programme designed specifically for the needs of LGBTI+ youth in partnership with the city of Toronto. Findings from an evaluation indicated that youth recipients experienced a higher level of safety, improved mental health, and a higher perception of safety in their day-to-day lives compared to their previous experiences in programmes that were not specific to LGBTI+ populations (Abramovich and Kimura, 2019[46]).

Further discussion of how governments can best address the support needs of individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness are found in Block 6.

How to measure the success of housing-led and Housing First programmes?

Regular reporting of households in Housing First units to assess programme performance

New Zealand monitors progress in the delivery of the Housing First Programme by reporting on a monthly basis the number of households staying in Housing First units (Figure 5.1). Beyond this, the Housing Dashboard collects monthly data on public and transitional housing, other housing built by the government, Housing First, the Public Housing Register, and other housing support provided. The dashboard is freely accessible and is updated at the end of every month. This allows to visualise the evolution of the programme within the city or country where it is being implemented, in order to monitor and evaluate its performance. In addition to the Housing Dashboard, there are other regularly updated products that provide visibility of a range of housing programmes, and progress towards overall strategic goals outlined in the government Policy Statement on Housing and Urban Development. For instance, *MAIHI Ka Ora, Ka Mārama* is a Māori housing dashboard collated and hosted by Te Tūāpapa Kura Kāinga – Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). It includes data on programmes that support Māori housing aspirations, and data that describes the disproportionate effects of the housing crisis on Māori.

Figure 5.1. New Zealand's delivery of the Housing First Programme and its efforts to monitor progress

Number of households currently in service of the Housing First programme in New Zealand (June 2019-June 2024)
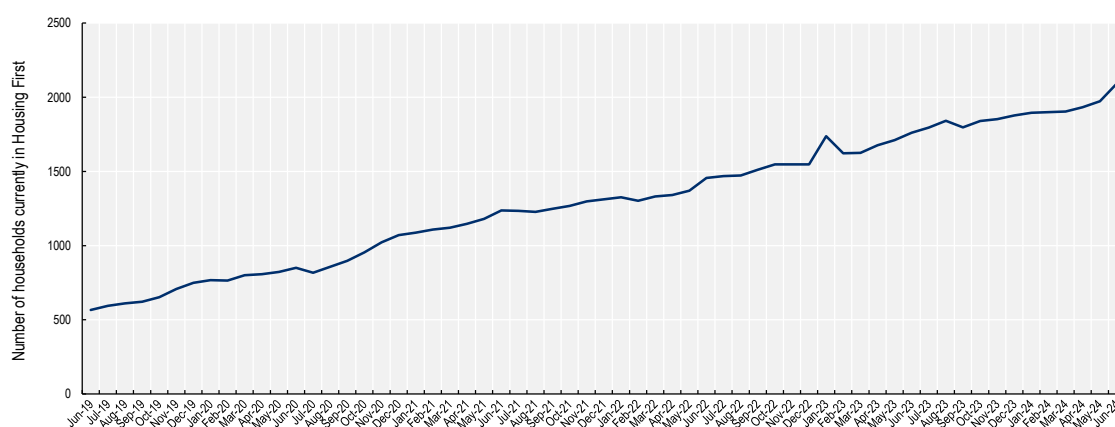
Note: The number above refers to households currently being supported through the Housing First programme.
Source: (Statistics New Zealand, 2024[47]), The Housing Dashboard, www.hud.govt.nz/stats-and-insights/the-government-housing-dashboard/housing-support#tabset.

Choosing the right indicators to monitor progress

An external assessment of HOGAR SÍ's Hábitat programme methodology in **Spain** demonstrates how to include a range of economic indicators in a cost-effectiveness analysis of its Housing First model (Panadero Herrero, 2021[48]). The report tracks the costs of the Hábitat programme in comparison to programme alternatives, as well as housing retention rates, participant satisfaction, and participant use of social services. The study also monitored participant discrimination, level of victimisation, happiness, and physical and mental health. The evaluation found both direct positive outcomes (reducing homelessness) and indirect positive outcomes (other positive socio-economic and health outcomes), especially when accounting for the reduction in social service consumption.

Recent research from the **United States** measures the economic impacts of Housing First on income and healthcare costs, finding that the provision of housing assistance without preconditions improves employment outcomes (for people able and willing to work) and reduces health costs for people experiencing homelessness and is therefore both rehabilitative and cost-effective. In Los Angeles, California, a novel dataset combining administrative records from multiple public agencies and a random case manager assignment was used to show that Housing First assistance was both rehabilitative and cost-effective, resulting in reduced homelessness and crime, as well as increases income and employment. The savings from an increase in income and employment are large enough to offset public service programme costs within approximately 18 months (Cohen, 2022[14]). In Massachusetts, research on Medicaid enrolees who are chronically experiencing homelessness also leveraged administrative data, and found that individuals who receive support from Housing First experience greater reductions in healthcare service utilisation and incur significantly lower healthcare costs (Brennan et al., 2024[15]).

Cost-benefit analyses of some Housing First programmes provide evidence on the return on investment of such policies. In **Canada,** the At Home/Chez Soi study provided Housing First accommodation and wraparound services for individuals experiencing homelessness with mental health conditions in five cities over a two-year period. A cost-effectiveness evaluation of the study found that 69% of the costs of the intervention were balanced out by savings in other social services, such as emergency shelters (For the At Home/Chez Soi Investigators, 2020[49]). In the **United States**, the Denver Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond Initiative was launched in 2016 and it aimed to provide individuals experiencing chronic homelessness with permanent housing and support services. An evaluation of the programme from 2016 to 2020 found that participants had fewer shelter stays, police interactions, jail time, and detox facility visits compared to those in the control group (Cunningham et al., 2021[50]). Regarding cost offsetting, approximately half of the annual cost per programme participant was covered by reductions in the expenses of other public services (Gillespie et al., 2021[51]).

Fundamentals for success

Housing-led and Housing First approaches, which prioritise providing unconditional, long-term housing, are an essential component of the paradigm shift to effectively address homelessness. Evidence has shown that these models are effective in reducing homelessness and improving housing stability, particularly for individuals with complex needs. Preliminary evidence suggests that Housing First can be cost-effective, particularly when considering the cost savings from reduced reliance on shelters, emergency rooms, and other public services. More evidence of this kind could strengthen the case for Housing First approaches.

Although Housing First programmes have shown signs of cost-effectiveness and better outcomes compared to traditional models, they are not yet widely scaled in most OECD and EU countries. Scaling-up of Housing First programmes systematically will be the challenge for most countries in the coming years.

The block addresses how to mobilise housing units, engage diverse populations, and monitor progress, encouraging governments to integrate these approaches into national strategies.

Building on these operational issues, the following recommendations can help policy makers and practitioners to install, scale up or improve housing-led and Housing First programmes:

- Pursue housing-led and Housing First as core policies to provide housing solutions alongside comprehensive wraparound services, tailored to an individual's support needs.

- Facilitate rapid transitions into appropriate long-term housing, using a detailed needs assessment and a housing-led approach for individuals with low to moderate support needs.

- Leverage the existing housing supply and social protection system to facilitate long-term housing solutions, including through social rental schemes, co-operation agreements with social housing providers, and other opportunities to mobilise housing in the private stock.

- Tailor housing-led and Housing First programmes to the needs of specific socio-demographic groups, such as youth, LGBTI, women, older people, Indigenous groups, and migrants, ensuring inclusivity, appropriate housing solutions, and targeted support.

- Track the progress and effectiveness of housing-led and Housing First programmes through systematic monitoring and evaluation and rigorous research.

- Scale up housing-led and Housing First programmes to end homelessness, including by leveraging mainstream social services to support housing retention, setting regional targets, using research and evaluation to monitor outcomes and cost savings, and advocating for a system-wide shift in homelessness policy.

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6 Low-barrier, tailored services

Block 6 explores how to meet the health and social service needs of people experiencing homelessness, in light of the diversity in both the type and intensity of support needs across individuals. This block highlights the significant disparities in health outcomes for people experiencing homelessness, who are often at increased risk of various diseases and have a shorter life span, compared to the general population. It provides guidance to assess support needs, remove barriers to mainstream services, introduce low-barrier health and social services, and facilitate access to job training and opportunities for people who are able to work.

Relevance and key data

There are vast differences in the type and intensity of health and social service needs among people experiencing homelessness (Pleace, 2023[1]). Some individuals experiencing homelessness primarily require help to secure long-term, stable housing, while others have multiple and/or more complex needs that require higher-intensity health and social services and support, in addition to housing (Block 5). Depending on the individual, service needs may relate to, among other things, health, substance use, trauma counselling, childcare, and/or employment and training. They can range from facilitating access to health insurance and housing assistance, to providing a broad spectrum of low-barrier health, social, and housing services. There is also scope to ensure more effective responses to issues relating to intimate partner violence (IPV), trauma, and child-related needs. Box 6.1 provides a non-exhaustive list of potential services that may be relevant for individuals facing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

Access to appropriate services is crucial for people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. Research has found that health outcomes of people experiencing homelessness are systematically poorer relative to the general population: people experiencing homelessness are at increased risk of diseases, as well as mental health conditions, substance use, sexually transmitted diseases, and other health disorders (Fuller-Thomson, Hulchanski and Hwang, 2000[2]). Evidence from a range of countries has demonstrated that people experiencing homelessness tend to have significantly shorter life spans than the general population (see, for instance, (Cha, 2013[3]; Romaszko et al., 2017[4]; Ivers et al., 2019[5]; Tito, 2023[6]; Frankeberger et al., 2022[7])).

Box 6.1. Types of services that may be relevant for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness

The following list is not exhaustive:

- Emergency housing solutions, including overnight shelters (including accommodation for victims/survivors of intimate partner violence)
- Housing-led and Housing First and services
- Food services
- Social assistance services
- Health care services (including sexual and reproductive health services)
- Outpatient clinics
- Hospitals
- Rehabilitation centres
- Psychological and/or trauma support
- Street medicine services
- Family reconnection
- Access to facilities for hygiene and personal care
- Legal assistance and social services
- Harm reduction services: Overdose prevention centres/safe injection sites
- Eviction counselling centres
- Employment/education services (including authority in charge of social assistance/housing benefits)

Access to medical services among the general population varies widely across countries (Figure 6.1). While access has improved for low-income households over time, gaps persist. Barriers to accessing social and health services are more prevalent among certain groups, such as migrants (Kaur et al., 2021[8]).

Figure 6.1. Access to medical services often varies across income groups

Unmet needs for medical examination due to financial, geographic or waiting time reasons, 2022 or latest year, percentage of the population
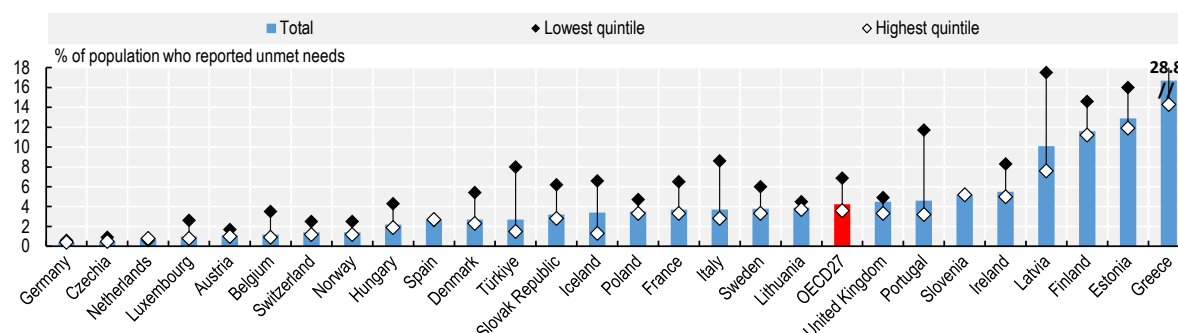
Notes: Data for 2023 instead of 2022 for Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. Data for 2021 instead of 2022 for Türkiye. Data for 2019 instead of 2022 for Iceland and the United Kingdom.
Source: Eurostat Database, based on EU-SILC and (OECD, 2021[9]).

Common operational questions

There are opportunities to improve the provision of services to people experiencing homelessness throughout OECD and EU countries. The following set of operational questions is intended to guide policy makers and practitioners in strengthening different dimensions of service provision in their country, city or community context:

- How to assess the support needs of people experiencing homelessness?
- How to remove barriers to services faced by people experiencing homelessness?
- How can low-barrier services supplement, or be incorporated within, mainstream services?
- What opportunities exist to facilitate access to job training and job opportunities for people who are able to work?

How to assess the support needs of people experiencing homelessness?

Effectively meeting individuals' needs relies on a timely needs assessment. Good-quality needs assessment tools are those that consider the unique circumstances of the population experiencing homelessness (Gordon et al., 2019[10]; Barile, Pruitt and Parker, 2019[11]; Oliveira et al., 2021[12]).

> *Comprehensive needs assessments to identify individual needs and circumstances of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness*

In **England** (the **United Kingdom**), the Homeless Health Needs Audit (HNHA) serves as a data collection framework that allows local homelessness service providers to conduct surveys focused on health needs with people experiencing homelessness. These data enable organisations to collaborate with local authorities and housing and health agencies to enhance service co-ordination and address gaps in service

delivery (Homeless Link, 2022[13]). Since 2012, three waves of audits have been conducted. The last wave corresponds to the 2018-21 period and found that 78% of respondents had a physical health condition and 82% had a mental health diagnosis, respectively. In addition, The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government carries out the *Rough Sleeping Questionnaire* to identify specific support needs, inform service improvements, and estimate the fiscal costs associated with rough sleeping, which are notably higher for those with complex vulnerabilities. These insights aim to enhance targeted interventions and services for people who sleep rough and those at risk of sleeping rough (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2020[14]).

In the **United States**, a research project funded by the University of Utah conducted in-depth interviews with people experiencing homelessness to assess their needs, challenges in accessing support services and their perceived solutions to these challenges (Smith, Moore and Canham, 2021[15]). The study identified gaps in service delivery and showcased the importance of integrating the concerns of people experiencing homelessness into policy making so that services match their needs. The Basic Center Program (BCP) offers community-based emergency shelters for runaway and homeless youth under 18, providing up to 21 days of shelter, food, clothing, medical care, and counselling. A key component of BCP is facilitating family reunification whenever safe and appropriate, aiming to restore family connections and stability for these youth.

In **Chile**, the *Gente de la Calle* foundation assesses the needs of people experiencing homelessness and offers personalised support through targeted interventions. These assessments are conducted upon individual request or through the mediation of public authorities and civil society organisations. Depending on individual needs, specialists provide support in various areas such as substance use, physical health, mental health, pensions, and labour market integration (Fundación Gente de la Calle, 2024[16]). In 2023, the foundation organised public events in partnership with public authorities and other civil society organisations to provide basic assistance, such as support in applying for social benefits (Fundación Gente de la Calle, 2024[17]).

Ensuring individuals with high-support needs receive the services they need

In **Denmark,** Housing First programmes provide support services tailored to beneficiaries' needs and goals. Specialised support is provided through three approaches: Critical Time Intervention (CTI), Intensive Case Management (ICM), and Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) (Socialstyrelsen, 2020[18]). CTI involves assigning a case manager who offers support throughout a defined period, typically nine months, to assist individuals transitioning from shelters to long-term housing. This support includes co-ordinating with community providers and developing a personalised transition plan. ICM provides extended assistance where a case manager co-ordinates beneficiaries' access to support and treatment services until they no longer require it. ACT offers a comprehensive support system where social workers, psychiatrists, addiction specialists, counsellors, nurses, and other professional provide in-home assistance to beneficiaries. This approach is often used with people experiencing homelessness with complex needs, such as both substance use disorders and mental illnesses (Benjamin, 2013[19]).

In the **United Kingdom**, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) developed a set of evidence-based guidelines for practitioners that provide a framework for integrating health and social care support for people experiencing homelessness. The guidelines offer recommendations on planning, improving access, involving peer roles, assessing needs, and managing transitions between settings, all aimed at fostering co-ordinated, multidisciplinary care (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), 2022[20]).

How to remove barriers to services faced by people experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

The provision of low-barrier services should be a fundamental aspect of a broader, inclusive approach to policy making (Block 1). In practice, this means removing administrative, logistical and social bottlenecks to service provision for people who may face (or expect to face) stigma, discrimination or rejection from mainstream service providers; lack required administrative documentation to access services; be subject to frequent moves and housing instability and thus face disruptions in ongoing treatment (Pleace, 2023[1]). Logistical barriers can also pose a challenge, including difficulties to physically access the location to apply for or receive services (if locations are hard to access via public transit), or a lack of childcare (making it difficult for parents to take part in some support programmes). The provision of low-barrier services has been shown to improve access to basic primary healthcare services by removing social (e.g. discrimination), logistical, and health-related barriers for people experiencing homelessness (Lynch et al., 2022[21]; Barile, Pruitt and Parker, 2020[22]).

> *Conducting research to assess what barriers to mainstream services exist, why and for whom*

In **Spain**, a mixed-methods study based on surveys with over 130 homelessness service providers and semi-structured interviews with 20 women experiencing homelessness who had been victims of gender-based violence concluded that victims/survivors of domestic violence experiencing homelessness face challenges in accessing social, health, and judicial services (Matulič Domandzič et al., 2024[23]). Similarly, a study surveying people experiencing homelessness, as well as healthcare and social workers, found that people experiencing homelessness face significant barriers to accessing healthcare services, and typically seek care only when critically ill (Cernadas and Fernández, 2021[24]). These barriers can be administrative but may also stem from negative past experiences and/or fears of mistreatment or discrimination. This underscores the importance of raising awareness and providing training to mainstream providers to eliminate discrimination in access to support services.

In the **United Kingdom,** research conducted by the national LGBTI youth homelessness charity, *akt*, revealed that only 44% of LGBTQ+ youth who had experienced homelessness were aware of available housing support during their most recent instance of homelessness, while 24% reported complete unawareness of any such support (akt, 2021[25]). This highlights how limited awareness of existing programmes can significantly hinder access to essential services.

> *Reducing administrative, logistical and social barriers to mainstream services, including through training to service providers*

In Tokyo, **Japan**, the NGO *Sanyukai* provides a bundle of services for people experiencing homelessness. These services include free medical care for those without a health insurance card, referrals to public services, lifestyle and health counselling, and outreach food distribution. In 2023, 1 696 health consultations were provided, 8 125 counselling cases were managed, and 820 meal distribution outreach activities were conducted (Sanyukai, 2023[26]).

In Istanbul, **Türkiye**, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality provides support to people experiencing homelessness by offering temporary accommodation, healthcare, elderly care, clothing, and food services (IBB, 2024[27]). Moreover, specific outreach campaigns are launched in the winter to increase coverage of the support services (IBB, 2024[28]). In Türkiye, temporary accommodation centres are managed by local governments and are set to increase in number in coming years (IMM, 2023[29]).

In **New Zealand,** *LinkPeople*, a community housing provider, offers housing solutions and supports individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness in accessing local health and social services. The organisation provides housing support in three ways. First, *LinkPeople* assists individuals transitioning

from care institutions or emergency housing into independent housing. Second, the organisation supports individuals at risk of losing their tenancies, collaborating with landlords and social service providers. Third, *LinkPeople* manages housing units leased from private owners, which are rented to individuals in need of housing. Once housed, individuals receive assistance in accessing social and health services that best suit their needs (LinkPeople, 2024[30]).

Co-ordinating and co-locating services to provide targeted care to meet individuals' needs that extend beyond housing

With IPV a leading cause of homelessness among women (OECD, 2023[31]), the Kukui Center in Hawaii, the **United States,** is an example of an integrated programme that serves families impacted by IPV (OECD, 2023[31]). The centre co-locates ten non-profit agencies and offers emergency, short, and medium-term shelter for children, adolescents, and families. In the suburbs of Paris, **France,** the Maison des Femmes (Women's House) is a structure located on the grounds of a public hospital that provides interdisciplinary support to survivors of gender-based violence by co-locating health, social, and judicial services. Several similar structures have been opened in Bordeaux, Marseille, and other French cities.

Co-located services in the form of "family centres" for people leaving prisons are common in Nordic countries, where multidisciplinary teams of specialists are located in a single room. For example, the Red Cross re-entry house in Oslo, **Norway**, provides state and municipal services in the same building. Similar one-stop-shops have been introduced in other countries, such as in the **United Kingdom**. At the EU level, the European Family Justice Center Alliance operates family centres that offer targeted support to victims of sexual violence, child abuse, gender-based violence, and domestic violence. Services include legal advice, accommodation planning, and psychological assistance, among others (European Family Justice Center Alliance, 2024[32]).

Supporting migrants experiencing or at risk of homelessness through comprehensive low-barrier services

Migrants' legal status often determines their access to housing assistance and other social welfare services for people experiencing homelessness. Depending on the country, they may or may not be entitled to social benefits and/or housing assistance; emergency social and care services (including healthcare); social benefits (including housing assistance) only if they possess permanent residence or protection status, or if they have a job.

Access to social benefits (including housing assistance) for EU mobile citizens is summarised in Box 6.2. In several European countries, financial instruments under the European Social Fund Plus (ESF +), have been mobilised to fund projects providing support to EU mobile citizens experiencing homelessness. An example is the MOCT- Berlin Bridge towards Participation in **Germany**. This project encompasses a wide range of services, including assistance with securing a livelihood, accessing healthcare, and obtaining childcare support (Haj Ahmad and Busch-Geertsema, 2024[33]).

Box 6.2. Access to social benefits (including housing assistance) for EU mobile citizens

An EU mobile citizen is a national of an EU member state who lives in another member state of the Union. The right to free movement of EU citizens across EU countries is safeguarded and regulated by Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and the Council (European Union, 2004[34]). The eligibility of EU mobile citizens for **social benefits, including those who are experiencing homelessness,** depends on their status. Three categories can be distinguished:

1. **Workers and self-employed persons** enjoy equal treatment to national workers in regard to social benefit eligibility.

2. **For jobseekers,** access to social benefits on equal terms to national workers is conditional on having previously worked between 6 and 12 months in the host member state. Additionally, for jobseekers who have not previously worked in the host member state, their eligibility for social benefits is dependent on their ties with the national labour market. If eligible, the social benefits they might benefit from directly target labour market integration; eligibility for broader social benefits varies throughout countries and contexts (Blauberger and Schmidt, 2014[35]).

3. For **economically inactive EU citizens**, such as pensioners, long-term unemployed persons, tourists or students, access to social benefits changes over time, along **three phases** (Costamagna, Montaldo and Romanelli, 2022[36]):

   a. For the first 90 days of residence in the host country, economically inactive EU citizens have partial access to social assistance.

   b. For EU mobile citizens residing up to five years in a host Member State, their access to social assistance (and that of their family) is dependent on whether they meet the requirements stipulated in Article 7 of the Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004.

   c. EU mobile citizens that have continuously and legally resided for more than five years in a host Member State and have obtained a permanent residence permit are entitled to the same access to social benefits as nationals.

Note: As established by the Court of Justice of the European Union, social benefits can be defined as "the advantages which…, whether or not linked to a contract of employment, are generally granted to national workers primarily because of their objective status as workers or by virtue of the mere fact of their residence on the national territory and the extension of which to workers who are nationals of other Member States therefore seems suitable to facilitate their mobility within the Community" (EUR-lex, 1979[37]).

In **Denmark**, the Kirkens Korshær organisation supports the social integration of EU mobile citizens experiencing homelessness who hold a residence permit in another EU country through the ESF+ funded Kompasset (Kirkens Korshær, 2024[38]). Since EU mobile citizens are not entitled to access public services in Denmark, Kirkens Korshær offers guidance on their rights and supports them in job searching, provided they have authorisation to work in Denmark. Staff and volunteers assist beneficiaries in a variety of European languages, including English, Romanian, Polish, Spanish and Greek.

In **Austria**, the neunerhaus Health Center provides free, low-threshold medical care services to individuals experiencing homelessness and those without medical insurance, including EU mobile citizens. The interdisciplinary centre includes a general practice, a dental clinic, social work counselling, peer work, nursing services, and a mental health practice (neunerhaus, 2024[39]). Additionally, video interpretation provides translation support in over 40 languages (Haj Ahmad and Busch-Geertsema, 2024[33]).

In the **United States**, the city of New York issues a municipal identification card, IDNYC, accessible for people aged 10 years or older. The IDNYC card is available to applicants regardless of their immigration

status and ensures access to various services, including cash assistance, health benefits, employment identity, and affordable housing (ACCESS NY, 2024[40]). To request this card, applicants must provide proof of residence, which can be issued by a shelter if the applicant is experiencing homelessness.

How can low-barrier services supplement, or be incorporated within, existing mainstream services?

Whether people experiencing homelessness are best served through *mainstream services* or *specialised services targeting people experiencing homelessness* depends on different factors and specific country contexts. What *is* important, however, is to establish a strong connection between low-threshold street medicine and mainstream services (e.g. through referrals), to ensure that more complex health needs are met (Enich, Tiderington and Ure, 2022[41]). By avoiding downstream emergency department and hospital utilisation, low-threshold support can also contribute to saving costs overall (Basu et al., 2011[42]).

Integrating public services across sectors, in particular between medical/health providers and other social services, is also important to ensure people experiencing homelessness receive a range of tailored supports (Adams and Hakonarson, 2024[43]; OECD, 2023[31]). Integrated public services are particularly valuable for people experiencing homelessness with complex needs, who often require specialised support from several services providers and/or agencies (OECD, 2015[44]).

Eliminating administrative barriers through data partnerships and other innovative solutions to ensure access to health and social services

Creating a framework for integrated social and health service delivery is important for ensuring that people experiencing homelessness have access to tailored support. Studies in the **United States** have found that data partnerships between multiple service providers (e.g. healthcare providers, permanent supportive housing providers food banks, etc.) lead to higher co-ordination and better social and health outcomes for beneficiaries (Angelov and Buck, 2023[45]; Schick et al., 2019[46]).

In many OECD countries, it is difficult for people experiencing homelessness to apply for or receive benefits without a mailing address. In the **Netherlands**, individuals legally residing in the country are registered in the Municipal Personal Records Database (GBA). If a permanent home address is missing, a postal address can be requested. Plus, if both a permanent home address and a postal address are missing, municipalities have the legal obligation to register the individual with a postal address of a town hall or an institution with which the municipality collaborates. Since municipalities in the Netherlands often require to be registered as a resident to receive certain local services, this allows people experiencing homelessness to qualify for emergency shelters and other services in the locality in which they are living (FEANTSA, 2020[47]; Evangelista, 2013[48]).

Supporting people experiencing homelessness through mobile medical support

Mobile medical support provides low-barrier and easy to access health and social services to address the unique needs and circumstances of people living rough. In California (the **United States**), a recent rise in homelessness has fuelled rapid growth in community mobile medical support programmes. The state's Department Health Care Services (DHCS) provides reimbursements for care in over 25 recognised programmes. The services are often delivered by medical students and community health workers. In California, the programme is an important form of medical support for people of colour; 25% of the patients identify as African-American and 23% identify as Hispanic (Feldman, 2023[49]).

In **Brazil**, the *Consultório na Rua* programme provides primary healthcare services to people experiencing homelessness through street clinics. Intervention teams are made up of a variety of specialists, ranging from nurses and dental surgeons to social workers and therapists (Ministry of Health, 2024[50]). The assistance provided is tailored to patients' needs and includes support for substance use disorders, mental

health conditions, as well as dental and vision problems. An independent academic evaluation in the city of São Paulo found that the programme operates to 75% of its expected capacity, lagging in providing care for people experiencing homelessness who engage in substance use (Borysow, Oda and Furtado, 2023[51]).

In the **United Kingdom**, the Groundswell charity manages the Homeless Health Peer Advocacy (HHPA) program. Although not a mobile clinic, this programme helps people experiencing homelessness access physical and mental health services by assisting them with attending appointments and navigating the healthcare system (Groundswell, 2024[52]). Moreover, the support is provided by people experiencing homelessness. "Link workers" are non-clinical staff who work within or alongside general practitioners to help patients access services for needs such as mental health, housing, loneliness, and benefits, often employed by a group of general practitioners or community organisations working on behalf of the National Health Service (NHS). As of December 2023, there are approximately 3 200 social prescribers in England, supported by NHS England's Social Prescribing Network and an online collaboration platform for practitioners (Nuffield Trust, 2024[53]).

Improving health outcomes and providing an entry point to services through Overdose Prevention Centres

Substance use disorders (such as of opioids) can both contribute to homelessness and be a consequence of it (Yoo et al., 2022[54]). Individuals experiencing homelessness with substance use disorders face a heightened risk of fatal and non-fatal overdoses and frequently encounter challenges in accessing treatment (Milaney et al., 2021[55]; McLaughlin et al., 2021[56]; Fine et al., 2022[57]). Overdose Prevention Centres (OPCs) have emerged as effective interventions to address this issue, also because they reach vulnerable populations, including those not served by traditional services (Shorter et al., 2023[58]; Magwood et al., 2020[59]; Bardwell et al., 2017[60]). OPCs provide people who use drugs with clean needles and syringes, to inject drugs in a clean, indoor, clinical facility out of public view where they are free of harassment, and access to emergency services. Carefully designed low-barrier services such as OPCs can also function as an entry point to a variety of services, including primary care, hospital treatment and drug therapy, especially for the most vulnerable populations (Shorter et al., 2023[58]). OPCs currently operate in approximately 15 OECD countries, including Australia, Canada, Mexico, and a range of European countries. In addition to OPCs, mobile treatment units, such as methadone units, can offer individuals with opioid use disorder delocalised comprehensive and specialised care (Gibbons et al., 2024[62]; Chatterjee et al., 2024[63]).

The Netherlands was an early pioneer of OPCs since the height of its heroin crisis in the 1980s. The Dutch Harm Reduction Network (HRN) monitors services for people with substance use disorders. OPCs are now operating in approximately 21 communities and serving 5 to 30 clients daily. The facilities do not systematically record the number of users who visit and consume drugs to protect privacy, but employees report an increase in younger patients experiencing homelessness with or without migration background under the age of 35 who often have mild disabilities (Singer, 2023[64]), (van der Gouwe, 2022[65]).

The needs of people with opioid use disorders are better addressed through integrated health services, including psychosocial interventions and screening for other infectious diseases (OECD, 2019[66]). In **Greece**, alcohol and drug-use disorders make up a significant part of the country's mental health burden and progressive reforms have been shifting provision away from institutionalised care to the delivery of community-based services. The National Action Plan for Public Health 2021-25 and National Action Plan for Mental Health 2021-30 promote investment in integrated, recovery-oriented, community-based centres that decrease stigma and social exclusion (OECD/European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2021[67]). The city of Athens, in partnership with the Partnership for Health Cities global network, implemented an intervention focused on its unhoused population with opioid use disorders. The intervention provides housing, therapeutic services, healthcare, counselling, legal support, and

programmes for the social reintegration of people experiencing homelessness who inject drugs (Vital Strategies, 2020[68]).

Facilitating access to mental health support for people experiencing homelessness

Homelessness has been shown to have an enduring impact on mental health of young people (Russell et al., 2020[69]). This underscores the importance of providing early access to mental health support for people experiencing homelessness, which is correlated with positive mental health outcomes (Dixon et al., 2011[70]).

In 2023, over 14% of **Australia**'s specialist homelessness services (SHS) clients were single young people, of whom almost 50% had mental health conditions, and 73% were not enrolled in education or formal training. More than half of the clients with a current mental health condition also experienced another type of vulnerability, which highlights the value of an integrated service response (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024[71]). The Reconnect Program is the Australian Government's long standing youth homelessness prevention initiative that serves as an early intervention and prevention programme for young people aged 12 to 18 years (or 12 to 21 years in the case of newly arrived youth) who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and their families. Reconnect services work to prevent homelessness through the provision of counselling, group work, mediation, and practical support to the whole family. Reconnect providers also purchase other services to meet the individual needs of clients, such as specialised mental health services. In 2024, an independent review of the Reconnect Program was conducted on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Social Services to investigate the appropriateness, effectiveness, and efficiency of the programme. The review highlighted the importance of the Reconnect Program to children and young people, their families, and their communities. The review findings are currently being considered to determine next steps (Department of Social Services, 2024[72]). Building on the success of this project, **Canada's** Reconnect project provides a community-driven early intervention programme aimed at supporting young people aged 13-24 who are at risk of, or have recently entered, homelessness (Homeless Hub, 2024[73]).

In **Ireland**, the NGO Simon Community provides counselling services and psychotherapeutic support to people experiencing homelessness. This support is provided one-on-one and can take the form of motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioural therapy, or behaviour focused therapy, among others (Dublin Simon Community, 2024[74]).

What opportunities exist to facilitate access to job training and job opportunities for people who are able to work?

Expanding employment and training opportunities as one aspect of services for people experiencing homelessness can also facilitate a sustainable transition out of homelessness, for those who are able to take up employment (Axe, Childs and Manion, 2020[75]). Despite the willingness to work expressed by many individuals experiencing homelessness, they face numerous barriers in accessing and maintaining formal employment, including difficulties in providing contact information, stigma in disclosing homelessness to employers, and various personal challenges such as health issues and criminal records (Marshall et al., 2022[76]; Tiderington et al., 2020[77]). Tailored employment programmes may benefit individuals experiencing and/or exiting homelessness, especially those previously integrated into the labour market. However, outcomes vary: merely securing employment may not guarantee stable employment (Barton et al., 2021[78]; Bretherton and Pleace, 2019[79]). There is a need to strengthen the evidence base to understand the most effective employment-related interventions for this particular population, to assess which types of employment support can be most effective in different contexts (for further discussion, see (Newton et al., 2020[80]) and (Card, Kluve and Weber, 2017[81])).

Reducing barriers to employment through training and sustained support

In **France,** the *Accompagnement global* programme supports jobseekers facing barriers to enter the labour market. The programme connects jobseekers registered in the French Public Employment Services (PES) with a PES caseworker and a social worker to provides holistic support in finding employment opportunities. The PES caseworker provides beneficiaries with professional assistance to identify and overcome obstacles hampering labour market entry; the social worker assists beneficiaries with social issues, including housing and financial hardship. As of 2018, roughly 85% of beneficiaries were satisfied with the programme and the probability of finding stable employment within six months of entering the programme was 27%.

In **Austria**, people experiencing homelessness can be supported by non-profit Social Economic Enterprises that offer sheltered, market-based workplaces for vulnerable groups and partner with private actors to facilitate the transition of participants to the primary labour market (OECD, 2021[82]).

In **England and Wales** (the **United Kingdom**), people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness qualify for the Work and Health Programme. Launched in 2018, the programme provides intensive, tailored support though health and social care providers, professional contacts, and other local services to help people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness transition into work. Beneficiaries of the programme are referred by jobcentres to work with public, private or voluntary organisations, known as providers, to help overcome barriers to work. Providers receive financial incentives, including funding for initial service delivery, and outcome related payments when the beneficiary finds stable employment. Providers support beneficiaries for up to 21 months (Department for Work and Pensions, 2024[83]).

In **Japan**, the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare has an open call for businesses to participate in an employment programme designed to support the labour market integration of people experiencing homelessness (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare, 2024[84]). The programme targets four regions in the country and seeks to provide people experiencing homelessness, or at risk of homelessness, with counselling and support to find employment. This includes personalised advice and seminars, as well as temporary work experience in specific businesses.

In Seoul (**Korea**), the Homeless Job Support Centre provides people experiencing homelessness with counselling services to support their entry into the labour market. Support is provided in two ways: first, the centre offers pre-employment training services by providing access to employment programmes and collaborating with educational institutions. Second, the centre provides tailored, personalised support to help beneficiaries obtain relevant certifications, stay informed about job listing, connect with their desired occupations, and prepare for interviews (Seoul Homeless Support Center, 2024[85]).

In March 2022, the **European Commission** activated a Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian refugees to give immediate asylum protection (European Commission, 2024[86]). This programme gives Ukrainian refugees automatic access to employment and accommodation, along with other forms of social welfare, education, and medical care. Access to employment is specifically facilitated by removing the authorisation to work requirement (i.e., Ukrainian refugees do not need to apply for a work permit), and the provision of vocational training, language courses, and career counselling. Over 5 million refugees have benefited from this programme, with many planning to return to Ukraine and others transitioning to longer-term residency in Europe (Aida Asylum Database Information, 2023[87]).

Fundamentals for success

There is considerable diversity in the level and type of support needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness: some individuals do not require support beyond housing assistance, while others have multiple and/or complex needs, and may require different forms of health, social and employment support. At the individual level, a first critical step is to conduct a timely needs assessment. More broadly, however, ensuring access to services – including by providing a range of low-barrier supports and removing bottlenecks to service provision – is a fundamental component of an inclusive policy approach. Co-ordinating existing services, as well as co-locating different types of support in a single site (or in close proximity) have also proven to be effective in different contexts.

Building on the operational issues and good practices described above, the following recommendations can help policy makers and practitioners improve the provision of low-barrier, tailored wraparound services for people who need them:

- Carry out a timely needs assessment to identify individual needs and circumstances of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness (including people leaving institutional care), and ensure that individuals with high-service needs receive the support they need.
- Eliminate administrative, logistical, and social hurdles to accessing services, including through trainings to mainstream service providers.
- Co-ordinate and, where possible, co-locate, health and social services to facilitate targeted treatment and care to meet individuals' needs that extend beyond housing.
- Facilitate access to low-barrier medical services, including Overdose Prevention Centres, street medicine, and mental health support.
- Strengthen access to employment opportunities for people who are able to work through training and sustained support.

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7 Funding and financing

Block 7 addresses efforts to fund and finance homelessness policies and programmes, in a context of increasing pressure on public social spending and fiscal constraints. It discusses the need for more efficient, targeted allocation of resources to prevent and combat homelessness. This block examines the dual role of governments – both as funders of homelessness programmes and initiatives, as well as fundraisers that seek resources from other sources – and provides recommendations to secure adequate and sustained funding to support policy objectives to end homelessness.

Relevance and key data

Homelessness entails high costs. First and foremost, there are high human costs, in terms of lower life expectancy, higher risk of disease, mental health conditions and substance use disorders, and poorer health outcomes associated with people experiencing homelessness, relative to the general population (OECD, 2020[1]). At the same time, the costs associated with homelessness weigh heavily on public budgets, given the range of housing and support services and other public systems that are mobilised for people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. This may include, among other things, housing/shelter, health and mental health services (including emergency care), social welfare services, and the criminal justice system. There is no standard approach to assess the financial costs associated with homelessness across countries, and such calculations present considerable methodological challenges (Box 7.1).

Public spending on social services, including housing and homelessness services, is under increasing pressure, as governments face growing fiscal constraints that limit the resources available for social protection. In OECD countries, social spending averages 21% of GDP, with substantial variation across countries (from 31.6% in France to 7.4% in Mexico) (Block 4).

Despite the lack of precise data on public spending aimed at addressing homelessness, certain challenges are widespread. Most funding is directed towards emergency responses and managing homelessness rather than preventive measures or long-term solutions. Evidence has shown, however, that long-term housing solutions, such as Housing First programmes, are effective and resources efficient (see further discussion in Block 5). The fragmented nature of funding, which often comes from multiple sources and sectors, makes it difficult to co-ordinate resources effectively. This complexity in managing timelines, objectives, reporting processes and varying modalities applicable to different funds hinders the development of sustainable, long-term funding strategies, further complicating efforts to combat homelessness effectively.

Box 7.1. How much does homelessness cost governments?

There is no standard approach to assess the financial costs associated with homelessness, and such calculations present considerable methodological challenges, given that different levels of government and a broad range of sectoral agencies, service providers, and budgetary resources are often mobilised. Further, direct costs relating to housing and service provision vary considerably from one individual (or family) to another, depending on the breadth and intensity of needs, the type of housing/shelter and support services provided (and by whom they are provided), as well as the length of time services are accessed.

Accordingly, national estimates are based on different methods and cannot be compared. For instance:

- Between April 2023 and March 2024, local councils spent GBP 2.3 billion (USD 2.9 billion) on temporary accommodation for households experiencing homelessness in England (the **United Kingdom**), reflecting a 29% increase from the previous year, and nearly doubling over the past five years (Shelter, 2024[2]).
- Research from New South Wales, **Australia**, found that the average cost to the government for people accessing homelessness services over a six-year period is nearly 4 times higher than with respect to the general population (NSW government, 2021[3]) Reflecting the broad range of supports accessed by people experiencing homelessness, just 9% of those costs related directly to homelessness and housing, with the health and justice sectors representing the costliest areas of intervention among individuals with high support needs.

- In January 2024, the **United States Government** announced over USD 3 billion in federal funding for homelessness, to be directed towards permanent and short-term housing assistance, supportive services, planning, data, and other costs (HUD, 2024[4]).
- As of 2022, the National Institute of Statistics (INE) in **Spain** estimates that on average, homeless care centres offering housing, catering services and/or street assistance spend EUR 348 804 per year at the national level (INE, 2022[5]).
- In early 2023, the NGO Focus Ireland (**Ireland**) estimated Irish local authorities would spend EUR 345 million on services for households experiencing homelessness that year (Focus Ireland, 2023[6]). As of 2022, spending on emergency accommodation accounted for over 80% of all expenditure in homelessness by local authorities.

Access to affordable and social housing is central to solving homelessness. First, homelessness is, in part, a housing problem. Recent research from the **United States** suggests that housing markets play a significant role in shaping the size of the population experiencing homelessness. Researchers found that while personal vulnerabilities may help explain why some individuals become homeless in specific communities, they do not fully account for regional variations in homelessness (Colburn and Page Aldern, 2022[7]). These findings highlight the critical need for investments aimed at increasing the housing supply to prevent homelessness (see also Block 4). Further research linking housing markets to homelessness would enhance our understanding of this relationship and help uncover how these dynamics unfold in other OECD and EU countries. Further, housing is also a key part of the solution to homelessness: helping people transition into long-term housing (through housing-led and Housing First schemes, discussed in Block 5) depends on the availability of and individual's access to affordable and social housing.

Public investment in housing declined significantly between 2005 and 2019, on average, in OECD countries, before rebounding somewhat in recent years (OECD, 2024[8]; OECD, 2023[9]). In particular, public investment in housing development alone dropped by more than half between 2005 and 2016. Public investment in housing and community amenities (a more comprehensive category, which also includes, for instance, community development, water supply, street lighting and R&D) also declined, albeit to a lesser degree (Figure 7.1). Recent increases in construction costs arising from more expensive raw materials, machinery and labour, and more demanding energy-efficiency standards, along with interest rates, have driven up development costs. For example, in France, construction costs for social housing are projected to increase between 5-8% between 2024 and 2030, and around 15% after 2030, in response to the new environmental regulation (RE2020) (GREMILLET, 2023[10]). As a result, many housing developments have been put on hold, especially in social and affordable housing, where developers are limited in their ability to raise rents to pass on higher costs to tenants (OECD, 2023[9]).

Figure 7.1. On average, public investment in housing dropped significantly in the OECD since its peak in 2009, before rebounding in recent years

Total public investment in Housing and community amenities and in Housing development alone, OECD-30 average, as percentage GDP, 2000 to 2022
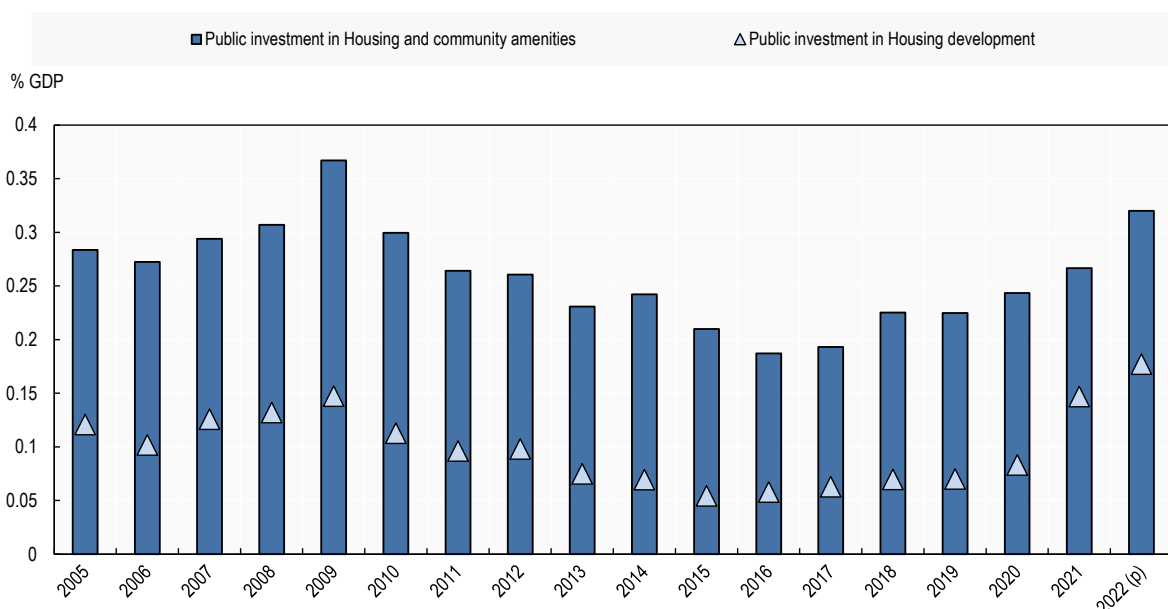
Note: 1) Total public investment in Housing and community amenities refers to the unweighted average across 31 OECD countries, and includes both direct investment (COFOG series P5_K2CG – Government gross capital formation) and Public capital transfers (COFOG series D9CG – Indirect capital expenditure made through transfers to organisations outside of government). Housing and community amenities includes, among other things, housing development; community development; water supply; street lighting; R&D housing and community amenities; and housing and community amenities not elsewhere classified (N.E.C.). 2) Public investment in housing development alone refers to the unweighted average across 30 OECD countries, and includes both direct investment (COFOG series P5_K2CG – Government gross capital formation) and Public capital transfers (COFOG series D9CG – Indirect capital expenditure made through transfers to organisations outside of government). Housing development includes, among other things, the acquisition of land needed for the construction of dwellings, the construction or purchase and remodelling of dwelling units for the general public or for people with special needs, and grants or loans to support the expansion, improvement or maintenance of the housing stock. 3) See the Eurostat Manual on sources and methods for the compilation of COFOG Statistics (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5917333/KS-RA-11-013-EN.PDF) for more detail. 4) Data exclude Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, New Zealand and Türkiye. Data for housing development alone also exclude the United States. Data for 2022 are provisional, and exclude Australia, Czechia (capital transfers), Korea, and the United Kingdom.
Source: (OECD, 2024[8]), OECD Affordable Housing Database (2024), indicator PH1.1 Policy instruments and level of governance, https://webfs.oecd.org/els-com/Affordable_Housing_Database/PH1-1-Policy-instruments-and-level-of-governance.pdf.

Nevertheless, while public investment in housing *can* in some cases contribute to expanding the supply of affordable and social housing, this is not always the case, and such housing investments are not systematically mobilised to house people experiencing homelessness. Data on government spending on affordable and social housing are not widely available across OECD countries. For countries with available data, public social expenditure on social affordable housing is highest in New Zealand at 0.35% of the GDP, followed by Australia at 0.26%, and Austria at 0.21%, respectively (OECD, 2024[11]). Further, social housing allocation systems fulfil multiple objectives and prioritisation of people experiencing homelessness remains rare (Pleace, Teller and Quilgars, 2011[12]). Throughout the OECD and EU, there remains a need to strengthen investment in affordable and social housing in OECD and EU countries (OECD, 2021[13]; OECD, 2023[9]).

Common operational questions

In homelessness policy making, public authorities – including both national governments and subnational authorities – often have dual roles:

- As ***funders*** to other public, semi-public or private entities, to support the development and implementation of strategies, policies and programmes to combat homelessness.
- As ***fundraisers*** from other entities (supranational, national, non-public / private) to be allocated to homelessness strategies, policies and programmes.

For instance, in practice, national governments may be responsible for:

- Setting the policy frameworks, funding arrangements, reporting requirements, and financial incentive structure(s) relating to homelessness policy.
- Providing direct funding to sub-national authorities, NGOs and/or other non-public actors to support homelessness interventions/programmes (such as pilot projects, bridge funding, or cross-sectoral funding).
- Raising funds (through the fiscal system; in response to supra-national funding opportunities; or in setting up long-term funding mechanisms).

Subnational entities, including local governments, may also play a similar dual role, as both provider *and* recipient of funds.

The following set of operational questions is intended to guide policy makers and practitioners on both sides of the funding issue: for ***funders*** of homelessness programmes and initiatives (which may consist of supra-national entities, national authorities, as well as the philanthropic and private sector); and for ***fundraisers*** (which may be national and sub-national governments, service providers and a range of other entities).

Funders:

- How to balance immediate needs with long-term objectives?
- How to co-ordinate multiple funding sources for homelessness programmes?
- How to diversify funding sources, drawing on rents, lottery money, revolving funds, savings programmes, social impact bonds, and social impact investment?
- How can Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) be generalised as a requirement to access funding?

Fundraisers:

- How to design a homelessness programme or intervention that is attractive to funders?
- How to identify funding opportunities that will help deliver on homelessness policy objectives?
- How to strengthen funding and financing expertise within the homelessness services sector?

For funders: How to balance immediate needs with long-term objectives?

In most OECD countries, the bulk of public spending on homelessness is directed towards emergency accommodation rather than prevention measures or long-term housing-led solutions, despite increased recognition of their effectiveness. This is the case, even in countries that are investing significantly in the expansion of Housing First and Housing-led programmes (Block 5).

Policy makers must not only seek ways to expand the financial resources available for homelessness policies and programmes; they must also critically rethink how resources are allocated and the extent to which they can be best leveraged to support the shift from crisis response to advancing the government's policy priority to end homelessness. Despite the documented successes of programmes such as Housing

First, only a few countries and regions have been able to achieve scale, in part due to funding and resource constraints.

For example, in **France**, around 45% of the roughly EUR 3 billion budget of the *Accommodation, pathways to housing and integration of vulnerable people programme* (*Hébergement, parcours vers le logement et insertion des personnes vulnérables*) is allocated to support emergency accommodation, compared to around 20% to Housing First programmes (Cohésion des territoires, 2024[14]). In **Ireland,** local authorities' average annual expenditure on services for people experiencing homelessness increased from EUR 73 million between 2009 and 2014 to an expected EUR 345 million in 2023. As of 2022, emergency accommodation accounted for over 80% of local authorities' expenditure on homelessness services (Focus Ireland, 2023[6]).

Increase public investment towards prevention and long-term housing solutions

Boosting investments in prevention policies can help avert family homelessness and frequently results in cost-savings in the medium term (Evans, Sullivan and Wallskog, 2016[15]; Mackie, Thomas and Bibbings, 2017[16]). As of 2023, the provincial Government of Ontario, **Canada**, increased its annual investment in homelessness prevention by CAD 202 million (about USD 143 million), bringing the total budget for supportive housing programmes and homelessness prevention services to an all-time high of CAD 700 million (Northumberland County, 2023[17]). Still, this increase in investment in prevention is small compared to the provincial government's investment of over CAD 4 billion in supportive housing and related services over the previous three years.

In 2024, the Government of **Scotland** (the **United Kingdom**) announced an GBP 80 million (USD 101 million) investment over two years in affordable housing in 2024, aimed at reducing the duration of temporary accommodation and securing long-term housing solutions (Scottish Government, 2024[18]). This funding aims to allow the government to acquire empty properties and transform them into affordable social housing.

In **New Zealand**, Housing First was introduced through the "Peoples Project" in 2014 and began receiving government funding in 2017. Housing First is for people who have been experiencing chronic homelessness (at least 12 months), and tailored support is provided for as long as needed. For individuals who are recently homeless or at risk of experiencing homelessness, the Rapid Rehousing Programme is available to provide support for up to 12 months. Transitional housing is for individuals and whānau with an immediate housing need and no appropriate alternative. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development has increased its investment in transitional housing to 6 413 places available as of September 2024, or 398 more places than in July 2023 (Te Tuapapa Kura Kainga - Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 2024[19]). Transitional housing is intended to provide housing and services for up to 12 weeks, and support for a further 12 weeks. People living in transitional housing pay up to 25% of their total income as a contribution to accommodation costs.

Aligning financing incentive structures for municipalities to accelerate the shift from emergency accommodation towards Housing First solutions

Existing funding regimes may explicitly or implicitly encourage local governments to rely on temporary accommodation, or on specific types of housing solutions. Governments can use funding rules to incentivise transitions from temporary to long-term housing, while ensuring responsibilities are not delegated to municipalities without the necessary funding structure and competences in place. **Denmark** has taken an innovative approach by adjusting the incentive structures to accelerate a shift from the provision of temporary and emergency accommodation towards Housing First solutions. The change is part of a new political strategy, launched in 2021, to end long-term homelessness and channel financial resources into Housing First solutions (FEANTSA, 2022[20]). By contrast, governments can also create

negative incentives, including those that encourage local authorities to rely on temporary or poor-quality housing solutions, rather than longer-term, higher quality alternatives.

Legislation came into force in October 2023, which aims to: i) provide more affordable housing; ii) restructure the economic incentives for municipalities, to transition from financial support of shelter stays to the full implementation of Housing First in Denmark; iii) establish a national partnership of key stakeholders and invest in the role of civil society to strengthen the implementation of Housing First. A central element of the legislation was to adjust the financial incentives for municipalities investing in non-emergency housing support. Previously, the central government reimbursed 50% of municipal expenses on temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness for the duration of their stay. Under the new legislation, municipalities will be reimbursed 50% of their expenses on temporary accommodation for a much shorter duration (up to four months in an initial phase; then up to three months). After this period, the state reimbursement will reimburse 50% of municipal expenses for two years only in the case that an individual has transitioned to a long-term housing solution. In parallel, a temporary rent reduction was introduced for around 1 800 public housing units, along with a permanent rental reduction of an additional 2 250 units (FEANTSA, 2022[20]), and investment in the construction of new affordable housing.

For funders: How to co-ordinate multiple funding sources for homelessness programmes?

Funding for homelessness often comes from different sources and spans different sectors, reflecting the cross-sectoral dimension of the issue. The development of Housing First projects, for instance, may be funded by national governments or NGOs, while funding for the creation and operation of overdose prevention centres (OPC's) might come from a blend of multi-level public authorities or private funders. For example, the Insite safe injection site in Vancouver, **Canada**, receives both federal and provincial funding (PHS, 2024[21]); in Sydney, **Australia,** the Uniting Medically Supervised Injecting Centre is funded through state financing (Parliament of NSW, 2023[22]), and in New York City, the **United States,** OPC's are privately funded (Giglio et al., 2023[23]; NYC Health, 2022[24]).

A multiplicity of funders in practical terms often imply different application processes, eligible expenses, reporting requirements, and spending horizons, which makes it hard to attract and manage different funds and ensure sustainable, long-term funding.

Further, the integrated nature of effective homelessness solutions – such as Housing First and Housing-led programmes – can also pose funding challenges because they often require both capital investment in infrastructure (e.g. housing development, renovation or acquisition), in addition to ongoing or longer-term costs, including the provision of social services and/or rental support for tenants if needed. The Housing First initiative in Trieste (**Italy**) is illustrative in this regard. Created in 2016, the initial phase of the project was funded by the NGO *Caritas Italiana*, with a range of funders supporting the subsequent operational phase: the municipality of Trieste provided funding for the housing units through the European Social Fund (ESF); the social co-operative Lybra supported social inclusion measures for residents; the *Emporio della Solidarietà* provided food support; the Italian Federation of Organisations for Homeless People (FIO.PSD) provided training for the staff and designed tools to evaluate the project; and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) provided additional resources (the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) have since been combined in the present-day ESF+ scheme).

EU funds – such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) – can be used to finance the development of housing and social services. ERDF funds generally aim to correct imbalances between regions, including through the construction or improvement of infrastructure (European Commission, 2023[25]), whereas ESF+ funds focus on responding to social challenges, including through strengthening social protection and promoting employment (European Commission, 2023[26]). Although each fund has been used individually to improve housing solutions or the

provision of social services, different programme criteria and timelines can in practice make it challenging to combine the funding streams to support integrated projects (Box 7.2). Other international organisations also financially support housing programmes (Box 7.3).

Projects in the homelessness sector seeking to attract multiple funders must ensure that the funding sources are complementary. To achieve this, it is essential to harmonise rules and guidelines, align timelines, and allocate funds in a clear and transparent manner, among other considerations (ECoPP Sub-Group 1, 2023[27]). In **Sweden**, informal meetings between key actors involved in the implementation of EU funds, including the ESF, ERDF and EAFRD, are organised by county administrations across different regions. These meetings facilitate geographical co-ordination and alignment in multi-fund implementation.

Box 7.2. EU funding instruments for housing-led solutions available to EU Member States

EU Member States may consider a range of funding instruments to support Housing-led solutions. The following list provides an overview of key EU funding instruments.

ESF+

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is the EU's main instrument to address social challenges, focusing on COVID-19 recovery, high employment, social protection, and a skilled workforce for a green and digital economy. It integrates various European funds and supports individuals, regions, and Member States in tackling social, employment, education, and climate-related challenges. Member States must allocate a minimum of 25% of ESF+ resources for social inclusion, including support for the most deprived individuals, and funding actions related to the Youth Guarantee and Child Guarantee. A minimum of 3% of the ESF+ shared management strand is earmarked to programmes targeting the most deprived individuals, including people experiencing homelessness. New regulations which include a focus on housing make it possible to use ESF+ funds for Housing First (European Commission, 2023[28]; Housing First Europe Hub; FEANTSA, 2022[29]).

ERDF

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) aims to reduce disparities between different regions within the EU, enhancing development, and fostering overall cohesion. It funds infrastructure projects, including housing, making it applicable to Housing First initiatives. Notably, EDF's objectives include promoting socio-economic inclusion for marginalised communities, low-income households, and disadvantaged groups through integrated actions involving housing and social services. Importantly, ERDF funds focus on infrastructure investments, where ESF+ funds focus on helping individuals (European Commission, 2023[25]).

NextGenerationEU

NextGenerationEU, an EUR 800 billion (around USD 845 billion) temporary stimulus package, was launched by the European Union to aid Member States in repairing the immediate economic and social impact of the pandemic. It consists of two funding categories: the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU). RRF, at EUR 723.8 billion, serves as the core component, offering loans and grants to support reforms and investments in EU countries. FEANTSA (2021[31]) shows that among the 27 EU Member States, 7 explicitly address homelessness in their Recovery and Resilience Plans, with 5 proposing housing-led solutions. In addition, 20 EU Member States plan to invest in housing initiatives, while 12 are focused on combating energy poverty.

InvestEU

InvestEU mobilises investment, through an EU budget guarantee of EUR 26.2 billion (USD 27.7 billion), in various priority areas, including infrastructure projects in energy and transport, economic diversification, and social infrastructure projects (e.g. social and affordable housing, healthcare, social services, and educational infrastructure). It also supports other social investments (e.g. microfinance, the social economy, education, skills, and training) and projects in just transition territories (regions with a transition plan approved in accordance with the rules of the Just Transition Fund). The investment support may be complemented by technical assistance for the identification, preparation, and development of investment projects, as well as capacity building (referred to as "the InvestEU Advisory Hub"). The InvestEU Portal connects project promoters and investors in an online EU marketplace.

European Investment Bank

The European Investment Bank (EIB) finances affordable and sustainable housing initiatives. Within its EUR 150 billion urban lending portfolio, the EIB supports projects focused on reconstructing existing housing and developing new social and affordable accommodation. These initiatives address a range of needs, from demographic challenges in small towns and rural areas to severe housing shortages in major cities.

Just Transition Fund

The Just Transition Fund will support the economic diversification and restructuring of the territories. This involves mobilizing funding for productive investments in various areas such as research and innovation, environmental restoration, clean energy, workforce training, active inclusion programmes, as well as the transformation of current high carbon facilities. This fund will be directly connected to the programmed operations under the ESF+ and ERDF 2021-27.

Social Climate Fund

The Social Climate Fund (SCF) aims to provide tailored financial support to EU member states to support the green transition, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups, such as low-income households affected by energy poverty. The funds can be used for building renovations, improving energy efficiency, promoting renewable energy, and implementing low-emission solutions, among others.

Box 7.3. Non-European specific financing for housing

Inter-American Development Bank

The **Inter-American Development Bank** (IDB) Urban Development and Housing division works to improve infrastructure, services, and support informal settlements. For example, in February 2023, the IDB group IDB Invest structured and subscribed the totality of the first social housing bond in Peru issued by the leading company in housing and construction in the country (Los Portales) and an amount equivalent to USD 35M in Peruvian soles over a 10-year period. This fund will finance the development of urban rehabilitation and social housing projects, aiming to benefit 6 800 families a year and build 15 000 new social housing units (IDB Invest, 2023[32]; Inter-American Development Bank Group, 2024[33]).

Asian Development Bank

The **Asian Development Bank** (ADB) offers grants and near-market term loans to middle-income countries, including in urban development, health, and social protection along with technical expertise to establish the legal, regulatory, and policy frameworks to Asian member countries. The ADB has supported successful housing and urban sector projects since the 1980s including in housing supply, construction, and the expansion of housing finance. They are particularly emphasising this issue in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the disaster and climate change related impacts exacerbating housing problems, especially for the urban and rural poor (Lee, 2022[34]).

World Bank

The **World Bank** assists client countries in developing and deepening resilient affordable housing markets to low and middle-income households by providing financial instruments, including supply side support such as construction finance and supply subsidies (World Bank, 2020[35]).

United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)

In 2024, the **UN Refugee Agency** (UNHCR) plans to invest in sustainable housing and settlements in 38 countries by providing emergency shelter assistance to newly arrived refugees and asylum-seekers, including in host countries in the Americas, Asia, and Europe (UNHCR, 2024[36]). For example, in partnership with Habitat for Humanity, they implemented long-term housing options for Ukrainian refugees in Warsaw and Gliwice urban areas (Spyridon, 2023[37]). **UN Habitat** helps provide technical and housing policy advice and eviction defences support in partnership with the UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (UN Habitat, 2024[38]).

Overview of Bilateral and Multilateral Funding Sources for Housing (UN-Habitat).

UN-Habitat (the United Nations Human Settlements Programme) has compiled a comprehensive list of existing bilateral and multilateral funding sources to support the development and implementation of effective housing policies, programmes, and projects. This resource highlights a diverse range of institutions and housing interventions, including market-rate housing, affordable housing, and social housing, offering valuable insights into funding opportunities for varied housing needs (UN-Habitat, 2024[39]).

For funders: How to diversify funding sources, drawing on rents, lottery money, revolving funds, savings programmes, and social impact bonds?

Funding for long-term housing solutions can be drawn from a range of sources. The list below provides a range of options, and is not exhaustive.

Resources from different public agencies, lottery money and rents from tenants

Chile's Housing First pilot serves individuals who are above 50 years old with a minimum of five years of street homelessness experience. The programme has served 916 individuals from 2019 to 2023, placing them in shared apartments and providing three support professionals for every 20 participants. The programme is funded by a public contribution of the Social Development Ministry and the Housing Ministry (approximately comparable to cost of shelters or EUR 21 per day per capita) and all participants, who must contribute 30% of their income as rent.

In 2008, **Finland** partnered with the NGO Y-Foundation to acquire 18 000 new apartments for its Housing First initiative. The foundation received discounted loans from the state to buy properties or renovate

shelters. The apartments bought on the private market are funded through the Finnish lottery. The state support, which has amounted to approximately EUR 270 million (about USD 285 million), is shared between the national government and municipalities. Individuals experiencing homelessness who move into the apartments, are required to contribute to the rent.

Dedicated revolving funds

In 2022, **Latvia** established the Housing Affordability Fund to channel investment into affordable rental housing. The Fund will help finance the construction of new rental housing at below-market rates outside of the capital region. The initial funding of around EUR 42.9 million was primarily through the Latvian Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP). The fund aims to be *revolving* through loan repayments from housing developers and the share of tenant's rents that will be allocated to the Fund. To incentivise developer participation, the fund allocates up to 30% capital rebate of total project costs upon the lease of units (OECD, 2023[40]).

Special savings mechanisms

A common approach for raising debt among social housing providers is to pool financing through centralised funding institutions, which aggregate and manage public funds as is the case for the Housing Bank in Norway and the *Caisse de Depots et Consignations* in **France**. In France, individuals can open a tax-free state-backed savings account (*le livret A, le livret de Développement Durable et Solidaire, or the Livret d'Epargne Populaire*) at a higher interest rate than private banks through the *Caisse des depots*. These accounts are a huge success; over 50 million French people have several *livrets*. The state then lends the money to social housing developers to fund social housing construction and maintenance. Over a quarter of the social housing costs are funded through this channel. In 2023, 84 500 social housing units were built and 107 021 rehabilitated through this funding pool. Thus, this programme provides reliable and sustainable long-term funding for social housing expansion (Caisse des Depots Groupe, 2024[41]).

Raising private revenue through social impact bonds

A new social policy innovation aimed at encouraging investment to end homelessness is known as Social Impact Bonds (SIBs). These are "pay-for-success" contracts in which third-party investors provide the up-front financing for a programme or intervention designed to improve the prospects of a target group, such as individuals experiencing homelessness. At the conclusion of the programme, the SIB partners assess the extent to which the programme has achieved its desired outcomes through an audit or independent evaluation (Painter, 2021[42]). If the preset target outcomes are achieved, investors are repaid with a financial return (de la Peña, 2015[43]). In the **United Kingdom**, a London-based SIB programme identified 830 people experiencing homelessness and five types of indicators (e.g. reduction in the number of street homelessness, reconnection to employment). The programme reached its desired results and allowed the investors to be paid back with interest. Payments to investors are made based on the agreed-upon returns. A 2022 study reviewed 32 SIBs for homelessness implemented in **Australia**, **Belgium**, the **United Kingdom** and the **United States**, and found that at least 14 met their target outcomes, but that improvements to outcome metrics and evaluation methods were needed to attract a higher scale of investors (Wang and Xu, 2022[44]).

Additionally, social impact investment property funds offer an alternative approach to raising capital for housing solutions. These funds leverage investment from local authorities, pension funds, and charitable foundations to acquire and refurbish properties, which are then leased to housing partners to provide safe, high-quality, and affordable housing for households in temporary accommodation. In the **United Kingdom**, the *Resonance Homelessness Property* Funds managed by the social impact investment company *Resonance* have housed over 3 300 people since 2013 (Resonance, 2024[45]).

For funders: How can Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) be generalised as a requirement to access funding?

In light of the shortage of systematic M&E in the area of homelessness (Block 3), there is scope to leverage funding opportunities to strengthen the evidence base in terms of what works, ensuring that best practices are identified and applied elsewhere. Funding providers can play a key role in generalising M&E as a requirement to access funding.

Lessons can be drawn from the **climate finance** sector. The Green Climate Fund (the world's largest funder in the sector) requires continuous monitoring of all funded programmes to assess the impact and adjust outputs as needed (Green Climate Fund, 2024[46]). Making M&E a prerequisite for accessing funding could help ensure policy implementation yields the results sought by the funder.

The Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) has issued over EUR 10 billion in Social Inclusion Bonds since 2017, supporting vulnerable communities and fostering social cohesion across Europe (CEB, 2024[47]). These bonds focus on areas such as education, social housing, MSME lending, and health. The CEB requires all funded projects to comply with its environmental and social safeguards policy. Accordingly, the CEB enforces strict monitoring and evaluation of adherence to these standards throughout the project implementation cycle for all projects receiving financial support from the bank.

Improving transparency on how homelessness funding is allocated and the outcomes

Research shows that higher levels of budget transparency positively affect the quality of governance. This can include making the budget publicly available in a timely and comprehensive way, developing opportunities for civil society and the general public to engage in the budget process, and creating formal institutions (e.g. independent fiscal institutions, legislatures, and audit institutions) to understand, monitor, and influence how resources are spent (OECD, 2017[48]). While the following examples are not specific to the homelessness sector, they can provide inspiration to homelessness policy makers and practitioners.

For example, **Ireland**'s Department of Finance publishes monthly profiles of expenditures and revenues at the start of each year and these profiles form an important point of reference for monthly reporting to the public on budgeting execution. In 2015, Ireland introduced the new National Economic Dialogue (NED), which is a prebudget consultative forum, convened by the government, bringing together the various civil society interests, social partners and parliamentary stakeholders to discuss priorities for the October budget. The forum is held in June, after the government has determined (from its spring budget semester) the level of "fiscal space" available in the coming year, and before line ministries have submitted budget proposals.

There are several public budgeting initiatives at the city-level as well. For example, in 2016 in Paris (**France**), the city debated the allocation of EUR 30 million at a city-wide, *arrondissement* (city district), and school level. They also held dedicated forums for residents in low-income neighbourhoods designated by the city and held complementary citizen education initiatives on public financing. Since then, a public budgeting team meets regularly with a steering committee of high-level representatives to review proposed projects by theme. In tandem, the Paris City Council's public housing company (*la Régie Immobilière de la Ville de Paris*) launched a participatory budgeting portal for the social housing they manage. Ten chosen projects were implemented with RIVP's financial support (Cabannes, 2017[49]). The Madrid City Council in **Spain** launched an online platform for public participation in budgeting in 2015 to help foster trust, transparency, and direct citizen consultation (OECD, 2015[50]).

For fundraisers: How to design a homelessness programme or intervention that is attractive to funders?

Blending different funding instruments, including repayable (e.g. loans) and non-repayable (e.g. grants) instruments, can be effective in increasing the potential attractiveness of a programme or project from the perspective of funders. In addition, other strategies can help raise the profile of a funding application.

Aligning proposed projects with priorities of funding bodies and relevant stakeholders

A fundamental dimension of increasing an intervention's "attractiveness" in the eyes of large funders is to ensure that the programme or project aligns with the broader priorities of the funder and any relevant stakeholders. In the context of the EU, for instance, subnational governments, NGOs and other entities that seek EU funding (see Box 7.2) should ensure that proposed projects align with the priorities of the Member States/national managing authority, and is compatible with the selection of projects by the managing authority during the negotiation and adoption of the programmes. In practice, this may mean adjusting a project's scope and the proposal language to fit within the national frameworks.

In **Spain**, two NGOs, *Hogar Sí* and *Provivienda,* secured funding through the EU Next Generation Funds to finance two pilot Housing First projects. One of the projects, *Derechos a la Vivienda*, focuses on promoting housing solutions for people leaving care institutions (HOGAR SÍ, 2022[51]). One of the objectives of the EU Next Generation Funds in Spain is to promote a new economy of care and employment policies, as well as transforming, modernising, and enhancing social services, including housing (Fresno Consulting, 2021[52]). In this vein, within a public-private partnership, the government and social entities successfully aligned the project targets with the specific objectives of the EU Next Generation Funds to secure access to such funds.

Testing innovative solutions through pilot projects before scaling up

In Košice, the **Slovak Republic**, the DEDO foundation has supported households experiencing homelessness through a range of services, including access to healthcare and housing, primarily through a Housing First programme co-funded by the ESF (European Social Fund Plus, 2022[53]). The project's positive outcomes helped design the Slovak Republic's national strategy for preventing and ending homelessness.

In **Czechia**, the city of Brno launched a Housing First pilot project, offering housing solutions and support services to families experiencing homelessness. This initiative was funded by the ESF and was implemented in collaboration with civil society organisations and academia. The evaluation of the initiative showed that 96% of beneficiaries had maintained housing one year into the programme (Housing First Europe Hub; FEANTSA, 2022[29]). Building on the positive results, the Ministry of Labour and Social affairs issued a national call for funding Housing First programmes and provided guidance to applicants on how to prepare their applications.

The municipal Government of Rotterdam in **the Netherlands** manages Project 010, an initiative aimed at supporting young people aged 18 to 23 who are at risk of homelessness. Based on the principles of Housing First, the programme provides independent housing, financial assistance, and counselling services. Launched in 2019, evaluations have shown positive financial and social impacts. For every euro invested, the city government saves two euros due to reduced reliance on public services such as shelters. Additionally, each euro invested is projected to generate a net saving of EUR 1.5 in societal costs, including debt assistance and reducing school dropouts. The success of the programme has sparked interest in expanding it to other at-risk groups and scaling it up across the city (CEBEON, 2023[54]).

For fundraisers: How to identify funding opportunities that will help deliver on homelessness policy objectives?

Developing a pipeline of projects that are ready to finance, including scalable projects

In Catalonia (**Spain**), the Catalan Institute of Finance (ICF) is a beneficiary of a EUR 100 million loan from the Council of Europe Development Bank to support the expansion of social housing for vulnerable population groups across the region. The loan will co-finance a pipeline of operations managed by the ICF, including financial support for social organisations and municipalities to acquire housing units for social rent, as well as funding for social housing developers to build new units. Additionally, the loan benefits from an InvestEU guarantee, which aims to raise the total funding to EUR 200 million (CEB, 2023[55]).

For fundraisers: How to strengthen funding and financing expertise within the homelessness services sector?

Funding opportunities are also constrained by the limited capacity within the homelessness sector to manage this complex funding and financing landscape. NGO and service providers may not know that these funding sources are available, lack the training or time to put together a successful application, and find reporting requirements burdensome. This may make funding streams inaccessible, particularly for regions with the greatest resource constraints or those most siloed for national and subnational entities.

Efforts are currently underway to develop this capacity within the EU, through an EPOCH working group, co-chaired with the Council of Europe Development Bank. The aim of the working group is to map funding options and assist in developing projects aimed at tackling homelessness. In this context, the InvestEU Advisory Hub also supports the identification, preparation, and development of investment projects across the European Union. In addition, FEANTSA is convening mutual learning events aimed at building capacity, including in areas related to funding and financing for national and regional governments as well as service providers in the field of homelessness (more information available from FEANTSA).

Adapting lessons and approaches from the climate and energy sectors to build capacity for funding and financing for homelessness

The homelessness sector can also look to climate finance for funding directly, as housing solutions need to be upgraded in line with "green legislation". Many low-income households live in older buildings that require energy-intensive processes to heat them (Taylor, 2021[56]). For example, the inhabitants of social housing estates in Warsaw, **Poland,** often live in homes that are heated with either coal stoves or electric heaters (Frankowski, 2022[57]). Renovation of the existing stock can mitigate energy poverty, and the climate finance sector can help funding towards this aim (Barnett; Ganzerla; Couti; Molard, 2024[58]).

Fundamentals for success

Homelessness imposes high human and financial costs, with public spending often directed towards emergency responses rather than long-term solutions. The fragmentation of funding across different sectors and varying modalities across funding bodies hinder, among other factors, the efficient co-ordination of resources.

This block presents innovative funding models such as revolving funds, social impact bonds, and partnerships between public and private sectors as potential ways to diversify and increase the financial support needed to address homelessness effectively. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) should be expanded to ensure resources are used efficiently. To tackle homelessness effectively in the long term, it is crucial to expand the availability of affordable housing and increase investment in prevention

programmes and Housing First initiatives. A growing body of research demonstrates that Housing First can be cost-effective for public budgets, as the savings generated often surpass the initial costs. This block provides recommendations for both funders and fundraisers, drawing on existing evidence and international experiences.

Building on these operational issues, the following recommendations can help policy makers and practitioners mobilising funding and financing and aligning incentive structures, for both funders and funding recipients:

For funders:

- Identify and communicate policy objectives to be achieved and align funding and incentive structures accordingly.
- Remove bottlenecks to funding integrated, long-term projects that combine both housing and service elements.
- Mandate quality monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks as part of funding obligations.
- Ensure transparency in funding decisions and budget allocations related to homelessness.
- Lay the foundation for long-term funding and financing for affordable and social housing, including through (revolving) fund systems, as well as systemic solutions to scale up Housing-led and Housing First solutions.

For fundraisers:

- Map potential (supra-national, national, sub-national and non-public) funding sources, along with technical assistance needs.
- Develop a pipeline of projects that are ready to finance, including scalable projects.
- Address technical assistance needs in the homelessness services sector to develop skills to attract and manage funding.

More generally:

- Adapt lessons from climate and energy funding and financing schemes to the homelessness and social policy sector.
- Effectively communicate the rationale, the importance, and the social and economic benefits of funding Housing First programmes to the broader population.

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8 Leadership, co-ordination and capacity

Block 8 discusses leadership, co-ordination, and capacity within the homelessness sector, emphasising their importance for effective governance. Co-ordination challenges often arise due to the diverse range of actors and stakeholders involved in homelessness policies and services. This block explores the range of agencies and authorities responsible for homelessness across OECD and EU countries and provides guidance on improving horizontal and vertical co-ordination. It also examines the capacity challenges facing local authorities and frontline workers in the homelessness sector, which constrain their ability to implement innovative practices effectively, and explores ways to improve working conditions and develop capacity.

Relevance and key data

This section focuses on leadership, co-ordination, and capacity in the homelessness sector – core dimensions of good governance – in light of the particular salience of these issues in this sector. The recommendations aim to ensure that "the social relief sector [can] function as a trampoline not only as a safety net" (Boesveldt, van Montfort and Boutellier, 2017[1]).

As is the case in many policy domains, co-ordination challenges arise in the homelessness sector in light of the range of actors, agencies and stakeholders involved in designing, delivering and funding homelessness policies and services (Block 1). Governments can benefit from a culture of co-operation that codifies the role of various levels of government in policy making, legislation, financing, standard setting, oversight and regular communication to improve effective governance and successful long-term reform (OECD, 2019[2]). Concretely, improving co-ordination in the realm of homelessness can take many forms, including, among others, inter-ministerial councils as well as national Housing First Hubs, which provide a platform for training, mutual learning, exchange, and co-ordination, and play a key role in mobilising different actors to collectively scale up Housing First solutions. Smooth co-operation with regional and local governments, along with adequate resources and capacity, is critical, in light of their often significant role in delivering homelessness support services and housing solutions.

Further, homelessness service providers are under increasing strain. In OECD countries, health and social care systems employ more workers now than at any other time in history (OECD, 2023[3]). In 2021, more than one in every ten jobs (10.5%) was in health or social care, up from 9.5% in 2011 (Figure 8.1). The share of employment in health and social work ranges from over 20% in Norway, to less than 5% in Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Romania. Across OECD countries with available data, the majority of workers in health and social care systems are women, representing on average roughly 80% of all workers.

Figure 8.1. The health and social care sector employs 1 in 10 workers on average – the majority of whom are women

Employment in health and social work as a share of total employment, by gender, 2021 (or nearest year)
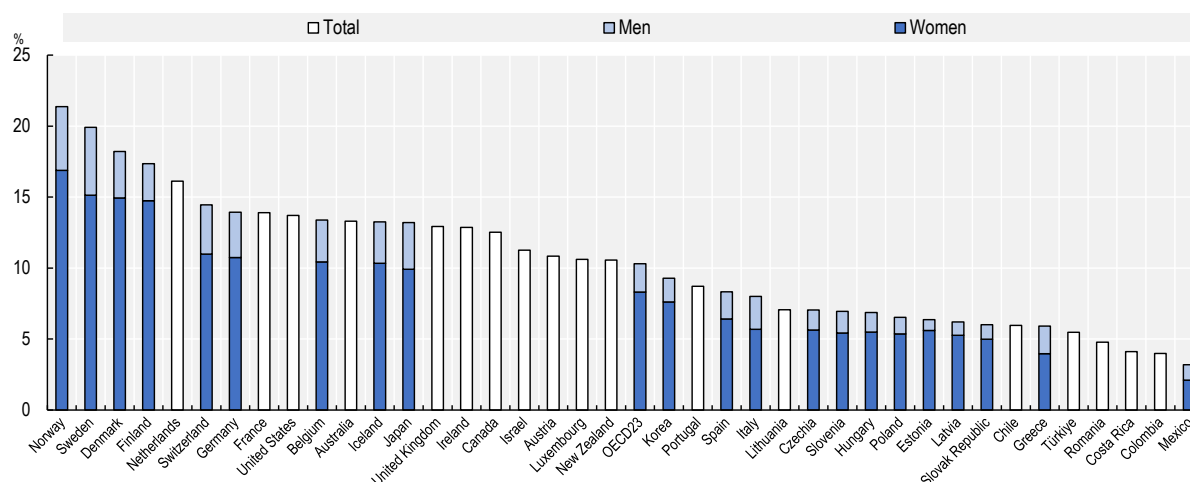
Source: (OECD, 2023[3]), *Health at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/7a7afb35-en.

Indeed, in many OECD and EU countries, homelessness services are under-resourced, fragmented, and suffer from shortages of both frontline and operational staff. Service providers and agencies in charge often lack the capacity to build momentum around more innovative or efficient practices, which can create

service gaps, inequities across populations, and an inability to focus on targeted prevention (Mosley, 2021[4]; Gaetz, 2020[5]).

OECD countries exhibit vast differences in social and health services available (Block 6), ministry compositions and responsibilities and organisational structures (Block 1), national regulations and capacity to integrate housing services with social services. Thus, some of the recommendations in this section will not be uniformly applicable across all countries.

Common operational questions

Ensuring good governance is a continuous process for public agencies at all levels and underpins the realisation of all other blocks in this Toolkit. The following set of operational questions is intended to guide policy makers and practitioners to improve leadership, co-ordination and capacity in the homelessness sector in their country, city or community context:

- Which governmental agency is best placed to lead on homelessness policies?
- How to improve co-ordination and coherence across different actors and policy domains to improve homelessness services?
- How to improve working conditions and develop capacity for local governments and frontline staff in the homelessness sector?

Which governmental agency is best placed to lead on homelessness policies?

In terms of leadership, the responsible agency to tackle homelessness varies by country. In just over 50% of OECD countries, the ministry responsible for Social Welfare (e.g. Labour, Health, Family) is responsible for addressing homelessness. In other countries, the leading ministry falls under the authority of ministries of Housing, Economy, Finance, Economic Development, Environment, Regional Development or Social Affairs. Further, in some countries, homelessness policies are fragmented across multiple ministries.

Figure 8.2. Across OECD countries, different public agencies lead homelessness policy
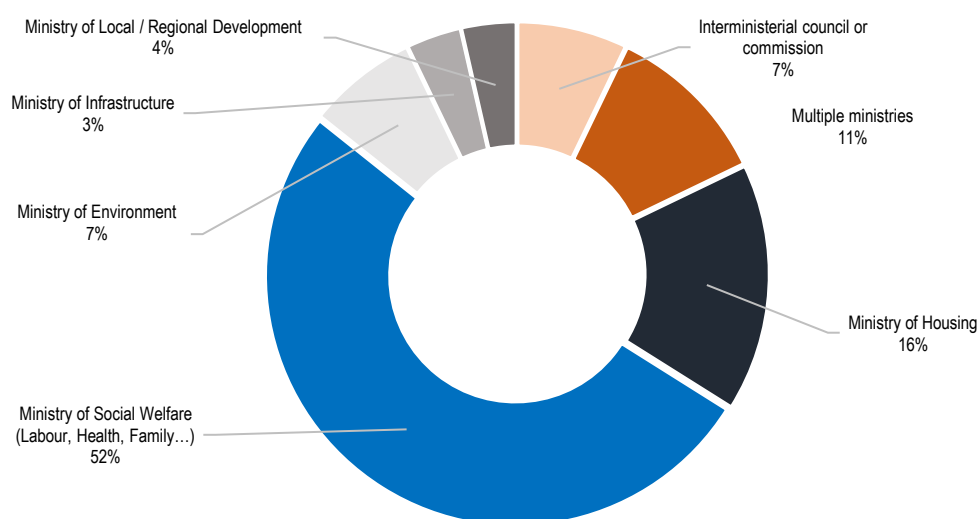
Source: 2023 OECD Questionnaire on Affordable and Social Housing (QuASH).

Governments will need to identify which institutional actors/agencies are best placed to co-ordinate efforts on homelessness. The choice of appropriate agency will vary by national context, but some key characteristics to consider are that the agency should have: i) the mandate to convene all relevant stakeholders, ii) the capacity to effectively co-ordinate national and local stakeholders, both within and outside the government, to prevent overlaps, and iii) sufficient financial, technical, and human resources to achieve these objectives (OECD, 2023[6]). Beyond the implementation of relevant policies to combat homelessness, this also includes defining indicators, developing a culture of monitoring, evaluation, and learning to increase capacity, and disseminate data and outputs to stakeholders.

Identifying the ministry with the adequate functional capacity and financial resources

Effective homelessness prevention and response requires adequate functional capacities and financial resources to implement the policies. These include strong internal policies and priorities to integrate budgets and service delivery, data-sharing and cross-team communication, and a heterogenous combination of specialists and generalists with formal and informal collaboration channels (such as co-locating services within the same building).

Homelessness policies often benefit from the establishment of a clear policy lead or co-ordinator, whose responsibilities may include clarifying the roles of different actors (e.g. provider, financier, regulator), and identifying opportunities to institutionalise co-operation (e.g. through the creation of different governing bodies with complementary mandates and tools among stakeholders).

A number of countries have a lead ministry responsible for homelessness, often with a considerable implementation role for regional and local governments. In **Norway**, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is responsible for the National strategy for Social Housing Policies (2021-24), "We all need a safe place to call home," yet housing policy responsibilities are shared across national, subnational and non-public actors. The central government outlines the policy goals and sets the enabling framework (laws, regulations and financial tools distributed by the National Housing Bank); public health and social welfare services are responsible for people experiencing homelessness; municipalities provide housing support – including temporary accommodation – to vulnerable populations, in co-operation with NGOs (FEANTSA, 2022[7]). In **Germany**, the Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building is in charge of the development of the national action plan to combat homelessness, with key roles in affordable and social housing policies, and the provision of health and social services for subnational actors.

In several countries, inter-ministerial bodies facilitate the co-ordination of homelessness policies, though their responsibilities vary. In **France**, since 2010, the DIHAL (*Délégation interministérielle à l'hébergement et à l'accès au logement*) co-ordinates and monitors the implementation of public policies for shelter and access to housing for people experiencing homelessness or poorly housed people, under the authority of the Prime Minister and functionally attached to the Ministry of Territorial Cohesion. In the **United States**, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) co-ordinates across 19 federal agencies and departments, and with partners in both the public and private sectors and people with lived experience, to prevent and end homelessness in the nation. Its primary focus is to reduce bureaucracy and promote the co-ordination and combination of different federal programmes, and to improve efficiency across levels of government, helping state, local, and tribal partners use federal resources from different agencies to implement best practices and meet locally-determined needs.

Conducting a mapping of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and their functions

One step to strengthening co-ordination and multi-level governance can involve a mapping of the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and their functions. There are many ways to conduct a

mapping; a selection of key questions in Box 8.1 could provide some useful guidance. The aim of the mapping exercise could be to identify both overlaps and gaps, along with clarity over who should be engaged at different parts of the process. This process can be useful for broad, inclusive processes, such as determining who to engage in the design of a national homelessness strategy (Block 1), as well as identifying a narrower subset of relevant actors and institutions to be mobilised for specific initiatives (such as rethinking shelter access rules).

Box 8.1. Mapping actors and institutions in the homelessness sector: Key questions

The following questions could support the undertaking of a mapping exercise to identify existing and potential institutional actors to engage in homelessness policy making:

- Who is engaged in homelessness strategies, policies and programmes? Which public actors and level(s) of government (national, regional, municipal)? Which non-government actors?
- What are the roles of these actors? Who regulates? Who funds and/or finances? Who implements?
- Which types of sectors are mobilised?
- What services do they provide?
- At what moment do they intervene?
- Who is currently (in)eligible to access housing and support services for people experiencing homelessness? Who is supporting those who are ineligible?
- Who is responsible for homelessness prevention? For housing-led and Housing First solutions?
- Which non-governmental actors and people at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness be more meaningfully engaged, and in what ways?

In **Spain**, for instance, an Inter-ministerial Commission sets general policy guidelines, and a joint committee of national and autonomous bodies (the Territorial Council of Social Services and the System for the Autonomy and Care of People with Dependency) is intended to ensure the consistency of homelessness policies across levels of government. This same body, along with a Technical Co-operation Group of regional and local actors, provides implementation, monitoring, and tracking support for the country's homelessness strategy (the Framework Agreement). The Social Welfare Commission of the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces engages local actors to develop solutions in line with the national strategy, and the State Council of Non-Governmental Social Action Organisations incorporates inputs from NGOs and people with lived experience.

How to improve co-ordination and coherence across different actors and policy domains to improve homelessness services?

Homelessness programmes tend to be fragmented across a range of citizen-facing agencies and service providers. As has been demonstrated throughout this Toolkit, this includes a broad range of national-level ministries, regional and local authorities, and non-governmental organisations. Without sufficient co-ordination, reforms in specific policy areas may have unintended negative effects on other areas working with people experiencing homelessness. Moreover, in homelessness policy, as in any other policy that involves different agencies, the gains or losses of reforms are likely to be unequally distributed across agencies and ministries, creating additional barriers to enacting reforms. For example, a randomised controlled trial (RCT) of the Housing First (*Un Chez Soi d'Abord*) programme in **France** conducted across four sites: Paris, Marseille, Toulouse and Lille found cost savings for the French health insurance for

participants with a diagnosis of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder but increased expenditure on housing and social services (Lemoine et al., 2021[8]).

Encouraging horizontal and vertical integration of critical homelessness services

As discussed in Block 6, there is growing evidence that integrating public services, in particular medical/health providers and social services is a major public policy priority for many OECD countries (Adams and Hakonarson, 2024[9]). Integration can be horizontal and/or vertical. Horizontal integration, which is a more common approach and the focus of many initiatives across the European Union, typically brings together policy groups, services, professions, and organisations from across different sectors and/or organisations to address the needs of service users. Vertical integration on the other hand is more likely to be systemic and involve the integration of governance and finance arrangements within multiple service settings.

An example of a horizontal integration approach includes programmes that provide care-experienced young people with intensive wraparound support where they are linked to a professional support person. Since 2017, local authorities in **England** (the **United Kingdom**) are required to offer a Personal Adviser to all care leavers towards whom they had a duty for care under the Children Act 1989. (Box 3.1) In April 2022, the Department for Education announced GBP 36.4 million (USD 46 million) of funding for Personal Advisers over the next three years (Foley et al., 2023[10]). This includes responsibility for monitoring, reviewing, and implementing the young person's "pathway plan". A pathway plan details the kind of support the young person might expect their Personal Adviser to provide and address – for instance, information on housing options, benefit entitlements, or support in finding employment.

Vertical integration tends to be larger-scale and include a range of initiatives. In the province of Québec (**Canada**) the Program of Research to Integrate the Services for the Maintenance of Autonomy (PRISMA) was initiated in 1997 and has since become a mainstream approach to services for older people and people with disabilities in the province. The project blends various approaches to service integration, namely case management, single entry points, individualised service plans, a functional assessment tool and an information sharing system (MacAdam, 2015[11]).

A key barrier to greater integration is multi-governance finance issues and competition between service providers for resources (Adams and Hakonarson, 2024[9]). If full integration is not feasible, co-locating relevant services in one place can address time and resource allocation issues not only for the service users themselves but also for the service providers. For example, co-located services in the form of "family centres" for people leaving prisons are common in the Nordic countries, where multidisciplinary teams of specialists are located under one room. One example is the Red Cross re-entry house in Oslo, **Norway**, where different state and municipal services are in the same building, so that people leaving prison can access services more easily. Similar one-stop-shops have been introduced in other European countries, such as in the **United Kingdom**.

Fostering a heterogeneous representation in homelessness support service networks

Ensuring a heterogenous constellation of the policy network which involves a mixed composition of specialists and generalists, government, not-for-profit sector actors, and research sector actors, is conducive to a better quality of housing services (Boesveldt, van Montfort and Boutellier, 2017[1]). For example, in **Portugal**, the *National Strategy for the Integration of Homelessness People: Prevention, Intervention and Monitoring, 2017-23,* involves a range of public agencies (e.g. ministries, public institutes, local authorities) and private stakeholders (e.g. NGOs, research institutes) (Baptista, 2018[12]). The monitoring and evaluation groups meets bimonthly to assess the progress of the strategy and is responsible for preparing a biennial Action Plan and annual evaluation reports. Each annual evaluation report provides an update on the status of the strategic objectives, the main constraints to achieving strategic objectives, as well as improvement proposals. The biennial Action Plans include consultations

with partner entities and people with lived experiences of homelessness and provides updated goals and strategic objectives.

Co-creating homelessness service delivery with impacted individuals

As discussed in Block 11, advocates of user-centred government service design and delivery emphasise the importance of moving from human- centred design to co-designing services with impacted individuals throughout the ongoing development process of a service, rather than a one-off formal consultations or observational user research (Service Design Network gGMbH, 2016[13]; OECD, 2022[14]). Co-designing can allow individuals directly affected by homelessness to participate in the development process of a service or prevention programme. This is also critical when thinking about cross-agency collaboration for wraparound service delivery. This also includes empowering frontline staff or civil servants to co-create better institutional solutions from the bottom-up based on their direct experience. Such efforts can help ensure that limited resources are used effectively. Austrian- and UK-based researchers found that co-designed mental health interventions positively affect people experiencing homelessness' mental health and housing situations, while also leading to reduced hospital and emergency department admissions and increased primary care utilisation (Schiffler et al., 2023[15]). Once implemented, establishing a monitoring system to measure service and the user journey, and whole outcomes (instead of focusing on individual agencies) can help promote iterative process improvements and successful delivery.

Leveraging data-sharing partnerships to best address individual needs

In early 2012, a data-sharing partnerships was established with the County Hospital system in Houston, the United **States** known as the Harris Health system to address the needs of high-needs, high-cost populations which was later expanded to include the emergency medical services (EMS) system (Baptista, 2018[12]). Analysing the overlap between the data from these two systems revealed that individuals were not limited to accessing just one agency or hospital, such as the Harris Health System, but were also seeking care at other hospitals based on EMS drop-offs. This initiative demonstrated that cross-sector data integration plays a crucial role in achieving care co-ordination for socially and medically vulnerable individuals. Building successful data sharing partnerships required establishing trust with agency partners through transparent communication about data usage and demonstrating the proof of concept from initial data sharing initiatives with the county. Data privacy must be ensured.

In **Chile**, the Social Information Registry (RIS) functions as a registry of socio-economic and administrative data for individuals and households, covering an estimated 98% of the national population. The *Red de Protección Social* was established in 2021 as an information platform for social services and benefits available in situations of need, including difficulties in finding housing. The platform links administrative data across various registries, namely, the RIS, the Household Registry (*Registro Social de Hogares*), the Civil Registry and Identification Service, and the National Health Fund. This enables the platform to identify the services and benefits available to households across 20 institutions. The goal is to inform individuals about the benefits and services they qualify for and how to request and access them (Frey, Hyee and Minondo Canto, 2024[16]).

How to improve working conditions and develop capacity for local governments and frontline staff in the homelessness sector?

The frontline homelessness workforce, including shelter and service agency workers, plays a critical part in providing immediate accommodation, food, security, and support services to individuals experiencing homelessness. Yet they often receive little support themselves, and insufficient attention is paid to advancing the capacity of shelter workers (Burke, 2005[17]; Kulkarni et al., 2013[18]; Mullen and Leginksi, 2010[19]; Hopper, Bassuk and Olivet, 2010[20]). OECD work on long-term care (LTC) workers shows that the workforce frequently experiences overwork, poor working conditions, financial insecurity, vicarious

trauma, lack of social recognition, and frustration (e.g. from the challenges to overcome the systemic barriers to support people experiencing homelessness) (OECD, 2023[21]). Similarly, in the homelessness sector, service providers face numerous challenges, including physical and psychological strain, long working hours, low wages, limited training opportunities and a lack of social recognition, and the sector often suffers from high turnover (Peters, Hobson and Samuel, 2021[22]).

Frontline staff workers are also prone to experience emotional distress. Research in Canada found that frequent exposure to chronic stressors, stemming from direct contact with service users, was positively correlated with post-traumatic stress and psychological distress. This impact was especially pronounced among early-career workers with frequent direct contact with service users (Kerman et al., 2022[23]). Similarly, qualitative studies capturing conversations with homelessness service providers and surveys show that frontline workers often experience burnout symptoms and psychological exhaustion (Twis et al., 2021[24]; Peters, Hobson and Samuel, 2021[22]; Mette et al., 2020[25]; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2023[26]). These findings suggests that frontline workers could potentially benefit from more comprehensive in-work counselling support. The following quotes, taken from (Peters, Hobson and Samuel, 2021[22]), illustrate the difficulties of homelessness care work:

- "Constantly battling a biased social system with inadequate resources, [...] can [...] lead to feeling overwhelmed and defeated."
- "I love my job […]. Nevertheless, I have never felt so much despair and helplessness before in all my life."

A critical component to tackle homelessness will be to improve conditions and develop capacity and training for local governments and frontline staff in homelessness services. The homelessness sector can draw on insights from recent reforms enacted in the LTC sector, following the COVID-19 pandemic to address similar challenges. Reforms include allocating greater resources to improve working conditions, reduce labour shortages, strengthen training programmes, and emphasise preventive measures (OECD, 2023[21]). Considering that many countries plan to significantly scale-up service-intensive programmes like Housing First to combat homelessness, attracting new staff will likely require improving the attractiveness of homelessness services.

Proposed solutions include i) increasing the wage and working condition protections of workers, ii) supporting collective bargaining, iii) boosting opportunities for training, iv) increasing the use of new technologies particularly to improve digital skills, v) promoting the transitions of undeclared foreign care workers to formal employment, and vi) providing more counselling services, regular supervision, and mental health resources. In addition, campaigns to increase social recognition can help promote recruitment.

Increasing wages and improving working conditions of workers in the health, social services and homelessness sectors

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of countries permanently or temporarily increased the remuneration of LTC workers, including **Canada**, **Czechia**, **France**, **Hungary**, **Korea**, **Latvia**, the **Netherlands** and **Slovenia**. The largest increases were observed in Hungary and Slovenia, with pay rising by 20% and 16%, respectively. Additionally, in 2021, Luxembourg granted LTC workers two extra days of leave, leading to an overall increase in their hourly earnings (OECD, 2023[21]).

Boosting training opportunities, including obligatory training

In **Belgium,** LTC workers are required to complete a formal training programme, along with two additional days of training each year. In **Ireland**, quality assessments of LTC providers include a review of the educational qualifications of their care staff. Additionally, LTC workers are required to complete periodic courses or additional training based on the specific needs of the care recipients. This helps enhance the

skills of care providers while elevating the overall quality of care (OECD, 2023[21]). In **Norway**, as part of the Competency lift 2025 action plan, the central government provides grants to municipalities to offer different types of training to complement formal training programmes and help LTC workers strengthen their skills and improve their motivation (OECD, 2022[27]). Finally, quantitative studies show that access to training might be positively associated with workers' well-being: a cross-country study across eight European countries (**France**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, the **Netherlands**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Spain** and **Sweden**) found that working in a care setting with access to training is linked to lower levels of psychophysical exhaustion and disillusionment (HOME_EU Consortium Study Group, 2020[28]).

Fundamentals for success

In light of the diversity of actors and policy domains engaged in the homelessness sector, effective policy delivery depends on strong leadership and smooth co-ordination. Further, across OECD and EU countries, homelessness services tend to be fragmented and under-resourced, and the workforce suffers from physical and psychological strain, long working hours, low wages, limited training opportunities and a lack of social recognition. To scale-up service-intensive programmes like Housing First, policy makers will need to improve the attractiveness of homelessness services. Building on these operational issues, the following recommendations can help policy makers and practitioners to strengthen leadership, co-ordination and capacity in the homelessness sector:

- Establish a clear policy lead on homelessness and clarify the roles and responsibilities of different actors (provider, financier, regulator), ensuring that the agency has the necessary mandate, capacity and resources.
- Strengthen horizontal and vertical co-ordination – and, where possible, encourage integration – of critical homelessness services.
- Encourage information sharing and mutual learning across different levels of government and relevant authorities, NGOs, and the private sector, including through national networks such as Housing First hubs.
- Engage a range of relevant stakeholders in support service networks, and co-create homelessness service delivery with impacted individuals.
- Improve conditions and develop capacity and training for local governments and frontline staff in the homelessness sector.

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9 The political economy of reform

Block 9 explores the political economy of homelessness reform, emphasising the need for systemic change in how governments address homelessness. Bringing together lessons from the eight other building blocks, this block highlights these importance of elevating homelessness on the political agenda, building broad-based coalitions to depoliticise the issue, strengthening public support for homelessness reform, and fostering policy continuity beyond electoral cycles.

Relevance and key data

Together, the nine building blocks presented in this Toolkit call for a systems change in how governments have traditionally addressed homelessness. Ending homelessness requires a comprehensive understanding of the country's political economy to garner support from diverse stakeholders and effectively implement policy reform. There is growing public interest in housing and homelessness policy reforms, and the issue is often politically fraught.

Drawing on a range of country experiences in implementing significant structural reforms – notably in the areas of pensions, product markets and labour markets – several important lessons, or "ingredients," to successful reforms can be summarised as follows (Tompson, 2009[1]):

- *An electoral mandate for reform* and *the condition of the policy regime to be reformed*: persistent and acute housing challenges – namely the lack of affordable housing and the homelessness crisis – have become key electoral issues in many OECD and EU countries, as voters demand solutions from government. Rising homelessness rates, and particularly increases in unsheltered homelessness, have propelled the issue into one that is recognised in many countries as "ripe" for reform. For instance, the swift government actions introduced at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic signified that it *was* possible, for instance, to efficiently and relatively effectively propose safer alternatives to rough sleeping. Governments can take advantage of this political momentum to respond with a broad-based commitment and evidence-based solutions to putting into place long-term solutions to end homelessness.

- *Effective communication*: homelessness is a complex policy issue, and it is also a profoundly human one. This requires the development of strategic communication to garner public support for action. For instance, communication efforts may aim to assuage public resistance to the development of affordable and social housing, which is an essential part of the solution to ending homelessness.

- *Solid research and analysis*: the evidence base continues to solidify, with well-documented data on the effectiveness of housing-led and Housing First models, for instance. There is a need to monitor and evaluate homelessness policy effectiveness more generally (Block 3): a robust evidence base can help make the policy response to homelessness less contentious.

- *Government cohesion* and *leadership*: collaboration and co-operation across a range of stakeholders and institutions are critical and discussed in detail in Block 1– but so is consistent government leadership. This has been the case in past decades in Finland, where eight coalition governments have supported the goal of eradicating homelessness, thereby largely taking the policy goal out of the political arena and enabling a results-oriented technical focus on policy measures to be enacted (Kaakinen, 2023[2]).

- *Time* and *persistence*: while some measures and reforms can be put into place in the short term (such as improved data collection efforts; the introduction of a public dashboard to communicate homelessness statistics; pilot measures to prevent evictions), others will take more time to design, implement and track results (including, for instance, investments in affordable and social housing). Persistence and continuity are key and can be facilitated by actors and institutions *outside* government as well, who are not constrained by electoral cycles.

Common operational questions

There are a number of strategies to strengthen the overall public policy response to homelessness, and to engage civil society in supporting an integrated, evidence-based, people-centred policy approach. The

following set of operational questions is intended to guide policy makers and practitioners in considering key dimensions of the political economy of reform in their country, city or community context:

- How to elevate the issue of homelessness on the political agenda and build public support for reform?
- How to better communicate homelessness data to key stakeholders and the broader public?
- How to foster policy continuity and consistent efforts to combat homelessness beyond electoral cycles?

How to elevate the issue of homelessness on the political agenda and build public support for reform?

Elevating the issue of homelessness on the political agenda to bring about reform through an evidence-based, housing-led approach

At national level, two factors can help meaningfully shape the homelessness policy agenda and bring about policy reform. First, improving data collection methods on homelessness at the national, regional, and local levels can help governments gain a better understanding of its scope and causes, facilitating its insertion into the public agenda and developing solutions that more effectively address the drivers of homelessness in their specific context (Block 2). Relatedly, governments can be incentivised to increase investment in long-term affordable and social housing solutions, in light of the evidence of a positive link between investing in housing solutions to prevent and combat homelessness and increased savings in public spending, a correlation found by a number of cost-benefit studies (Block 5) (Gaetz, 2012[3]; Dellar, 2022[4]; Pomeroy, 2005[5]; Palermo, Dera and Clyne, 2006[6]; Patterson et al., 2008[7]).

The electorate can also play a role in bringing the issue of homelessness to the political agenda, but there is often a lack of understanding within the community regarding the issue of homelessness and the most effective ways to address it. For example, a 2019 survey across eight European countries found that while 58% of respondents supported government action to address homelessness, 57% reported having limited knowledge about the topic (HOME-EU consortium study group, 2019[8]). Similarly, a nationwide survey conducted in Chile in 2024 revealed that 70% of respondents believe the central and municipal governments should be responsible for delivering solutions for people experiencing homelessness, and 84% believe the general population should show greater concern about the issue (CADEM, 2024[9]). Without sufficient understanding of the issue and of evidence-based policy solutions to address it, the electorate can act as a barrier to implementing effective homelessness policy. To bridge the knowledge gap on homelessness, governments should seek support from civil society, private actors, and academia to inform the public, raise awareness, and ultimately garner support at the ballot box.

In addition, key institutional actors could more systematically incorporate the theme of homelessness into public perception surveys, such as the Eurobarometer. This would help assess public opinion on the issue, adapt communication tools to garner support, and make homelessness a more prominent policy topic for citizens.

Public figures can play a role in raising the profile of the value of homelessness policy. For instance, in the **United Kingdom**, the Royal Foundation launched the Homewards programme in 2023, led by the Prince and Princess of Wales. This programme supports local actors in six locations across the United Kingdom to form coalitions to develop and implement homelessness prevention strategies in their communities (The Royal Foundation, 2024[10]). One year into the programme, working groups and broad coalitions have been formed in all six locations, bringing together over 500 cross-sector organisations and individuals. In the **United States**, musician Jon Bon Jovi advocates for action to address homelessness and has founded the Jon Bon Jovi Soul Foundation to provide funding to community partners working on homelessness. It

is important for such efforts engage in evidence-based solutions and rigorously assess the impacts of their interventions.

Developing strategic, evidence-based communication tools to engage, inform, and mobilise the public to support homelessness reform and overcome local resistance (NIMBYism)

In the **United Kingdom**, FrameWorks UK, an NGO, has developed a toolkit with advice to grow public support for building social housing. The framework suggests framing the issue of housing, homelessness, and poverty with straightforward responses to three key questions: (i) Identifying what the issue is about and why it matters ("What are social homes and why do they matter?"); (ii) communicating how it works, and the obstacles to making it work ("How do social homes work? What's not working, and why?"); (iii) laying out what can be done to address it ("What can we do about the shortage of social homes?") (FrameWorks UK, 2024[11]). Strategic framing of such issues can be essential to overcome local resistance, or "NIMBYism ("not-in-my-backyard" responses), to the development of more social and affordable housing – which is one of the key components to addressing homelessness.

Box 9.1 addresses a number of common questions and misconceptions around homelessness, providing short evidence summaries and indicating research and related OECD work for further reading. These short evidence summaries may be useful for different purposes, including galvanising political and/or public support for homelessness, or funding applications.

Box 9.1. Debunking common myths around homelessness with evidence

This Box summarises the evidence relating to a handful of common questions and misconceptions around homelessness, recalling key research findings and the state of the art, and directing the reader to more detailed discussion in the relevant building block of the Toolkit and/or other work.

Is homelessness always visible?

No. In many countries, only a small share of people experiencing homelessness are sleeping rough in public spaces, and/or may be chronically homeless. In contrast, a larger share of individuals cycle in and out of homelessness, and may be less "visible" to the public – and in official government statistics (OECD, 2015[12]; OECD, 2020[13]; OECD, 2024[14]). These diverse experiences can include people who are staying in non-conventional dwellings (such as mobile homes or temporary structures), or who are temporarily staying with family and friends. For instance, in **Australia**, individuals sleeping rough made up only 6% of all people experiencing homelessness in 2021, compared to 14% of people who were staying with family and friends (OECD, 2024[15]). While experiences of "hidden homelessness" are hard to capture in official statistics, there are ways to increase data coverage to reflect a more diverse range of living situations (discussed in greater detail in the *OECD Monitoring Framework: Measuring Homelessness in OECD and EU countries*). More comprehensive data can in turn help to improve the public policy response to homelessness. For a detailed breakdown of national statistics on people experiencing homelessness as reported by governments across the OECD and EU, refer to the *OECD Country Notes on Homelessness Data* (OECD, 2024[16]) and the OECD Affordable Housing Database (OECD, 2024[14]).

Which socio-demographic groups are most likely to experience homelessness?

Homelessness affects a diverse range of people (see, for instance (OECD, 2020[13]) and (OECD, 2024[14])), and the socio-demographic groups most affected by homelessness vary across countries. Although in many countries, single men constitute a significant portion of the population experiencing homelessness in official government statistics, women, families with children, and young people are also affected. For example, in some OECD countries, women make up 20% to 40% of the homeless

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population. Moreover, evidence suggests that some socio-demographic groups are more likely to be underreported, or missed, in official government statistics on homelessness, leading to an incomplete understanding of the full extent of homelessness. Structural or institutional barriers can make it harder for some groups to access housing and/or support services, contributing to a higher likelihood of homelessness or housing instability. These issues are further discussed in Block 2 and the *OECD Monitoring Framework: Measuring Homelessness in OECD and EU countries* (OECD, Forthcoming[17]).

Is homelessness a consequence of one's own failings?

No, frequently it is not. It is important to understand homelessness as an issue connected to broader societal inequalities, and not necessarily a consequence of individual shortcomings, such as incompetence, social alienation, or substance use disorders. Such stigmatising discourses surrounding homelessness can be both harmful and erroneous. Research has pointed to the multifaceted nature of homelessness, increasingly emphasising the significance of structural factors, such as poverty, shrinking social safety nets, or constrained housing market conditions. The literature also recognises the role of institutional and systemic failures. Refer to Box 2.1 for further discussion of evidence on the diverse pathways into homelessness.

Do people experiencing homelessness systematically suffer from substance use disorders?

No. Substance use (such as of opioids or other harmful drugs) can both contribute to homelessness and be a consequence of it (Yoo et al., 2022[18]). Individuals experiencing homelessness with substance use disorders face a heightened risk of fatal and non-fatal overdoses and frequently encounter challenges in accessing treatment (Milaney et al., 2021[19]; McLaughlin et al., 2021[20]; Fine et al., 2022[21]). Overdose Prevention Centres (OPCs) have emerged as effective interventions to address this issue, also because they reach vulnerable populations, including those not served by traditional services (Shorter et al., 2023[22]; Magwood et al., 2020[23]; Bardwell et al., 2017[24]). Refer to Block 66 for further discussion on effective support services to people experiencing homelessness who suffer from substance use disorders.

However, it is important not to overstate this relationship. Substance use disorders can be one of many different drivers of homelessness (see Box 2.1), and not everyone who is experiencing homelessness uses drugs or alcohol. As such, it is essential to address the diverse reasons that people become homeless. For example, in **Germany**, studies show that two-thirds of people sleeping rough do not struggle with addiction (BMAS, 2022[25]).

Are street counts the best way to measure homelessness?

No, not on their own. Although street counts are the second-most commonly used data collection method across OECD and EU countries (see (OECD, Forthcoming[17])), street counts alone are insufficient to provide a comprehensive picture of homelessness. This is because (i) they tend to capture only limited types of homelessness or living arrangements, and (ii) they reflect experiences of homelessness at a specific point-in-time, failing to account for people who experience homelessness outside the time of the count. When combined with counts of individuals staying in shelters and temporary accommodations, street counts can provide a snapshot of homelessness among ETHOS Light groups 1, 2, and 3 (see Table 2.1). However, they fall short in capturing individuals who are temporarily staying with family or friends (ETHOS Light 6) or individuals transitioning in and out of homelessness. Additionally, street counts offer limited insights into the profiles, needs, and experiences of individuals experiencing homelessness. There is no one-size-fit-all solution to collect data on homelessness; there are several approaches, each with its strengths and limitations, offering varying depth and quality of data. This issue is further discussed in Block 2 and the *OECD Monitoring Framework: Measuring Homelessness in OECD and EU countries* (OECD, Forthcoming[17]).

> **Is Housing First effective in providing stable housing to people experiencing homelessness?**
>
> Yes. Housing First is effective in providing stable housing, for a diverse set of individuals in a broad array of country contexts. Studies have shown that participants in Housing First programmes achieve higher rates of housing stability compared to traditional approaches (Baxter et al., 2019[26]; Pleace, Baptista and Knutagård, 2019[27]; Jacob et al., 2022[28]). Block 5 provides a more detailed review of research and good practice. Nevertheless, the evidence base needs to be expanded to include findings from a more diverse set of countries to strengthen external validity.
>
> **Does Housing First improve health outcomes?**
>
> The evidence is mixed. For some participants, Housing First programmes have shown positive impacts on health outcomes, such as improvements in mental health and reductions in visits to the emergency room. Studies indicate that providing stable housing can create a foundation for individuals to address health issues more effectively. However, not all participants experience significant health improvements. Some research suggests that while housing stability increases, changes in health outcomes may be less pronounced or take longer to manifest. Therefore, while Housing First has the potential to enhance health outcomes, the effects can vary among individuals, and ongoing support services are crucial to address specific health needs (Keenan et al., 2021[29]; Roggenbuck, 2022[30]; Tsai, 2020[31]; Baxter et al., 2019[26]).
>
> **Is Housing First cost-effective?**
>
> Yes. The current evidence suggests that Housing First is an effective and resource-efficient intervention over the medium- to long- term. While there can be short-term costs to expanding the supply of affordable and social housing, implementing Housing First models can lead to significant cost savings across policy areas by reducing the use of emergency services, hospitalisations, and interactions with the criminal justice system. This has been demonstrated in the **United States**, **France**, the **United Kingdom**, **Canada**, and the **Netherlands** (for youth), where the Housing First interventions have generated significant cost savings that offset or exceeded programme costs (Délégation interministérielle à l'hébergement et à l'accès au logement (DIHAL), 2024[32]; Albanese, 2019[33]; CEBEON, 2023[34]). Moreover, as discussed in Block 5, governments can put in place long-term systems to fund affordable and social housing, such as revolving fund schemes, as has been the case in **Austria**, **Denmark**, the **Netherlands**, and, more recently, **Latvia**.

Building broad-based coalitions to depoliticise the issue of homelessness

To ensure commitment to preventing and combating homelessness among all stakeholders, policy discussions should be based on evidence and data. To this end, robust research and sound evidence must be presented in a clear and accessible format for key stakeholders in the policy-making process. Forming a cross-party coalition based on data and evidence ensures that policies to prevent and combat homelessness are implemented by the public administration in a consistent and systematic manner. As featured in Block 1, **Finland** and **Norway** have successfully developed sustained national-led approaches to homelessness, relying on a broad base of diverse stakeholders, including political parties.

How to better communicate homelessness data to key stakeholders and the broader public?

Producing annual reporting of homelessness trends and key indicators

In **Finland**, data on homelessness are published annually by the Housing Finance and Development Centre, ARA. Disaggregated data on subgroups of people experiencing homelessness are available,

drawing on a consistent methodology since 1987, providing over 30 years of trend data on homelessness. Having a large base of historical time-series data on homelessness helps policy makers evaluate the current context of homelessness and compare to past trends (The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA), 2024[35]).

Communicating homelessness trends with detailed graphical representations

In **France**, the report of the City of Paris' annual street count (*Nuit de la solidarité)* provides graphical representations of the distribution of people experiencing homelessness in Paris. For example, the report includes a map of Paris that pinpoints the geographic location where each individual person experiencing homelessness was enumerated (Atelier Parisien d'Urbanisme (APUR), 2024[36]). Detailed graphical representations make homelessness data easy to understand for those without a specialised background in housing and homelessness issues.

How to foster policy continuity and consistent efforts to address homelessness beyond electoral cycles?

Identifying, engaging, and supporting potential policy entrepreneurs and champions on homelessness, including outside government

In addition to fostering policy discussions on homelessness based on data and evidence rather than political ideology, it is important to ensure policy continuity beyond electoral cycles. Identifying, engaging, and supporting potential "policy entrepreneurs" and "champions" of homelessness, including those outside the government, can support this process by leveraging their expertise and reinforcing policy continuity.

National examples with international resonance include the Y-Foundation in **Finland**, an NGO that leads the Housing First Europe Hub alongside the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA). The Housing First Europe Hub serves as a platform bringing together a range of actors to promote Housing First as a policy response to address homelessness at the European level (Housing First Europe Hub, 2024[37]).

More broadly, NGOs can act as a bridge between different stakeholders – including members of diverse political parties and non-government actors – helping to inform the policy debate with good practice examples and evidence-based guidance. NGOs can and should play a role in supporting and disseminating rigorously evaluated good practice, and identifying remaining gaps in the evidence base. Further, cross-country collaboration and mutual learning practices can help create shared goals, share knowledge and good practice, and facilitate policy coherence and continuity.

Additionally, policies designed to prevent and combat homelessness should set defined targets for specific timelines, enabling governments to allocate resources and monitor implementation effectively. For instance, the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH), through the Lisbon Declaration, has set the goal of ending homelessness by 2030 with a specific focus on rough sleepers, which provides platform members with a specific goal in a clearly defined timeline (see Box 1).

Fundamentals for success

To enact reform in the homelessness sector, broad majorities and sustained support across government cycles are essential. This block explores the political economy of homelessness reform, emphasising the need for systemic change and a thorough understanding of the political landscape to implement effective policies. Key elements for success include leveraging political momentum, using strategic communication to gain backing of the public and service providers, building a solid evidence base, ensuring government

cohesion, and maintaining persistence over time. It also highlights strategies for elevating homelessness on the political agenda, depoliticising the issue through broad coalitions, and fostering public support with evidence-based communication. Regular data reporting and the engagement of policy champions are critical for ensuring policy continuity beyond electoral cycles.

Building on these operational issues, the following recommendations can help policy makers and practitioners to create the systems change needed to undertake successful reforms to end homelessness:

- Elevate the issue of homelessness on the political agenda through an evidence-based, housing-led approach.
- Build broad-based coalitions to depoliticise the issue of homelessness.
- Engage, inform, and mobilise the public to support homelessness reform, including through strategic, evidence-based communication tools to increase public awareness of "what works", based on rigorously evaluated interventions.
- Regularly report data on people experiencing homelessness and make key indicators publicly accessible to facilitate research and policy development and promote transparency and accountability.
- Regularly review government's progress towards policy objectives, as well as the evidence base to inform policy decisions and make adjustments where needed.
- Identify, engage and support potential policy entrepreneurs and "champions" on homelessness, including outside of government, to leverage their expertise and reinforce policy continuity beyond electoral cycles.

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10 Conclusion

Homelessness remains a multi-dimensional, persistent social challenge, affecting over 2 million people per year in OECD and EU countries as of 2024. It results from a complex interplay of structural factors, institutional failures, and individual circumstances. Research suggests that the main drivers vary across countries and communities, and can shift over time. Structural factors, like tight housing markets, poverty, weakened social safety nets, and reductions in social supports, like housing allowances, can heighten the risk of homelessness. At the same time, institutional failures persist, whereby the transition to sustainable housing from institutional and care facilities (such as state care, the criminal justice system, or hospitals) is insufficiently managed, increasing the risk of housing instability among people leaving institutional settings. Individual circumstances, such as an eviction, job loss, family breakdown, intimate partner violence, and mental health conditions, also increase the likelihood of homelessness. As such, the evidence and practical experiences presented in this Toolkit underscore the need to both expand affordable and social housing solutions, and strengthen inclusive social safety nets.

Structured around nine building blocks, the Toolkit proposes a framework for designing integrated, people-centred, housing-led homelessness policies. Together, these building blocks propose a pathway to eradicating homelessness, calling for a greater emphasis on prevention, low-barrier services, and housing-led and Housing First solutions. Policy makers do not need to address all issues captured in the blocks at once. Depending on the country context, they can focus first on the most pressing priorities, and address other issues in subsequent phases. By implementing and adapting relevant recommendations to their specific contexts, policy makers can make significant progress in the following nine essential areas:

- **Block 1 – Strategies, stakeholders, and inclusion** underscores the importance of developing national (or regional) strategies that are inclusive and evidence-based. A clear strategy should define priorities, set measurable targets and ensure co-ordination across government agencies and civil society. Engaging a wide range of stakeholders and co-creating strategies and programmes with people with lived experience of homelessness are essential.

- **Block 2 – Measurement: Definitions, data, and drivers** addresses the need for a clear statistical definition of homelessness, drawing on the ETHOS Light Typology, and robust data collection. More research into systemic and structural drivers of homelessness in different country and community contexts, such as income inequality, unemployment, and migration patterns, is necessary to inform effective prevention strategies.

- **Block 3 – Monitoring and evaluation** stresses the importance of systematically tracking policy outcomes to ensure that interventions meet their goals. Regular evaluations using a set of predefined indicators allow countries to refine policies and scale successful programmes.

- **Block 4 – Prioritising prevention** highlights the need to shift from reactive to proactive policy approaches. Preventing homelessness is a moral imperative, but also more effective and cost-efficient than responding only *after* people are already experiencing homelessness. Measures such as early intervention programmes, eviction prevention, and tailored support for at-risk individuals, including people leaving institutional settings, can reduce the risk of homelessness.

- **Block 5 – Long-term housing solutions: Housing-led and Housing First** advocates shifting the paradigm from temporary, emergency housing towards Housing-led and Housing First models, which offer unconditional, long-term housing solutions, accompanied by tailored service for

individuals who need them. Housing First has proven effective in improving housing stability and reducing reliance on costly emergency services. Scaling up such programmes is critical to ending chronic homelessness.

- **Block 6 – Low-barrier, tailored services** focuses on expanding access to wraparound support services that address the diverse needs of people experiencing homelessness. Services like healthcare, mental health support, and employment assistance should be easily accessible and designed without unnecessary bureaucratic barriers. Tailored, person-centred approaches help individuals maintain housing and rebuild their lives.

- **Block 7 – Funding and financing** discusses strategies to secure adequate and sustained funding for homelessness initiatives. Long-term financial commitments and innovative financing solutions, such as revolving funds, public-private partnerships, and social impact bonds, can be considered to achieve sustainability and scalability.

- **Block 8 – Leadership, co-ordination, and capacity** calls for strengthened governance and co-ordinated action across sectors. Assigning a clear policy lead and improving collaboration with other ministries, levels of government, and non-governmental organisations are necessary. Providing frontline workers and local governments with the skills, resources, and support they need to effectively implement policies and support government reforms should be prioritised.

- **Block 9 – The political economy of reform** recognises the challenges of implementing large-scale policy changes amid political, economic, and social pressures. It provides guidance on building broad-based coalitions, depoliticising homelessness issues, and engaging public support. Consistent political will, strategic communication, and policy champions are crucial for sustaining momentum beyond election cycles.

While the Toolkit presents the latest available homelessness research to provide a strong foundation for evidence-based policy making, important evidence gaps remain in the homelessness sector. This is notably the case in terms of data collection, monitoring and evaluation, and cost-effectiveness research. Addressing these gaps through rigorous research can go a long way to advance the fight against homelessness and ensure that policies are evidence-based, effective, and sustainable:

- There is a **lack of comprehensive, comparable data to monitor homelessness** in OECD and EU countries. Existing datasets often fail to capture the full scope of homelessness, particularly among certain groups, including women and other groups that are more likely to experience "hidden" forms of homelessness that are not well captured in standard data collection. The companion *OECD Monitoring Framework: Homelessness measurement in OECD and EU countries* explores these issues further and provides a self-assessment tool to guide policy makers in identifying opportunities to strengthen data collection. It will be important to take stock of recent data collection efforts in OECD and EU countries, including an EU-wide pilot project to assess homelessness at local level. Future research could focus on refining data collection methods and go beyond headline figures to understand the different trajectories of homelessness. Further, in-depth country-specific surveys and novel approaches – such as those relying on artificial intelligence (incl. machine learning) and big data sources, where available – may help shed further insights on risk factors and pathways into homelessness. Regular data collection can enable more accurate over-time and cross-country comparison and help tailor policy responses to the needs of different populations experiencing homelessness.

- **Programme-level evaluations** are another area where evidence remains limited. While housing-led and Housing First approaches have a robust evidence base for diverse populations in different country contexts, rigorous evaluations for other types of interventions, such as prevention programmes, low-barrier services, or other housing programmes, are not yet broadly available. There is a need for more programme-level evaluations to assess the effectiveness of different approaches and examine contextual factors that may influence effectiveness across countries,

allowing policies to be selected, and tailored, accordingly. Evaluations should focus not only on housing outcomes, but also on broader social integration, including health, employment and community participation.

- The evidence base on homelessness could be strengthened by **expanding the geographic coverage of homelessness research** to a more diverse set of contexts, notably in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and southern Europe. Much of the existing evidence base draws a handful of countries, with specific housing systems and social welfare regimes. This can not only identify where adaptations to broadly accepted policy interventions might be needed, but also lead to policy innovation.

- Research on the **cost-effectiveness of homelessness interventions** could also be significantly expanded. While there is growing recognition that preventive and Housing First approaches can economise on public resources by reducing the use of emergency services, police, and health systems, cost-benefit analyses for a wider countries and interventions would be valuable. Governments could benefit from research that quantifies the fiscal impacts of homelessness and the potential savings from different policy approaches. This evidence would be particularly helpful to advocate for scaling up proven responses.

This *OECD Toolkit to Combat Homelessness* is intended as both a resource and a roadmap for the many institutions and individuals engaged in preventing homelessness, supporting people who are experiencing homelessness, and providing sustainable pathways out of homelessness. Moving forward, strengthening the evidence base and shifting the policy paradigm away from emergency measures towards prevention and long-term housing solutions should be at the core of governments efforts.

OECD Toolkit to Combat Homelessness

With over 2.2 million people experiencing homelessness in a given year, the issue remains a persistent challenge in OECD and EU countries. Organised around nine building blocks, this Toolkit helps policy makers design and implement strategies to combat homelessness. It provides guidance in policy design, in how to engage stakeholders, strengthen the evidence base, and embed systematic monitoring and evaluation into homelessness policy making. The Toolkit stresses the need to shift policy focus towards prevention, the provision of tailored, low-barrier services, and long-term housing solutions, rather than relying on short-term emergency responses. Finally, it addresses key dimensions of policy delivery, including establishing more sustainable funding and financing streams, strengthening the capacity of front-line service providers, and building political support for policy reform. Each building block presents the latest research and proposes guidance and good practice examples to inspire policy makers and service providers to replicate what works.