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PART A

ASPECTS OF SOCIAL POLICY AND HOUSING IN THE EUROPEAN WELFARE STATES

Homelessness Service Provision in a Southern European Country: An Evolving Sector Framed by the Portuguese National Homelessness Strategy

Isabel Baptista[1] and Miguel Coelho[2]

Abstract

This article aims to provide a critical overview of homelessness service provision in Portugal – framed by EU-level developments with a particular focus on Southern European countries – within the national policy dynamics that in recent years have evolved towards the adoption of a national strategic approach to resolving homelessness. The article maps the organisational and operational changes which the provision of homelessness services has undergone in recent years, while also highlighting the stabilities that continue to shape the sector. The analysis provided will mainly draw on national evidence on the role and operation of the homelessness sector in Portugal and on available reviews on the adoption and implementation of the two national homelessness strategies. The topic has received little research and policy attention so far, which may partly be explained by the fragmented nature of the sector itself and by the only recent emergence of homelessness as an item on the Portuguese political agenda.

Keywords: Portugal; homelessness; service provision; national strategies; Southern Europe

Introduction

This article aims to provide a critical overview of homelessness service provision in Portugal – framed by EU-level developments with a particular focus on Southern European countries – within the context of the overall policy dynamics, which in recent years have evolved towards the adoption of a national strategic approach to resolving homelessness. We thus aim to map the changes which the provision of homelessness services has undergone in recent years and also highlight the stabilities that continue to shape the organisation and operation of the sector.

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The topic has received little research and policy attention so far, which may be partly explained by the fragmented nature of the sector itself and by the very recent emergence of homelessness on the Portuguese political agenda. The analysis provided will thus mainly draw on national evidence collected by the authors for the annual comparative studies of the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH) between 2018 and 2020 on different aspects of the role and operation of the homelessness sector in Europe as well as on the available reviews on the adoption and implementation of the two national homelessness strategies, ENIPSA 2009-2015 (ENIPSA, 2009) and ENIPSSA 2017-2023 (ENIPSSA, 2017).

The first section examines the trajectory of homelessness-related policies in Portugal within the overall context of the European Union, with a particular focus on the similarities and divergences between the Portuguese experience and that of other Southern European countries. Section two examines the interconnections between the evolution of the homelessness sector in Portugal and predominant patterns of service provision, the dominant definitions of homelessness and the cultural responses which have been shaped by different images of homelessness. The research findings are organised into different sections, exploring specific areas (e.g. data collection, governance structures, patterns of service provision, the quality and regulation of services, staffing issues, responses to COVID-19 crisis) that characterize the evolving trajectory of the homelessness sector in Portugal and the impact of the adoption of a strategic policy approach, introduced in 2009 with the approval of the first national homelessness strategy.

Portugal's approach to tackling homelessness within the EU: a singular convergent trajectory in the European South

Over the last decade, homelessness has emerged – or has been consolidated – as a specific target of public policy across the EU. A recent study (Baptista and Marlier, 2019) has shown that consistent progress is being made in the adoption of strategic policy frameworks to prevent and tackle homelessness across Europe, although geographical imbalances are apparent. In 2019, sixteen of the 28 EU Member States had adopted national or regional local level policies aiming at the delivery of integrated strategic responses to homelessness. According to Allen (as cited in Kourachanis, 2019) Southern European welfare states have traditionally been characterised by the underdevelopment of their social protection systems, particularly as a consequence of the residual development of social assistance schemes and social housing policies. This results in extra pressure on the informal solidarity (familiar) networks, whereby public policy assumes or insists that households must bear the principal responsibility for their members' welfare (Baptista and Sullivan, 2008).

As a consequence, high levels of housing insecurity and the resort to self-housing practices were common across Southern European countries. The introduction of mild neoliberal reforms in Southern European welfare states in the 1990s led to new, publicly visible forms of poverty, namely homelessness. At the time, social support for these new groups of poor was mainly provided by faith-based organisations, due to the traditional residual state intervention in this area (Arapoglou and Gounis, 2017). Emergency services were often driven by civil society

initiatives and the core of the social support services tended to be short-term and aimed at addressing extreme forms of social exclusion, such as rough sleeping.

Over the last decade there has been evidence of changes in the understanding of homelessness among key stakeholders across the four Southern European countries. Since 2009, Portugal, Italy, Spain and, more recently, Greece have developed specific national strategic policy frameworks for tackling homelessness (Baptista and Marlier, 2019).

In 2009, the National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People 2009-2015 (ENIPSA 2009-2015) represented a breakthrough in the Southern European approach to tackling homelessness as it was the first "southern" strategy to be adopted in this policy field, following a path initiated by other European countries (Baptista, 2009). The 'Guidelines for Tackling Severe Adult Marginality in Italy', and the Spanish Comprehensive National Strategy for Homelessness 2015-2020 (ENI-PSH) were both approved in 2015, with the active involvement of the respective governments.

The singularity of the Portuguese initiative introduced six years earlier must be highlighted at different levels: (i) it represented an important shift in the traditional (minimal) role of the Portuguese state in policy orientation in this field; (ii) it illustrated the impact of EU policy orientations on national policy-making processes, namely by explicitly acknowledging the role of several tools developed through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in the field of social inclusion; and (iii) it steered a change in the provision of homelessness services at the local level, namely with regard to enhanced and more effective governance structures and to more innovative approaches to tackling homelessness.

The 2009 ENIPSA initiative represented the state's first attempt (in partnership with relevant actors in the homelessness arena) to devise a coherent and integrated approach towards homelessness policy. Until then, measures to address homelessness had been, as already mentioned, largely fragmented and the state's role in mobilizing partnerships and in enabling and regulating homelessness service provision was rather weak. Homelessness services had traditionally been dependent on faith-based organisations, charities and NGOs, whose action was mostly steered by internal purposes and objectives, inextricably linked to poverty alleviation and the provision of social support. Although embedded in a social welfare model (Baptista, 2009) (Baptista and Sullivan, 2008), the first Portuguese national strategy initiated a path that aimed at strengthening the focus on housing needs and responses, introducing a more strategic role for the state in regulating the provision of homelessness services. Concurrently, the ENIPSA aimed at strengthening the evidence-based nature of homelessness practices and policy making and enhancing interagency cooperation, mutual responsibility and accountability within a participatory governance structure.

This latter development was already clearly in line with EU policy orientations – explicitly acknowledged in the 2009 document and later reinforced by the 2017-2023 follow-up national strategy – as well as the adoption of a definition of homelessness based on the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS). Since then, policy developments at the EU level (e.g., the EU Social Investment Package, 2011 and 2014 European Parliament Resolutions, the European Pillar of Social Rights) have highlighted the need for integrated strategic approaches to homelessness, at both the EU and national levels and for the adoption of harmonised definitions of homelessness.

The drive for change in the provision of homelessness services and the introduction of innovative approaches, such as the implementation of Housing First projects and programmes

– already present in the 2009 ENIPSA – are important common elements within the three Southern European integrated strategic frameworks. Over the last decade, all three countries (Italy, Portugal and Spain) – and perhaps particularly Italy, through *Housing First Italia*, have moved towards an expanding use of Housing First services, although still on a smaller scale than in some Northern and Western EU countries.

The convergent trajectory of the Portuguese strategic approach to tackling homelessness in relation to EU policy developments has nonetheless been affected by both advances and setbacks. By 2013, the ENIPSA was confronted with a set of obstacles in its operationalisation and political support, within an unfavourable wider societal context (e.g., the financial crisis, the adoption of austerity measures, a right-wing coalition government and corresponding ideological shift regarding the role of social policy) (Baptista, 2018).

Yet, the potential for change, boosted by the 2009-2015 national strategy, also led to enduring positive dynamics in the homelessness arena, namely at the local level (e.g., the mobilisation of local stakeholders to adopt local policy agendas on homelessness, the adoption of more integrated delivery of homelessness services, the increasing support for housing-led approaches).

By 2017, the Portuguese state became engaged once more by relaunching the strategic approach to homelessness which was made possible as a result of intersecting factors, such as: the (re)emergence of a political agenda centred on rights-based approaches towards social issues, the mobilisation of civil society organisations and other non-governmental actors involved in the ENIPSA trajectory, the visibility of positive developments in the provision of homelessness support fostered by the strategy's proposed intervention model and governance structures, and the active engagement of important stakeholders within the political arena (Members of Parliament and the newly elected President of the Republic).

The ENIPSSA 2017-2023 preserves the initial vision and main principles of the first national homelessness strategy, confirms the 2009 official definition based on rooflessness and (some) houselessness categories of ETHOS and upholds the commitment to developing quality preventative, support and resettlement services. More importantly, for the first time, the current strategy makes a relevant contribution towards the need to strengthen housing-based policy responses, establishing a clear link to housing policies. Challenges still remain, however, namely with regard to a clear allocation of adequate resources, the inability to establish consistent and effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, weak horizontal coordination at the state level, the persistence of a funding model which does not enhance organisational cooperation and integration of services, and the weak organisational and political capacity of the homelessness sector to influence policy design and implementation.

It is important to highlight that the mere adoption of "strategies" does not ensure success in implementing effective responses to homelessness and in bringing about actual change in the delivery of homelessness services. As already mentioned, one of the main obstacles to the whole process have been the lack of robust evidence-based mechanisms to assess the implementation progress of the two Portuguese national strategies.

Such limitations also seem to affect a significant number of existing strategic approaches to homelessness in other EU countries (Baptista and Marlier, 2019), including the implementation of the Guidelines for Tackling Severe Adult Marginality in Italy (Jessoula et al, 2019) and the

Spanish ENI-PSH 2015-2020 (Cabrero et al, 2019). The assessment of the situation with regard to the implementation of existing strategic approaches to homelessness and housing exclusion across Europe, including in these Southern European countries, reveals the importance of significantly strengthening demonstrably effective evidence-based policies which require robust political and institutional commitment, shared responsibility, extensive cooperation and coordination, robust data collection and reporting mechanisms, and adequate resourcing (Baptista and Marlier, 2019).

The (winding) trajectory of the Portuguese approach towards the adoption of overall strategic policy instruments to address homelessness created the potential to improve outcomes for homeless people and to reduce homelessness over time, although this has not yet been fully realised.

The Provision of Homelessness Services – Continuities and Change within an Evolving Sector

The provision of homelessness services in Portugal has been characterised by a strong focus on the provision of non-housing focussed services (Pleace et al, 2019) within a predominantly 'housing ready' model, although in recent years there has been a rise in Housing First projects and programmes. Such a profile cannot be dissociated from predominant – and even official – definitions of homelessness, which shape the understanding of "what homelessness is" and of "what support should be provided".

Since the approval of the 2009 National Strategy, the official definition of homelessness has increasingly become a point of reference used at the local level (GIMAE/ENIPSSA, 2018). The definition is based on a narrow adoption of ETHOS categories, focusing on a relatively restricted group of situations that cover only rooflessness and some houselessness categories (including people living in rented rooms and hostels paid for by social services providers). Although both strategies have highlighted the importance of developing preventative services and identifying risk trajectories and conditions that may trigger homelessness (e.g., people living in refuges for women escaping domestic violence, people living temporarily with family and friends due to the lack of housing alternatives), the current definition still tends to perpetuate a specific image of homelessness which inevitably shapes, at least in part, the design and implementation of responses to homelessness in Portugal.

Homelessness service provision in Portugal has mostly been focused on providing for the basic needs of homeless persons, with an emphasis on the emergency side of assistance and on temporary support. This approach has been clearly embedded in a social welfare model that addresses homelessness mainly from a social exclusion perspective, rather than from a housing one. Social welfare support linked to promoting access to permanent housing solutions has always had an extremely limited scope (Baptista and O'Sullivan, 2008). NGOs (including charities) have constituted the bulk of homelessness service providers in Portugal with an increasing presence of municipalities playing an important role in the provision and funding of homelessness services.

The adoption of a strategic approach to homelessness at the national level has prompted some progress in conceptual and policy guidance in the homelessness arena. The local level implementation of the national strategies – namely through the setting up of Local Homelessness
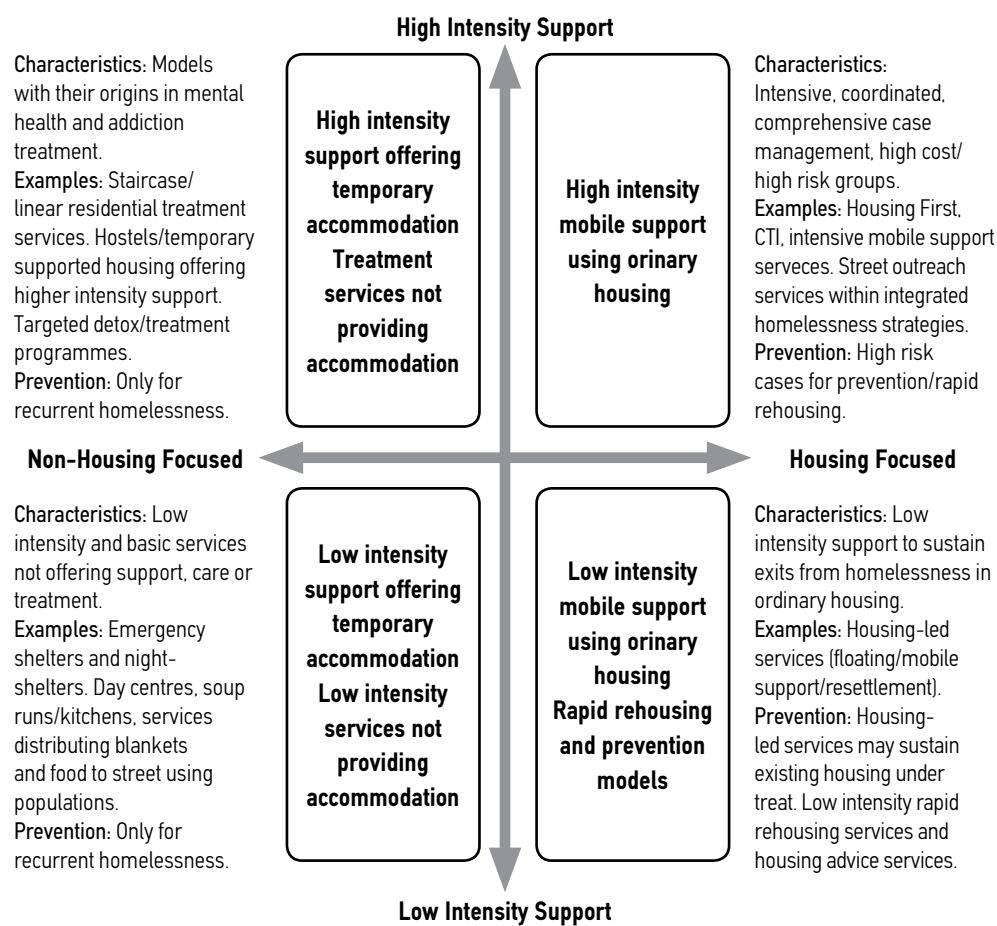
Units (NPISA)[3] – has contributed greatly to a strengthened cooperation between and integration of services among organisations and support workers within a traditionally fragmented and weakly organised homelessness sector.

These local units, which integrate both public and private actors, have gained increased responsibility with regard to planning and monitoring the provision of homelessness services, whereas responsibility for the provision (either direct or through commissioning) of homelessness services continues to lie heavily with NGOs and other private non-profit organisations.

A recent review of homelessness services in Europe (Pleace et al, 2019) has developed a European classification based on two main dimensions of the support provided: the housing or non-housing nature of the support and the intensity of such support. Figure 1 presents the typology proposed by the authors.

Figure 1. Typology of European Homelessness Services

High Intensity Support

Characteristics: Models with their origins in mental health and addiction treatment.
Examples: Staircase/linear residential treatment services. Hostels/temporary supported housing offering higher intensity support. Targeted detox/treatment programmes.
Prevention: Only for recurrent homelessness.

High intensity support offering temporary accommodation Treatment services not providing accommodation

High intensity mobile support using orinary housing

Characteristics: Intensive, coordinated, comprehensive case management, high cost/high risk groups.
Examples: Housing First, CTI, intensive mobile support serveces. Street outreach services within integrated homelessness strategies.
Prevention: High risk cases for prevention/rapid rehousing.

Non–Housing Focused ←→ **Housing Focused**

Characteristics: Low intensity and basic services not offering support, care or treatment.
Examples: Emergency shelters and night-shelters. Day centres, soup runs/kitchens, services distributing blankets and food to street using populations.
Prevention: Only for recurrent homelessness.

Low intensity support offering temporary accommodation Low intensity services not providing accommodation

Low intensity mobile support using orinary housing Rapid rehousing and prevention models

Characteristics: Low intensity support to sustain exits from homelessness in ordinary housing.
Examples: Housing-led services (floating/mobile support/resettlement).
Prevention: Housing-led services may sustain existing housing under treat. Low intensity rapid rehousing services and housing advice services.

Low Intensity Support

Source: Pleace, N., Baptista, I., Benjaminsen, L. and Busch-Geertsema, V. (2018), *Homelessness Services in Europe*, Brussels: FEANTSA

3. In January 2021, the official site of the ENIPSSA identified a total of 24 NPISA operating in the whole territory. The NPISA are local platforms comprising all relevant public and private actors who have the responsibility to plan and operationalise all homelessness intervention within their local territory, in line with the strategy's orientations.

The use of the typology as a reference tool to better grasp the diversity of patterns in the provision of homelessness services in Europe has already proved helpful for comparing the nature of service provision across the continent. (Baptista and Marlier, 2019).

A closer look at the situation in the Southern EU countries shows that a staircase model of service provision prevails across Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain with a predominance of low to medium non-housing focused support services. Some differences are nonetheless perceptible among the four countries. In Italy and Spain there is evidence of shifts occurring in service provision, as more intensive services are provided, together with access to permanent accommodation (housing focused support services). In Portugal, there is evidence of small-scale initiatives also providing housing-focused support services with access to permanent accommodation, which have recently been strengthened as a response to the impacts of the COVID crisis. Indeed, the central government has just announced that, as regards housing first model services and shared apartments projects, 300 new units have already been installed across the country[4].

Greece is the only country where such shifts are not yet apparent and where low to medium non-housing focused support seems to prevail among the provision of temporary accommodation services for homeless people (Baptista and Marlier, 2019).

Overall, the homelessness sector in Portugal has remained largely dominated by the presence of social support focussed services (non-housing low to medium support) concentrated on the provision of an array of non-residential support (e.g. day centres, outreach activities, access to food and personal hygiene services) and emergency accommodation. Support with access to temporary or permanent accommodation or preventative services still represents residual responses within the Portuguese homelessness sector (GTMA/ENIPSSA, 2020). Over the last decade, there has been an increasing development of housing-led (e.g., Housing First) services although still on a much smaller scale than in countries like Italy or even Spain (Pleace et al, 2019).

Recent developments in this area include the strengthening of the Lisbon Homelessness Municipal Plan, which foresees the expansion of 320 Housing First units (in addition to the existing 80) to be implemented by five new projects. The implementation of these projects was accelerated as a response to the pandemic with 260 housing first units already installed and 11 more in the shared apartments program[5].

Finally, the Portuguese Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) foresees the development of a structured and transversal response for people in need of emergency or transitional housing solutions. Portugal plans to invest 1.6 billion euros in housing, highlighting the goal of supporting 26,000 families by 2026. Among the investments to be made in the housing sector, the government mentions the National Urgent and Temporary Accommodation Exchange, with 186 million euros, through which a national stock of 2,130 emergency or reception/transition homes are to be created.

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4. https://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/gc22/comunicacao/noticia?i=governo-quer-alojar-1100-pessoas-em-situacao-de-sem-abrigo-ate-ao-final-de-2021
5. https://www.lisboa.pt/cidade/direitos-sociais/acao-social/pessoas-em-situacao-de-sem-abrigo

Methodology

The analysis of the role and functioning of the homelessness sector in Portugal, with a focus on the nature of the services provided, existing regulation, quality standards and relevant staffing issues will draw mainly on national evidence collected by the author for the annual comparative study of the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH) between 2018 and 2020 on different aspects of the operation of the homelessness sector in Europe.

The evidence collected for the analysis of the national situation was based on a standardised questionnaire that aims to collect relevant available secondary data on the topic under analysis each year. Interviews were also conducted with relevant stakeholders (e.g., policy makers, organisational representatives, support workers, researchers) for the completion of the national questionnaires.

The analysis draws on the information collected for the three annual EOH comparative reports regarding the Portuguese situation, which covered three main topics:

- 2018 – patterns of homelessness service provision and existing legal regulations;
- 2019 – regulation and quality of homelessness services;
- 2020 – staffing practices in services for homeless people.

The contents of the three national questionnaires will be explored in detail throughout the next sections. The analysis of the national situation will be framed by the discussion provided in the previous sections, namely with regard to the impact of the overall strategic policy framework, i.e., the national homelessness strategy, on the operation of the homelessness sector. The development of the different features of homelessness service provision in Portugal will also be framed by elements of a comparative EU perspective, briefly outlined above. Whenever possible, specific comparative insights into the reality of other Southern European countries will be provided.

The final section providing a brief overview on the impact of COVID-19 on the operation of homelessness services will draw on the results of two standardised online questionnaires launched between May and June 2020. The aim was to collect information on how the sector was responding to the challenges brought about by the pandemic during its initial stage. The first online questionnaire was sent to all 22 NPISA (local homeless units) coordinators. A second questionnaire was sent to all NPISA partner organisations, to be completed by: a) the leaders of the organisations; b) professional workers directly working with homeless people; and c) volunteers. Sixteen NPISA coordinators responded to the first questionnaire, and 58 support workers/volunteers contributed to the second.

Understanding and Tackling Homelessness in Portugal: a Decisive Decade (2009-2020)

The drive for change opened up by the operationalisation at the local level of the national strategy's intervention principles and methodologies enhanced positive developments in the organisation and operation of homelessness service provision across the country. One important

area of development relates to the collection of data on the number of people experiencing homelessness (according to the national definition), which started to be registered on a regular basis across all municipalities in 2017.

This annual exercise, coordinated by the Monitoring and Evaluation Group of the ENIPSSA, prompted a fruitful discussion around the official ENIPSSA definition of homelessness, its categories and the challenges arising from the collection of data at the local level. Since 2017, an enhanced progress has been observed in the procedures used to collect the data at local level, particularly with regard to the increased integration of efforts among local organisations (within or outside NPISA structures), thus ensuring a greater consistency of the information.

The latest available data published in 2020[6], gathered by the monitoring group of the ENIPSSA(12) reveals a total of 7,107 people living in the two categories covered by the official homelessness definition, i.e. people living in rooflessness situations (2,767) and people living in houselessness situations (4,340), which includes people living in emergency and temporary accommodation and in private rooms and/or hostels paid for by social security services or other social support services. The bulk of the total homeless population, 72%, is concentrated in the two metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto. The comparison between the 2019 and the 2020[7] data collection for the same 249 municipalities that provided information shows that there was an increase of around 21% in the total homeless population between these two years. The houseless categories are responsible for the greatest increase registered during this period, particularly in the Centre region (131% increase) and in the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (28% increase).

According to the latest ENIPSSA report (12) by the end of 2019, 67% of those people identified in a situation of rough sleeping in mainland Portugal had been assigned a case manager worker. This coverage was 89% for those people living in the different categories[8] covered by the ENIPSSA definition (in 2014, only 45% of people in those two categories had been assigned a case manager worker) (ISS, 2107). These figures reflect a positive local response to one of the objectives of the national strategic orientations in the ENIPSSA regarding the need to improve the quality of existing support, namely by the adoption and mainstreaming of a case management approach in order to ensure that individuals' unique needs are addressed.

Another area of progress fostered by the adoption of the two national strategies is the increasing number of Local Homelessness Units (NPISA) established over the past years. Since the adoption of the first national homelessness strategy in 2009, the number of NPISA grew from a total of 13 to 24 in September 2020. The setting-up of these structures was one of the measures already included in the 2009 Strategy. NPISA are responsible for the local implementation of the national strategy's aims, based on local homelessness diagnoses and plans. These local governance structures are comprised of all the main local stakeholders (public and private) with planning and/or service delivery responsibilities in the homelessness arena.

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6. Referring to 31 December 2019.

7. Referring respectively to data from 31 December 2018 and 31 December 2019.

8. These include: people living in temporary accommodation centres (including Social Security accommodation solutions of limited duration and with no access to long-term accommodation), specific accommodation for the homeless, and private rooms paid totally or partially by social services or other social welfare organisations.

Along with an increasing presence of these local integrated homelessness structures across the national territory, it is also important to note the progress achieved through their direct involvement within the central governance bodies of the national strategy responsible for planning and monitoring the strategy's implementation: currently, two representatives of the NPISA – elected on a rotating basis by the 24 local units – are part of the Executive Unit of the ENIPSSA.

This reinforced participation of the NPISA may contribute towards the more active involvement of their members, i.e., homelessness service providers (particularly NGOs and other non-public entities), at the level of the planning, coordination, regulation and evaluation of homelessness services, from which they have usually been disengaged over the years.

Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the design and implementation of social and housing policies in Portugal, including those directly pertaining to homelessness, continue to be characterised by a high degree of State centralisation, with a prominent role played by national public bodies (social services, housing and health) and local authorities (particularly in major urban areas). The regulation, monitoring and funding of homelessness service provision is almost exclusively the responsibility of public authorities (Baptista and Marlier, 2019).

The Operation of Homelessness Service Provision in Portugal

In general terms, the bulk of homelessness services in Portugal focus on the provision of transitional and temporary accommodation-based support, working within a 'housing-ready' model, along with a significant number of non-residential services. Housing-led approaches – including Housing First projects and programmes – have increasingly been implemented in different regions of the country, particularly in the greater Lisbon Area. Preventative services and measures are scarce, although preventing homelessness has been a declared goal of the National Homelessness Strategy since its earliest stages (Pleace et al, 2019).

The majority of homelessness services in Portugal fall under the remit of the social services legal framework which regulates service provision. Often, homelessness support is provided by NGOs and other social solidarity organizations (including charities) under commissioning from municipal or central state authorities (social security), through the establishment of cooperation agreements.

Cooperation agreements between the State and what are termed social solidarity institutions are also established by law and translate into specific commitments for the commissioning of services. Most homelessness services in operation within the national territory are funded and regulated under these cooperation agreements. Homelessness services can be more variable than other forms of service, which means that oversight must be flexible, adapting to the specifics of each agreement.

However, along with this formally established regulated sector, it is also possible to observe the presence of an unregulated sector offering support to homelessness people. These unregulated forms of support are not legally defined as 'services' and cannot be technically referred to as an unregulated 'service sector', because this does not have a specific, legal identity. For example, temporary accommodation provided through the provision of private rooms or hostel

accommodation is not considered a "service" and is not therefore subject to any quality control. Living standards in such premises are reported as being very low. Local charitable activity, such as the distribution of food, blankets and sleeping bags to people sleeping rough is also present in major cities and is often provided at the margins of any type of regulation.

Quality and Regulation of Homelessness Services

Overall, the operation of homelessness services falls under the remit of the legal framework for social services and has mandatory licensing procedures. These procedures establish a set of rules and conditions (e.g. conformity of facilities and equipment, opening hours, admissions criteria, types of services provided, rights and duties of users, staff qualifications and experience). Compliance with these conditions is overseen by the Institute for Social Security (ISS) and its various regional structures (Baptista and Coelho, 2019). An additional legal framework for the quality of homelessness services is the Resolution of the Council of Ministers approving the National Homelessness Strategy 2017-2023 (ENIPSSA). This document establishes specific guidance for the operation of support services, focusing on the adoption and development of an integrated intervention and support model.

The guidance and recommendations provided within the framework of the National Homelessness Strategy exert considerable influence over the quality of homelessness services, issuing good practice guidance to promote greater consistency in intervention practices and enhancing communication among services. For example, a specific training framework within the homelessness provision sector is defined alongside tools for identifying homelessness risk indicators, setting criteria for the establishment of local homelessness units (NPISA) and defining the requirements for people employed as case managers. However, it is important to note that there is no actual monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of good practice guidance at the level of service provision and, as guidance rather than regulation, these recommendations are not legally enforced.

There is a very limited evidence base for the quality of homelessness services in Portugal. The only evidence on the availability and quality of homelessness services relates to the operation of Housing First programmes. Several studies[9] have reported very good outcomes in relation to housing retaining rates and health and well-being outcomes. User satisfaction has also been positively reported by these internally run measurements.

However, supervision of services occurs via regular checks, at least once every two years and via priority inspections triggered by complaints or by problems identified during earlier inspections. These requirements are universal and legal sanctions, including fines, a temporary ban on operating and the closure of services are in place should standards be breached.

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9. See, for example, "The role of perceived housing quality and perceived choice to recovery: An ecological perspective on a housing first program in Lisbon" available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/302779015_The_role_of_perceived_housing_quality_and_perceived_choice_to_recovery_An_ecological_perspective_on_a_housing_first_program_in_Lisbon

Staffing and Capacity Building within the Homelessness Sector

People working in the homelessness sector in Portugal – and in Europe – are often qualified individuals working in contexts in which in-work training is available. In Portugal, homelessness sector professionals usually have a university degree in social sciences such as social work, psychology, sociology, anthropology, or social education. Moreover, the criteria established by the financing public authorities (i.e. the ISS and larger municipalities) regarding the profile of staff to be financed under the outsourcing contracts, ensures that organizations do hire qualified staff. Even so, a wide range of formal qualifications is often seen as a challenge as this work is usually not framed by a clearly defined intervention model.

There are legal requirements for workers to complete a minimum number of training hours, although questions have been raised (Baptista and Coelho, 2020) around whether the level and nature of this training has the right focus and intensity. Indeed, training is available on topics that can be useful for intervention (immigration, addictions, mental health, social rights, etc.) but the lack of provision of training tailored to the roles that professionals perform is often reported as problematic: on the one hand, the heterogeneity of the population and the extreme difficulties to which it is subjected require specialization, while, on the other, the need to establish benchmarks for training for interventions in different types of services should also be stressed. The first training programme, specifically tailored for professionals in the homelessness sector, was implemented in February 2019 (currently in its 11th edition) by the National Strategy. This course, with a duration of 30 hours, is entitled 'Prevention, Intervention and Support for People in Homelessness Situations in Portugal'.

The need for teams to have the time and the space to engage in training and action is crucial for helping them to cope with the complexity of their everyday tasks. Training gaps around innovative ways to work with homeless people were identified (Baptista and Coelho, 2020), within a context where the focus on specific metrics made it difficult for some homelessness services to think strategically. This lack of strategic thinking is common among professionals, but also among the managing bodies of organizations. The former can often be too focused on the individual scope of their action rather than on a more systemic perspective on the support work, while the latter are focused on fulfilling contracts and on issues related to the financing of the organization's operation.

Supervision procedures tend to focus on the compliance with contract service agreements, with an emphasis on statistical measures of performance, rather than the daily staffing practices, staff working conditions, or the informational and emotional elements of providing support, i.e., the areas in which staff tend to be trained. Although the discourse around service evaluation has already permeated the sector, it remains very much focused on the use of process indicators (number of people, number of actions), rather than on assessing changes and the impact of the support work.

Lately, there has been a positive development with regard to the communication capacities of the organisations in the sector – which is important for raising public awareness – as well as in their lobbying capacity in the political arena. There is, however, still much to be done in

terms of fostering collaboration among homelessness service providers, which continue to work on an individual rather than on a collaborative basis. A promising initiative in this domain is the establishment of an informal National Housing First Network composed of 12 to 15 organizations which either deliver or are interested in delivering Housing First projects. The first Housing First Conference in Portugal took place in early 2021.

Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis – a Quick Snapshot

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered changes in the responses to homelessness across Europe. The successive lockdowns and the need to protect people and contain the spread of the virus led to rapid responses from the homelessness sector in different ways. In Portugal, the main response to the pandemic was to significantly increase emergency shelter provision – 21 emergency collective accommodation spaces opened across the country, accommodating more than 500 persons[10] – and to extend the operation of existing emergency shelters (those that operated overnight moved to 24-hour operations). Housing First services have also been modified in various ways in order to facilitate people at heightened risk from the virus to shield at home, for example by providing food parcels, and allowing meetings between support workers and people using the services to take place outside and in other socially distanced forms.

Exceptional and temporary measures to respond to the COVID situation in Portugal in relation to housing were also introduced[11] during the first pandemic lockdown (all extended at least until the end of the first quarter of 2021 and, in some cases, until the end of the third quarter of 2021), including: the suspension of eviction and enforcement procedures[12]; the suspension of the termination of rental contracts during the pandemic5; a ban on terminating rental contracts due to arrears during the period of the state of emergency and the option to pay those rents in arrears during the 12 months following the end of the state of emergency in monthly instalments5; suspension of foreclosures on primary and permanent housing5; financial support for the payment of rent; and moratoria on the payment of mortgage instalments[13].

The results of an online survey held between May and June 2020 and targeting all NPISA coordinators and NPISA partner organizations provide interesting preliminary insights into some of the challenges facing the homelessness sector during these first critical months of the pandemic. These include:
- cooperation constraints in the provision of health services, particularly with the provision of mental health support which, as far as it was possible to ascertain, have still not been adequately responded to, as they also demonstrate pre-COVID-19 hindrances;

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10. Between December 2017 and December 2019, the number of homeless people – defined as people sleeping rough and people in houseless situations who are using temporary accommodation facilities for the homeless and who have no access to long-term accommodation solutions – rose from 4,414 in 2017, to 6,044 in 2018 and 7,107 in 2019 in mainland Portugal.
11. Law 1/2020 of 19 March
12. Article 8 of Law 1-A/2020 of 19 March
13. Article 4 of Decree-Law 10-J/2020 of 26 March

- although there are no reliable data on mortality rates or infection prevalence among homeless people, more than one in every two support workers considered that the risk of COVID-19 transmission among the homeless population was high, whereas two in every five support workers assessed such a risk as medium;
- NPISA coordinators reported that almost all accommodation facilities had the ability to screen new admissions, to isolate infected users and to dispose of personal protective equipment/material (masks, disinfectant, etc.);
- worrying reports regarding the ability of accommodation services to test all users, including the fact that only half of the NPISA coordinators declared that the necessary conditions were in place to test all users, while a third of them claimed that no facility had such capacity.
- when asked about proposed improvements following the pandemic, the majority of NPISA coordinators cited the need to strengthen the implementation of programmes that aim at providing stable and individualised housing solutions.

Overall, Portugal was initially successful in containing infection among people experiencing homelessness and the homelessness sector responded promptly, with a number of interventions to ensure that people could be sheltered with increased operational guidance to increase safety and a strong commitment from the staff within homelessness services. However, it is still early to say whether these short-term responses to prevent and reduce homelessness will provoke any shift in policies and practices within the sector.

Conclusions and Discussion

The adoption in 2009 of the first national homelessness strategy (ENIPSA 2009-2015) was in line with EU developments for the adoption of overall strategic policy approaches to homelessness, which, at the same time, represented a policy breakthrough within the Southern European policy context. The official and formal recognition in Portugal of homeless people as a public deserving of a particular public policy also represented the adoption of a more active role by the state in the regulation of services addressing the needs of this population.

The adoption of the national strategy was also a foundational moment, as it officially established the concept of "homeless person" in Portugal, following European guidelines by adopting the ETHOS typology framework. This definition has been progressively adopted at the local level and has had a positive impact in terms of enabling monitoring efforts and promoting better communication within the sector. However, by focusing exclusively on a restricted set of situations covering only the rooflessness and houselessness categories (including people living in rented rooms and hostels paid for by social service providers), the adopted definition does not enhance the identification of risk situations, namely "hidden homelessness" situations and may also render invisible some categories of people and trajectories, such as those of homeless women or families.

Nonetheless, by enhancing the establishment of new governance structures - the creation of Local Homelessness Units (NPISA) – the strategy has also introduced positive dynamics for mobilising

local stakeholders to adopt policy agendas across the sector and for the implementation of more integrated services. The creation of the NPISA strengthened cooperation between organisations and was crucial for the cohesion of the sector in a particularly difficult period – following the 2008 crisis and the fiscal consolidation and austerity period – when the reorientation of the role of social policies by the new right-wing coalition government in practice froze the operationalisation of the Strategy. This political disinvestment was counteracted at the local level by the continuing implementation of the strategy's aims and the continuing operation of the NPISA units. Since then, these units – which integrate both public and private actors – have gained increased responsibility with regard to planning and monitoring the provision of homelessness services, although the provision (either direct or through commissioning) of homelessness services continues to be mostly the responsibility of NGOs and other private non-profit organisations.

Between 2016 and 2017, homelessness appeared once more in the public debate, strengthened by a decisive contribution from the newly elected socialist government and from the active engagement of other important stakeholders in the political arena (e.g., Members of Parliament, and the newly elected President of the Republic).

The second National Strategy (ENIPSSA 2017-2023), although in terms of its content it was practically a reissue of the previous one, emerged with a new ambition for ensuring effective territorial implementation and the provision of practical tools to achieve this. This conceptual change, coupled with the intensification of the public debate around the most adequate responses for the effective eradication of homelessness, may have somehow contributed to the growing visibility and popularity of Housing First programmes, particularly at the level of public opinion, thus creating a favourable context for stronger investment in housing-led responses.

Thus, by the end of 2019, the focus of supporting investment was significantly reinforced and targeted at the provision of more individualised responses, namely by expanding the case management approach, the implementation of Housing First services and the provision of shared apartments. In addition, Lisbon announced the strengthening of the budget initially foreseen for the Municipal Plan for the Integration of Homeless People, from approximately €5M to €14.5M, with about one third of the amount being allocated to the creation and reinforcement of housing-led solutions.

It should be stressed that the outbreak of the pandemic has had a positive impact in accelerating the implementation of these projects, particularly by refocusing the attention of the public and policy makers on the serious structural housing hindrances affecting Portugal, which previously did not often resonate in the homelessness policy debate.

Nonetheless, the regulation of the quality of homelessness services remains an area where there is room for improvement. The regulation of the majority of service provisions for homeless people falls under the remit of the legal framework for social services. Often, homelessness support is provided by NGOs and other social solidarity organisations (including charities) and is commissioned by municipal or central state authorities (social security), through the establishment of cooperation agreements. Although the discourse on the need to evaluate responses has permeated the sector, the actual practice is that quality regulation continues to be conducted in a non-specific way in this area, with a focus on compliance so as to process indicators (number of people, number of actions, etc.), rather than on assessing changes or evaluating the impact of the support work. Evidence-based information on the quality of homelessness services in Portugal remains scarce.

Financing entities may play a crucial role in this respect, e.g., by promoting quality services, both by contracting services that comply with the specific guidelines for the sector and that include outcome evaluation indicators and by promoting the outcome-oriented evaluation procedures, thus enabling the orientation of future funding investments towards evidence-based responses and services. Moreover, a lack of robust evidence-based mechanisms for assessing the implementation progress of the two Portuguese national strategies is, possibly, one of the main persistent hindrances.

The issue of the quality of services illustrates how the presence of the phenomenon in the public debate, although a necessary condition for the allocation of resources to the sector, is not a sufficient condition for an adequate and concerted allocation. At this level, it is important to recognise the crucial role of service providers. Although their priorities have necessarily been shaped by the commitments undertaken within the scope of the funding contracts, the paradigmatic case of the organisations developing housing first services shows their engagement in trying to actively participate in the development of policies for the sector or in channelling the resources and developing internal mechanisms to establish evidence-based practices.

Although there has been a positive development with regard to the organisational communication capacities of the homelessness sector – crucial in order to raise public awareness – there is still room for improvement of the lobbying capacity in the policy arena, particularly as regards the need to enhance collaboration among homelessness service providers. Indeed, the lack of strategic thinking is still common at the organisational level, which often translates into a persistent trend to focus, for example, on an organisation's individual scope of action or on the fulfilment of contracts, rather than on developing a collaborative approach that could magnify an integrated and shared vison from and for the homelessness sector.

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