**Progress report on the**

**decriminalization of poverty**

**and homelessness**

**Input from Portugal**

In Portugal, homelessness is perceived as a situation of social vulnerability. Therefore, anyone who is flagged as homeless by the judicial authorities is referred to social support institutions. This social response has been implemented and inscribed in national legislation since 2000. The phenomenon of homelessness is analysed by the Homelessness Planning and Intervention Units within the framework of Local Social Action Councils.

Each Centre must be constituted by a representative of the city/municipality council and of public sector bodies or organizations, namely those in the areas of employment, social security, education, health, justice, home affairs, environment, citizenship and equality, as well as by all the organizations working in the area that wish to establish a coordinated and integrated approach, and which are recognized by all the other partners with competency to collaborate.

The Public Security Police is integrated in the Homelessness Planning and Intervention Unit*s*, taking an active role in the promotion of safety and security, and contributing to identify and mobilize resources needed to the resolution of this phenomenon.

Portugal has a [*National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless Persons*](http://www.enipssa.pt) since 2017. This Strategy (2017-2023) has implemented housing support responses, training and capacity building and individualised technical support. This instrument has standardized the definition of homelessness, which now encompasses any person who is “homeless, living in public space, staying in an emergency shelter or whereabouts in a precarious place” or “homeless, staying in temporary accommodation intended for that purpose”.

Although it is a national strategy, the responses are of a local and regional nature, namely municipal, implemented in a network within the scope of local poles of insertion for persons in situations of homelessness. Portugal also has economic support measures for these persons in vulnerable situations, such as subsidies, e.g. the social insertion income.

Local autonomy allows each local authority to create specific responses and support, either financially or in kind, including public spaces for hygiene and the change of clothes.

Within the scope of the Recovery and Resilience Program, funding was opened in September 2022 for the creation of an [*Insertion Community*](https://www.enipssa.pt/enipssa/-/asset_publisher/K0B8qsMxLNXi/content/abertas-as-candidaturas-para-comunidades-de-insercao?_101_INSTANCE_K0B8qsMxLNXi_redirect=%2Fenipssa) to promote access to housing support responses for persons experiencing homelessness. Insertion Communities involve a personalized and integrated intervention, with adequate technical support, to provide improvements in living conditions and well-being that facilitate the acquisition or reinforcement of personal, social and professional skills, promoting social inclusion.

The insertion community is intended to be a flexible accommodation solution, implemented through a set of autonomous and accessible functional units, which can have a common administration of shared services, to be installed in territories that do not have them. Projects can be presented by local authorities or by the third sector, with preference being given to projects from entities that are part of already constituted Homeless Planning and Intervention Centres. For this purpose, they must present a management model defined jointly by the partners who support persons in situation of homelessness within the scope of this Centre. The aim is to increase and reinforce an intervention that gives priority to host persons in situation of homelessness into a housing context, and which, in a personalized approach, promotes their autonomy and social insertion through training actions suited to their potential.

In July 2020, the Government launched a *New Housing Support Social Response Program* that has, since then, created more than 1.000 vacancies in innovative Housing First and Shared Apartment solutions across the country. These protocols aim to promote access to housing for persons in situation of homelessness, by financing technical support teams and monitoring housing response, in a personalized approach that promotes their autonomy and social insertion.

Since 2018, it is also worth highlighting the implementation of the annual [questionnaire](file:///C%3A/Users/miguel.msilva/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/BXZK9C64/Inqu%C3%A9rito%20de%20caracteriza%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20das%20pessoas%20em%20situa%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20de%20sem%20abrigo%20-%2031%20dezembro%202021%20-%20Dados.xlsx), covering almost 100% of the national territory, thus allowing an improvement in the diagnosis of housing needs across the entire continental territory.

On 16 December 2021, the Government also approved a [*National Strategy to Combat Poverty 2021-2030*](https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/resolucao-conselho-ministros/184-2021-176714553), developed across six lines of intervention: a) reducing poverty in children and young persons and their families; b) promoting the full integration of young adults into society and the systemic reduction of their risk of poverty; c) promoting employment and qualification as factors for eliminating poverty; d) strengthening public policies for social inclusion, promote and improve social integration and social protection of the most disadvantaged persons; e) guaranteeing territorial cohesion and local development; f) making the fight against poverty a national goal.

This instrument aims to implement a multidimensional and transversal approach to articulate public policies with a view to eradicate poverty. The strategy has among its goals the reduction of the poverty rate to 10% of the population, which means removing 660.000 persons from poverty by 2030. Also, noteworthy is the goal of halving child poverty, which will mean removing 170.000 children from this condition during the same period. The strategy includes six priority areas of intervention, in close articulation with the European Pillar of Social Rights and with the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

It should also be noted that the implementation of this Strategy foresees, among other measures, strengthening the participation of local authorities in housing responses aimed at persons in situations of vulnerability, including persons with mental health conditions and persons experiencing homelessness, persons in the process of self-employment and independent living, namely through the territorial dissemination of the Housing First accommodation model.

The Portuguese government is committed to increase the public housing stock, based on the universalist vision of the right to adequate housing. This new paradigm of public housing policies breaks with minimalist approaches that have been the common framework for years.

With the implementation of the [*New Generation of Housing Policies*](https://www.portaldahabitacao.pt/nova-geracao-de-politicas-de-habitacao) in 2018, the [*Framework Housing Law*](https://www.portaldahabitacao.pt/lei-de-bases-da-habita%C3%A7%C3%A3o) in 2019, the *National Housing Programme*, and more recently, the new *Housing Legislative* package (that reinforces and expands already existing responses), the Portuguese government strengthened the State’s constitutional commitment to the human right to adequate housing for all. The implementation of this principle implies that no social group, namely vulnerable and/or minority communities, among other groups and citizens, can be excluded from the different programs, once the eligibility criteria established have been met.

Recognizing the importance of the principle of universality in access to housing, in ways that progressively come closer to the recognition, already implemented in practice, of the principle of universality in the right to education and health, does not exclude the adoption, in a logic of complementarity, of mechanisms capable of responding to different housing needs, including those of segments with specific needs, or greater vulnerability, such as persons in situation of homelessness, minorities or the fragility associated with single parenthood, among others, such as emergency and imponderable situations.

In the Framework Housing Law, the State promotes and guarantees that all citizens, and particularly, persons in situations of homelessness, the right to a postal address, for the exercise of citizenship rights, including mail delivery service. Therefore, persons in situations of homelessness have the right to indicate as their postal address a chosen and authorized location, even if they do not overnight in that location.

In the context of the different measures of the *New Generation of Housing Policies* and *National Housing Programme*, the *First Right Programme* - *Support Programme for Access to Housing* is central in this sense, aiming to eradicate the situations of undignified housing conditions, benefiting, in its development, from the joint work between the *Housing and Urban Rehabilitation Institute* and the municipalities, which develop, for this purpose, their *Housing Local Strategies*. This programme aims to respond and support persons living in poverty and in situations of vulnerability, including persons in situation of homelessness.

In the context of strengthening and diversifying the supply of public housing solutions, a network with national coverage is being created, which aims to respond to specific needs of emergency and transitional housing. Accordingly, the *National Plan for Urgent and Temporary Accommodation*establishes the creation of structured and transversal responses to emergency and transition situations, such as the homelessness situation, mobilizing real estate for a grant and ensuring its financing. In 2021, the *National Urgent and Temporary Reception Reserve* was created and represents one of the instruments to support and respond to homelessness. Moreover, it presupposes the articulation between different government areas (namely the *Housing and Urban Rehabilitation Institute*, the Institute of Social Security and the *High Commissioner for Migration*), as well as involves municipalities, ONGs and non-profit entities.