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MANUAL FOR THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF VULNERABLE GROUPS HAVING THE HOUSING EXCLUSION STATUS

with special focus on the housing of the homeless (19th principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights)

CERANEO – Centre for the Development of Non-Profit Organizations



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The manual has been prepared within the framework of the "Strengthening the capacities of civil society organisations in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights in Croatia" project. The project implementation period runs from 1 September 2022 to 30 November 2023. The general aim of the project is to strengthen the advocacy capacities of civil society organisations and other stakeholders to monitor and implement the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) at national and local levels. The partners on the project are the Local Democracy Agency Sisak, Network of Associations Zagor and Association "MI" Split, Croatian Network for the Homeless and NOVA.



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Dear readers,

CERANEO has been exploring the problem of homelessness in Croatia for many years and advocates the development of a housing policy affordable to every citizen, in particular the homeless and persons at risk of homelessness. Through the present project CERANEO has developed a study of the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) in Croatia, including the 19th principle of the EPSR, known under the name "Housing and Assistance for the Homeless".

Before you is the Manual for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups having the Housing Exclusion Status, with special focus on the housing of the homeless (19th principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights). It has been prepared within the framework of the just mentioned project that is currently underway and is entitled "Strengthening the Capacities of Civil Society Organisations in Implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights in Croatia". One of the specific objectives of the project is advocating for the rights of vulnerable groups according to the priorities of the Action Plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in Croatia. Our partners in achieving this objective are the Croatian Network for the Homeless and Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), both of which have enriched this Manual with their experiences and knowledge¹.

The manual aims to outline the policies and measures currently in force relating to the provision of housing to groups that are vulnerable in terms of housing and to offer certain innovative solutions to the housing of the homeless, in particular to present the Housing First model. It is intended for all experts working with the homeless and persons at risk of homelessness so that they would remain committed in their efforts to ensure adequate housing for this vulnerable group, all decision-makers so that they would gain insight into the obligation of caring for the homeless, that has been recognized at national level through the ratification of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the entire public concerned.

CERANEO team

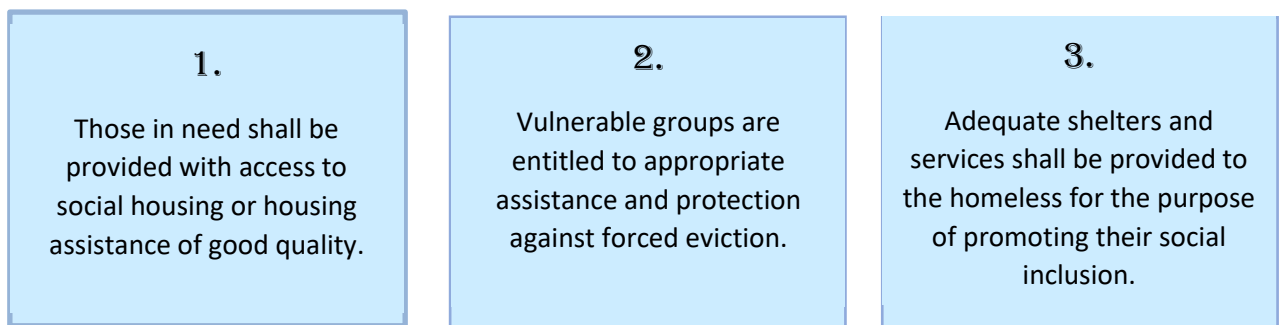
¹ We also thank other partners – Network of Associations Zagor, Local Democracy Agency Sisak and Association "MI" Split – for giving comments on the Manual.

1. European context of the housing policy

In 2017, the European parliament, the Council and the European Commission proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)². That is a programme setting out 20 principles divided into three groups: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. The aim of the European Pillar of Social Rights is to serve as a guide towards efficient employment and social outcomes when responding to current and future challenges which are directly aimed at fulfilling people's essential needs, and towards ensuring better enactment and implementation of social rights. Implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights is a priority within the framework of the European Social Fund Plus 2021-2027.

Image 1: *European Pillar of Social Rights*; Source: CERANEO. Available at <https://ceraneo.hr/publikacije/europski-stup-socijalnih-prava/>

The 19th principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights "*Housing and assistance for the homeless*" highlights in particular care for the homeless, stating:



In 2021, through its European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, the EU adopted concrete measures for the implementation of the EPSP³. The Action Plan states:

"Access to affordable housing is an increasing concern in many Member States, regions and cities. Homelessness is increasing in most Member States. While policies to end homelessness can only be successful through a tailored local or regional approach, many stakeholders have called for a European impetus to end homelessness across the EU by 2030."

As a response to this challenge, the European Platform on Combating Homelessness that aims to support Member States, cities and service providers in their endeavours to share best practices and identify efficient and innovative approaches was launched. The same year (2021) saw the adoption of

²² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1279&langId=hr>, visited on 15 August 2023.

³ European Commission, 2021, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/>

the Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combating Homelessness. The said Declaration highlights the following⁴:

- no one shall sleep rough for lack of accessible, safe and appropriate emergency accommodation
- no one shall live in emergency or transitional accommodation longer than is required for successful move-on to a permanent housing solution
- no one shall be 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 shall be evicted without assistance for an appropriate housing solution, when needed
- no one shall be discriminated due to their homelessness status.

In order to be able to monitor the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Action Plan for its implementation and other related documents, the European Union developed a set of indicators for monitoring the implementation of particular principles of the EPSP in EU Member States. On the basis of available data it is possible to compare the states of affairs across Member States. For the purpose of monitoring the 19th principle of the EPSP, indicators "**housing cost overburden rate**" and "**housing deprivation rate**" have been singled out. Below are data relating to the said indicators for the period from 2012 to 2021 at the levels of Croatia and the EU, which CERANEO prepared as part of the project.

2. Approach to the housing policy and fight against homelessness in Croatia

In the EU, responsibilities for housing and housing policy lie with Member States. However, drawing on its experience of the 2008 crisis, the EU has been increasing its way over this area and has consequently also adopted certain directives. Furthermore, housing is also the subject of some of the recommendations given to Member States within the framework of the European Semester. The Affordable Housing Initiative⁵, within the framework of which experiences are shared and innovative solutions to housing promoted, has also been launched. At its session on 23 April 2021, the Health and

⁴ EU, 2021,

file:///C:/Users/CERANEO/Downloads/Pokrenuta_Europska_platforma_za_borbu_protiv_besku_ni_tva.pdf

⁵ https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/proximity-and-social-economy/social-economy-eu/affordable-housing-initiative_en, visited on 15 August 2023.

Social Policy Committee of the Croatian Parliament expressed its support, without having gone through the required deliberations, for its implementation, and at its session on 25 April 2021, the Government of the Republic of Croatia followed suit. However, in its key strategic documents the Government seldom refers to it.

The National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia for the period until 2030 highlights, within development area 2 – *Strengthening Resilience to Crises*, strategic plan 5 – *Healthy, active and high-quality life*, whose performance indicator is measured as a decrease in the percentage of persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion to below 15% by 2030 (23.30% in 2019)⁶. In this respect, one of the policy priorities is social solidarity and responsibility – according to the said Strategy, by 2030 the **coverage of social assistance programmes for the poorest 20% of citizens** will increase. Special attention is placed on improving the uniformity of availability and quality of comprehensive social care for particularly vulnerable groups, including the homeless. In the field of demographic revitalisation and creation of a stimulating environment for the young and families, the National Development Strategy highlights the creation of conditions for the housing of young employed persons with average incomes that are not credit-worthy and cannot afford adequate housing and are forced to live as tenants or with parents in order to avoid the risk of homelessness. On the basis of the National Development Strategy's policy areas, the National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion for the period 2021 to 2027 was developed. It states the following:

"There are different rights, measures, activities and programmes addressing problems related to inadequate, i.e. decent housing, and these are defined by different regulations and strategic documents at national, regional and local levels."

The following goals of the National Plan concerning the housing of the homeless and persons at risk of homelessness may be highlighted:

| Specific goal 1: Decreasing poverty and social exclusion of vulnerable groups | Specific goal 4: Improving the living conditions of persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion |
|--|---|
| Measure 1 – Increasing the adequacy of social-security benefits and improving supplementary medical insurance coverage of the most vulnerable group of persons with compulsory health insurance | Measure 1 – Creating a stimulating environment for the improvement of the living conditions of young people and families and their not leaving |

⁶ National Development Strategy for the period until 2030.

Measure 5 – Contributing to the decrease in poverty at regional and local levels

Measure 2 – Providing housing to victims and volunteers of the Croatian War of Independence

Table 1: Goals of the National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion linked to a decrease in homelessness. National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, 2021

Under the Social Welfare Act, a homeless person is defined as follows:

"Homeless person means a person without a place of residence or the means by which to cover housing costs, that is housed or uses the service of organised housing at a shelter or overnight shelter or lives in public or other places not intended for housing purposes."

In defining homelessness, the legislator takes too little account of the ETHOS typology⁷, which also includes persons at risk of homelessness living in:

1.

unsafe housing – unsafe accommodation (temporarily with friends, without a rental contract), unlawful occupation of land, living under threat of violence

2.

inadequate housing – temporary unconventional dwellings, unsuitable living conditions, extremely overcrowded dwellings

The rights and services to which a person having the status of a homeless person or a person at risk of homelessness is entitled to are⁸:

- the right to a guaranteed minimum benefit; it is also granted to homeless persons that have been provided with accommodation or organised housing at a shelter in the amount of 50% of the guaranteed minimum benefit;
- housing allowance homeless persons in shelters, overnight shelters or organised housing are ineligible;

⁷ Feantsa, available for download at Feantse website, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ceraneo.hr/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ZAPOS LJAVANJE-BESKUCNIKA.pdf

⁸ Social Welfare Act, OG 8/22, 46/22, 119/22, 71/23.

- allowance for vulnerable energy buyers;
- social mentoring – expert assistance directed at strengthening the capacities for a more successful tackling of unfavourable living conditions and better integration into the community is provided;
- day stay service – provision of an organized activity during the day accompanied by professional and other assistance and support for the purpose of satisfying beneficiaries' basic and additional living needs that cannot be satisfied within the family circle;
- organised housing service;
- accommodation service.

The number of homeless persons in Croatia varies by source because there is no uniform record of all providers of services for the homeless and the competent institutions. According to the 2021 official statistical report of the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, 424 persons are recorded as homeless in the social welfare system (MLPSFSP, 2021). This group of homeless persons is eligible for the day stay service or the service of temporary accommodation at a shelter or overnight shelter. By inspecting the said report it is not possible to determine how many homeless persons in the social welfare system are eligible to allowances and/or other social services. The data collected within the framework of a study conducted for the purposes of mapping social services for the homeless reveal that in 2015, 344 homeless persons were registered in the social welfare centres' records, while service providers released data showing that 1,534 persons used their accommodation services in the same year (Načinović, 2016). According to the estimates of the Croatian Network for the Homeless, **in 2023, there were around 2,000 absolute homeless persons and as many as 10,000 persons at risk of homelessness living in Croatia.** A great many of the homeless in Croatia consist of persons who until the age of 18 lived in the system of alternative care for children and after leaving the system are left with no support. Data shows that as many as **one third of young persons that leave the alternative care system experience homelessness in 2 years** (Association "Play"). It is visible from the above figures that the system lacks coordination and that there is a need for the establishment of a clear strategic framework for the housing of the homeless with special emphasis on the housing of persons at risk of homelessness.

Under the Social Welfare Act, big cities and cities or towns that are centres of counties are required to ensure accommodation in shelters or overnight shelters for the homeless, while units of local and regional self-government are required at times of crises to ensure to families with minor children that have been left homeless and are unable to ensure accommodation for themselves, temporary housing in a social flat or otherwise, so as to prevent the separation of children from adults. Table 2 gives an overview of the availability of rights and services for the homeless in Croatia's 4 largest cities.

| City | Services provided on the basis of the Decision | | | Key service providers | | Innovative programmes |
|----------------|---|---|--------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| | Right to housing | Right to free meals in the soup kitchen | Right to GMB | Founder local unit | Others (church, NGO) | |
| City of Zagreb | + | + | + | Institution "Good Home" ("Dobri dom") | Croatian Network for the Homeless, Red Cross Zagreb, Association "FIVE PLUS" (PET PLUS), Association "Home of hope", Secular Franciscan Order, Zagreb Archdiocesan Caritas, Missionaries of Love | The Croatian Network for the Homeless has a centre providing assistance and support to the homeless and persons at risk of homelessness. Red Cross Zagreb has a shelter in Velika Kosnica. Association "Home of hope" provides daily space and accompanying services. Association "Good Home" provides meal services in its 4 soup kitchens. The Secular Franciscan Order provides the soup kitchen service. Caritas has an overnight shelter and the Missionaries of Love a shelter and a soup kitchen. |
| City of Split | + | + | + | Institution DES | Association "Bridge" (MoST), Caritas of the Split-Makarska Archdiocese, Association of Pope John XXII | Association "Bridge" (MoST) provides half-day accommodation to the homeless, an overnight shelter, assistance with employment, Caritas provides personal hygiene facilities; the Association of Pope John XXII offers housing with psycho-social rehabilitation and resocialisation. |
| City of Rijeka | + (necessary housing provided by the City, shelters provided by associations) | + | + | | Association "Oasis" (Oaza), Association "Terra", Red Cross Rijeka, Secular Franciscan Order – Rose of St. Francis | Association "Oasis" has a shelter and acts as the Centre for Assistance and Support to the Homeless, which was founded by the City of Rijeka; Association "Terra" provides a day centre for addicts-homeless persons (drop in), Red Cross Rijeka – soup kitchen and premises for accommodating the homeless in extreme weather conditions, Secular Franciscan Order – Shelter of the Rose of St. Francis |
| City of Osijek | + | + | + | | Caritas of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese, Red Cross Osijek | Caritas provides housing services at the Reception Centre for the Homeless (founder City of Osijek) and meals in the soup kitchen. It carries out resocialisation activities through workshops for the homeless: psychosocial and psychotherapeutic, IT, drama and music, and health, within |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|
| | | | | | | the framework of the project, Red Cross Osijek provides the soup kitchen service. |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|

Table 2: Overview of services for the homeless provided by Croatia's 4 largest cities; Source: CERANEO, December 2022

At the level of local governments, Public Housing programs such as renting apartments with protected rent and the likewise are developed and implemented, which, although of a great value, are not sufficient to provide for all citizens in need. The program of Public Rental Apartments in the City of Zagreb and the Program of Public renting apartments in Varaždin are recognized as social innovations in the field of housing and homelessness prevention (MROSP, 2021). As can be seen from Table 2, a large part of the provision of services to the homeless is provided by civil society organizations, which also provide innovative forms of services. In May 2023, the call "Development and expansion of the network of social services for the period 2023 to 2025" of the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy for (continuation of) three-year programs for the provision of social services to the homeless people and persons at risk of homelessness was announced. Main issue of the call is the sustainability and quality of services with project financing method. The Croatian model of caring for the homeless is mainly implemented through the activities of civil society organizations. This civil society organisations are at constant risk of financial, institutional and social instability (Horvat and Bežovan, 2023).

Given the lack of a strategic framework for action, experts in this area have been advocating for many years the development of a national housing policy that would **prevent homelessness**, but also provide housing for the homeless according to the *Housing first* innovation, which for many years has been one of the backbones of caring for the homeless in the world. As a result of public pressure, **on April 6, 2023, the Government's decision was made on the creation of the National Housing Policy Plan of the Republic of Croatia until 2030.** Starting thesis of the Plan is:

*"Housing is one of the basic human needs, and the home represents the basis of stability and security for the individual and the family, the backbone of social and emotional life, but increasingly also the workplace."*⁹

The European Pillar of Social Rights, the application of which the Government of the Republic of Croatia supported, stands out that country member should provide access to social housing or quality housing assistance to anyone who needs it. Namely, in 2021 alone, a total of 2,623 new apartments were built in Zagreb¹⁰, while an increasing number of young families are unable to find real estate, and the fact stands out that unaffordable housing is one of the main triggers for the emigration of the young, active population from Croatia (Bežovan and Jakovčević, 2023). Also, the number of citizens excluded from housing is growing, among whom there is an increasing share of elderly people. Based on previous research and efforts, CERANEO, in cooperation with the Faculty of Law, advocates for increase of housing affordability.

⁹ Website of the Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets, available at <https://mpgi.gov.hr/print.aspx?id=15323&url=print&page=1>

¹⁰ Croatian Bureau of statistics, 2021

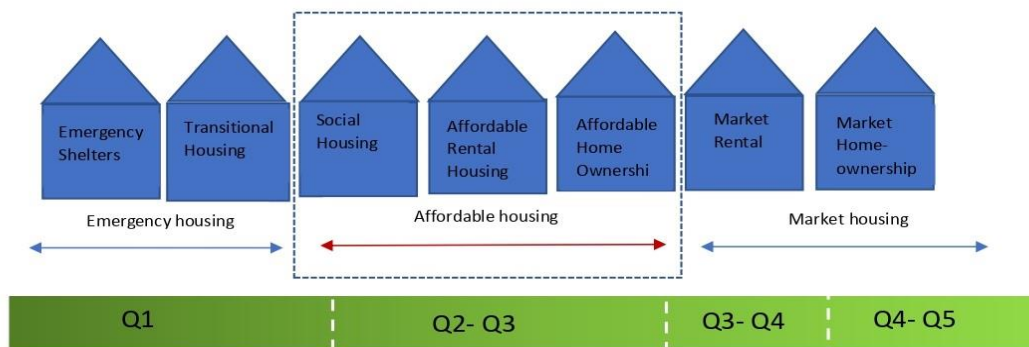


Image 4: Spectrum of Housing; Source: CERANEO

As shown in the Image of affordable Housing Action plan¹¹, affordable housing is the spectrum that comes after emergency housing (intended for people in the status of homelessness). The spectrum includes social housing, affordable rental housing, and affordable home ownership. The aforementioned form of housing prevents homelessness in the long term, and it is evident that this type of housing is the most needed, and the least available in Croatia.

In a comprehensive analysis, Bežovan, Baturina and Horvat (2023) conclude that the formal extent of social rights as well as the recognition of homelessness as a vulnerable group has made a little progress in Croatia in the last three decades. Significant obstacles to the realization of the social rights of the homeless are an inadequate support system for the realization of their rights, a clear need for new approaches and policies aimed at their (primarily housing) care and social inclusion.

When it comes to possibilities, the following proposals for an affordable housing policy stand out:

- enhancement of the number of social apartments by utilizing the state and city infrastructure - offering apartments to young people leaving alternative care;
- enhancement of rents in social housing for the purpose of sustainability of the model and development of training programs for living in social housing;
- starting a discussion on restrictions on the conversion of housing units into apartments for renting, increase the tax on short-term apartment rentals;
- join housing initiatives at the EU level to follow examples of good practice;
- consider the *Housing First* model for homeless care.

Unfortunately, only one expert from the Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy was included in the working group for the creation of the Plan, and no one from the civil sector that provides services to people at the greatest housing risk, the homeless, or the academic sector that deals with research on this topic was not included. In addition, the results of the work of this group in the public has not yet stimulated some discussions.

¹¹ Housing 20230; Available at Housing2030- <https://www.housing2030.org/project/cooperation-through-the-urban-agenda-for-the-eu-housing-partnership-action-plan/>

Considering the many years of neglect of the development of a comprehensive plan to combat homelessness and the current political climate of the development of the National Housing Policy Plan as well as the application of the European Pillar of Social Rights (mainly the 19th principle), the following manual presents the *Housing first* care model for the homeless. It has had a good effect in European countries, which is evident in the reduction of the number of homeless people and their reintegration into society. This approach to solving social problems is therefore considered a form of social investment with visible results for individuals, communities and society as a whole.

3. The *Housing First* model as a way of caring for the homeless¹²

Housing First as a concept means an approach to work in which the homeless are primarily provided with permanent housing, and only then work is done to meet their other needs. The goal is to enable people **to realize their right to a home in a dignified manner**, and then to provide them with continuous help and support in solving the problems that caused them to become homeless. The model takes into account Maslow's hierarchy of needs, according to which a person who does not meet basic life needs (food, water, shelter, security) cannot think about meeting needs at higher levels (innovative services that are most often offered to homeless people in Croatia are psychological help, employment assistance, etc.).

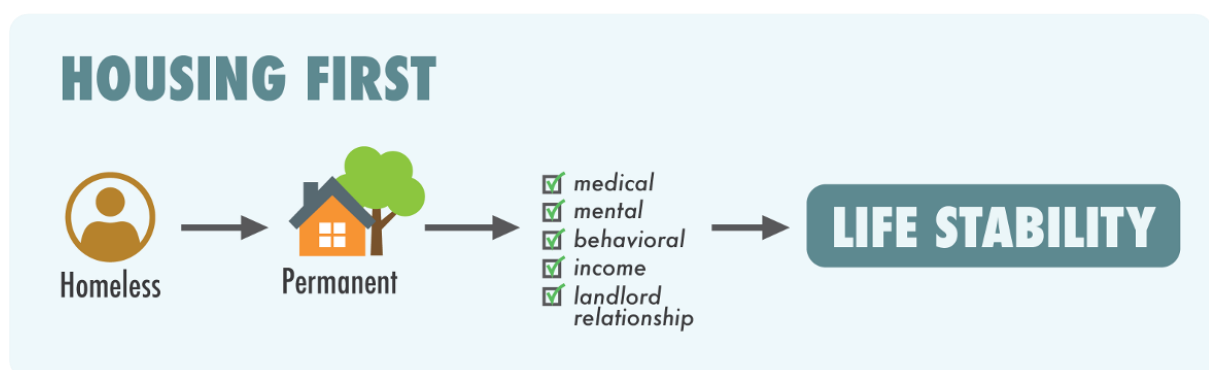


Image 5: Model *Housing First*; Source: Homelessness in Maine-
<https://housingfirst.marinhhs.org/housing-first>

Main principles of *Housing First*:

- adequate housing is a human right (the Government of the Republic of Croatia states the same when planning the National Housing Policy Plan)
- service users have the right to choose and control the process
- accommodation and treatment are separated
- orientation towards recovery
- damage reduction
- active user engagement without coercion
- planning focused on individual needs
- flexible support (as long as necessary)

in the traditional model of housing continuously returns to the shelters and overnight shelters with the same challenges, further burdening the system.

The CRESCER¹³ association from Portugal, which has been implementing this model for 20 years, singles out the following benefits compared to traditional care for the homeless:

- profitable and achieves better results,
- ends homelessness for 8 out of 10 people who experience it,
- offers autonomy, choice, empowerment and integration into the community for *Housing First* beneficiaries.

One of the countries where the *Housing First* model has been actively implemented for years is Norway. The following shows their comprehensive approach to caring for the homeless and the continuous decline in the number (and thus the cost of care) of the homeless using the *Housing First* model.

4. Comprehensive application of the *Housing First* model in Norway¹⁴

In 2019, 179,000 Norwegian citizens were at risk of housing (Kommunaldepartementet, 2020), and according to recent research, Norway had 3,325 homeless people in 2020 (Dyb and Zeiner, 2021). The definition of homeless in Norway is:

A homeless person is defined as one who does not own or rent a housing unit and is left with coincidental or temporary housing arrangements; who temporarily stays with close relatives, friends or acquaintances; or who is under the care of the correctional services or an institution, due for release within two months. People without arranged accommodations for the next night are also considered homeless. (Ulfrstad, 1997, p. 15; translation by NOVA project partners)

Comparing the definition of homeless in Norway and Croatia shows the difference in coverage of the number of homeless and the importance of prevention for people who are at risk of homelessness. Norway takes into account and clearly applies the ETHOS typology and, unlike Croatia, **maintains and collects unambiguous statistical data on the number of homeless people. In this way, the impact of the policies implemented can be clearly monitored.**

| Year | Number of Homeless | On 1 000 citizens |
|-------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 2020 | 3.325 | 0,62 |
| 2016 | 3.909 | 0,75 |
| 2012 | 6.259 | 1,26 |
| 2008 | 6.091 | 1,27 |

¹³ Pula +; can be found on <https://www.pula.hr/it/novita/detail/23391/grad-pula-bit-ce-vodja-housing-first-u-hrvatskoj/>.

¹⁴ This part of booklet was prepared in cooperation with project partner NOVA

| | | |
|-------------|--------------|------|
| 2005 | 5.496 | 1,19 |
| 2003 | 5.200 | 1,14 |
| 1996 | 6.200 | 1,5 |

Table 3: Number of Homeless people; Source: Dyb and Zeiner, 2021

In the very beginnings of the discourse on homelessness on European soil, in 1996, Norway conducted a comprehensive survey on the number of homeless people and the reasons for homelessness in Norway. In the continuation of development, they conduct the same research every 4 years and supplement their database. **The aforementioned data became the basis for the development of social policies in the area of care for the homeless and housing policy in Norway.** Thus, projects based on the *Housing First* model were implemented: Project Homeless (2001–2004), On the road to housing (2005–2007) and Housing for Welfare (2014–2020). On the basis of periodic research and monitoring of data on the homeless, the programs that are being implemented are continuously evaluated and they **show success in view of the continuum in the decline of the number of homeless people.**

There are currently 18 *Housing First* projects in Norway that are used by 253 homeless people (Barvik and Flåto, 2018). The freedom to choose a residential unit is limited, which in principle means that users can reject the offer of a residential unit without losing their place on the housing waiting list. **However, the housing units offered are mostly integrated into ordinary neighborhoods,** have a good standard, and the waiting time for suitable housing within the framework of HF-projects rarely exceeds 15 weeks. Health and social services are offered at least once a week, based on methods such as Individual Case Management (ICM) and Assertive Community Treatment (ACT). Some of the service teams included a support worker. There are no drug use or mental health treatment requirements. **Projects are built on the understanding of participants as individual human beings** capable of making decisions concerning their own lives. Damage reduction and recovery are the basic values by which experts are guided.

Evaluations of *Housing First* projects in Norway show that:

"Most participants experience an overall increase in quality of life, greater faith in the future, and peace and quiet in their daily lives. They believe that HF-projects provide them with a secure basis in life (Andvig et al., 2016; Skog Hansen, 2017). Most participants are satisfied with their housing unit (Snertingdal et al., 2015), and the services offered provide adequate assistance (Hansen, 2018). However, several participants feel lonely, and the lack of access to work, activities and networks are challenges faced by many (Skog Hansen, 2017).

4.1. Project X - streets¹⁵

In Norway, the programs are implemented by local governments that, in cooperation with the civil sector, have developed a number of examples of good practice over the years. One of them is Project X – street.

The X-street project was created based on the idea and initiative of the homeless themselves and is therefore described as an example of the joint action of the homeless. Staying in temporary accommodation run by an NGO funded by state and municipal grants, a group of homeless people

¹⁵ The street has its real name but it is not used to protect its residents

created a plan for a self-organized housing collective. The goal was to establish an affordable self-governing solution for homelessness and unemployment (Aaslund and Seim, 2020). In addition to safe accommodation, they wanted a base for their newly launched cleaning company.

The non-governmental organization that manages temporary accommodation decided to support the initiative with accommodation and financing, and in 2016 the X-street project was launched. By the summer of 2017, the house had 20 tenants. Their tenancies were governed by tenancy agreements between the tenants and the NGO, and the tenants were a mix of men and women between the ages of 25 and 60. In addition to the already existing cleaning company, a courier company was also established (Aaslund and Seim, 2020). The goal of the project was to contribute to a more positive and nuanced perception of the homeless. In order to achieve this goal, the initiators wanted to show their independence by running the house themselves. However, when the project was launched, the NGO funded an operational team consisting of a full-time social worker, along with two part-time peer support workers. The process of hiring peer support workers was solved in cooperation between the NGO and the tenants. The work team offered practical and social services to the tenants (Aaslund and Pruim, 2020). The X-street project was completed in January 2019. Tenants did not participate in this decision. The termination is justified by the lack of funds for non-governmental organizations, along with the ethical challenges of the role of employer (for social workers) and landlord. The tenants could stay for a year, but the organization as a project was terminated (Aaslund, 2020, 2021). However, the project is a unique example, at least in the Norwegian context, of how the welfare of citizens can be ensured by joint action among the long-term homeless.

When we talk about the *Housing First* model in Croatia, the Croatian Network for the Homeless until 2023 implemented organized housing for the homeless through which more than 50 homeless people were successfully reintegrated into society. Although organized housing cannot be considered a *Housing First* model in the full sense, this experience shows that with a focus on housing care, the success of the reintegration of the homeless into society increases and that there is potential for innovative solutions. So, this is about adapting the innovation to our circumstances, often without adequate support from the state. However, the corresponding effects are still achieved. Young socially excluded people are regularly rescued, provided with various forms of assistance, trained for work and reintegrated into society. The effects of these projects should be adequately presented to the public.

The City of Pula in cooperation with the City Society of the Red Cross of Pula and the Croatian Network for the Homeless launched an initiative for the first comprehensive application of this model in Croatia. Members of the Red Cross Pula have gone through education, and the plan is to implement the model in the City of Pula. However, we are talking about project initiatives. The effort of national institutions is needed to establish this model. An example of this can be countries such as Finland, Canada and Denmark, which introduced the ***Housing First* model as part of the National Strategy for housing policy and the fight against homelessness.**

In the further promotion of this innovative concept, we should cooperate more actively with organizations from other EU countries, participate in joint projects and work on systematic learning from the experience of others. These could be contributions to strengthening the sustainability of civil society organizations that provide services to this vulnerable group. The problems of homelessness should also be investigated in a broader perspective based on the ETHOS typology (living in unsuitable premises, subletting, overcrowding, etc.) and the public should be regularly informed about it in order to work on programs to help the population that also suffers from housing exclusion.

In addition to informing the public and providing services for people in the status of homelessness, it would be useful to implement homelessness prevention programs in order to reduce the number of

future homeless people in risky living situations and contribute to the quality of life of vulnerable groups.

5. Literature list:

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