ROOF Tops

**Key Messages
to the European Union
from the ROOF Network**

ROOFTOP
EU2022

ROOF
Ending homelessness

European Union
European Regional Development Fund

URBACT
Driving change for
better cities

About this document

ROOF is an URBACT Action Planning Network of nine cities across Europe. Braga (PT), Ghent (BE – Lead Partner), Glasgow (UK), Liège (BE), Odense (DK), Poznań (PL), Thessaloniki (EL), Timişoara (RO), Toulouse Métropole (FR) came together to explore and share housing solutions for ending homelessness. Each city also drafted a local action plan. We have engaged in transnational exchange, mutual learning and dialogue over autumn 2019 – spring 2022.

As a partnership we are passionate about ending homelessness in a managed and evidence-based way. We believe that changing how we all view homelessness, and the measures needed to tackle it, will allow new sustainable approaches at all levels. Whether through engaging people, direct action or advocating to change policy. Our specific objectives for ROOF are to have changed more minds towards data collection, have started or upscaled Housing First/Led initiatives and made progress in developing local, national and European homelessness and housing policies.

We believe the EU made a crucial step forward with the establishment of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, its working plan and with the Lisbon Declaration that was impressively signed by all EU Member States. We urge the EU to maintain the momentum and prepare to keep ending homelessness as a priority also beyond 2024 and to draft a Roadmap for the next EU cycles beyond 2024 and 2030 as well to reach functional zero for homelessness in Europe.

This document was co-created by all nine ROOF-cities to articulate through four key messages to the European Union (EU) and other key actors what cities need in the decade to come to end homelessness together with all stakeholders: a strategic Housing-led approach grounded in the systematic collection and interpretation of data. Each key message consists of four more detailed submessages.

Special thanks to Professor Philip Brown (University of Huddersfield) for helping ROOF articulate the messages, to Freek Spinnewijn (FEANTSA), Professor Ides Nicaise (KU Leuven) and Laura Colini (URBACT) for feedback and to every speaker who inspired us during the ROOF advocacy sessions.

ROOF is an URBACT project co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund. As a European Programme, URBACT engages over 500 cities and reaches out to more than 1,000 through past collaboration and communication. URBACT is actively engaged in housing, recently launching the platform Cities engaged in the Right to Housing, involving policy makers, EU organisations such as FEANTSA, IUT, Housing Europe, local politicians, MEP and the EU COM in various events.

Our key messages at a glance

1 | The EU must produce an Ending Homelessness Strategy by 2024/25 that includes key actions on improving affordability and quality of housing solutions.

2 | The EU and the Member States should develop a joint monitoring system with harmonised indicators and ad hoc surveys on homelessness to inform policy decisions.

3 | The EU should promote Housing-led approaches, particularly Housing First, as a key method of tackling homelessness.

4 |The EU should allocate EU Structural and Investment funds to tackle homelessness by expanding affordable housing stock and providing support to allow people to live and thrive independently.

1

The EU must produce an Ending Homelessness Strategy by 2024/25 that includes key actions on improving affordability and quality of housing solutions.

The Lisbon Declaration demonstrates the commitment of the European Union to take serious steps in addressing homelessness across Member States. We believe this to be a critical first step and call upon the EU to strengthen this approach by developing an Ending Homelessness Strategy with key actions on affordability and quality of housing solutions and a roadmap to identify for Member States the road towards ending homelessness within a pragmatic timeframe.

There is much that needs to be done including: increasing the supply of housing, improving the quality of housing, bringing vacant properties back into use, improving access to the private, public and social housing sectors and increasing housing security. Whilst these are housing issues, these are huge drivers of homelessness and the effects are seen in how people access healthcare, transport, the labour market, education and can lead to social unrest.

As ROOF we see a strategy as critical in order to provide the leadership this transformational agenda requires.

SUBMESSAGES TO KEY MESSAGE ON HOUSING

• The EU and its Member States must embed housing need as a fundamental human right in their legislation and policy and position housing as central to addressing improvements in public health, inequality and the climate crisis.

• The EU should embed a Recommendation under the European Pillar of Social Rights on giving Member States strategic direction for their national homelessness policies and related housing solutions to prevent and end homelessness grounded in realistic deliverable targets.

• The EU should further strengthen the Lisbon Declaration by drafting a clear Roadmap for transformation together with key milestones.

• The EU should support cross-sectoral mechanisms for collaboration between and within Member States in order to deliver coherent and coordinated responses at EU, national and local levels.

2

The EU and the Member States should develop a joint monitoring system with harmonised indicators and ad hoc surveys on homelessness to inform policy decisions.

The collection, analysis and harmonisation of data is critical in order to understand how things are and how things change. This is especially the case for homelessness in order to appreciate the scale of the challenge needed to resolve it and how effective attempts to address it are. Adopting common mechanisms including the FEANTSA ETHOS Light definition as the preferred European definition of homelessness for headcounts and integrating indicators of homelessness in existing European statistics such as European Union Statistics On Income And Living Conditions (EU-SILC) will allow for harmonisation. The pilot survey of homeless people in the context of the Belgian SILC-CUT research demonstrated the feasibility and usefulness of such surveys.

There is variability across Member States on data collection with respect to homelessness. Some countries, and cities within, are at a relatively advanced state. In others there is an absence or rudimentary application of data collection. Similarly, while many Member States and cities collect data there is a lack of analytical capabilities which can lead to missed opportunities to develop effective policies.

ROOF sees that the EU is in a unique position to enable Member States and key partners to increase their capabilities in this area and to enhance our understanding about how to increase the effectiveness of EU funding in our aim of ending homelessness and changing lives.

SUBMESSAGES TO KEY MESSAGE ON DATA

• **The EU should provide Member States and cities with the opportunity to enhance their capabilities with respect to collecting robust data on homelessness including understanding Housing First outcomes. The monitoring system should include headcounts based on the ETHOS (light) typology as well as targeted surveys based on a light version of EU-SILC.**

• **The EU should facilitate Member States and cities to fill the analytical skills gap which can inhibit the development of policies and interventions that will have the biggest impact on tackling homelessness.**

• **The European Platform on Combatting Homelessness should work with Eurostat to develop a joint monitoring system, including protocols for harmonised data collection and analysis to inform and evaluate policies at EU and national levels.**

• **The EU should develop a data-driven understanding of the various types of homelessness across and within Member States and design appropriate citizen-centred solutions.**

3

The EU should promote Housing-led approaches, particularly Housing First, as a key method of tackling homelessness.

The provision of safe, decent and affordable homes is transformative for people and society at large. Treating housing as a fundamental human right is critical and within the policy and practice of Housing First this principle is at its core. Housing First offers an opportunity to transform the lives of people, tackle complex and entrenched social issues and give local municipalities the tools they need to make a real impact on homelessness. For those people with high and complex needs Housing First can be life changing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that housing inequality is an issue of public health and safety as those people living in lower quality housing in insecure tenancies have often experienced evictions and been placed in vulnerable positions. The EU can do a great deal to disrupt political and policy inertia towards homelessness and Housing First by strongly advocating for a transformation in approach that can help us move away from victim blaming towards sustainable interventions, political engagement and positive policy implementation.
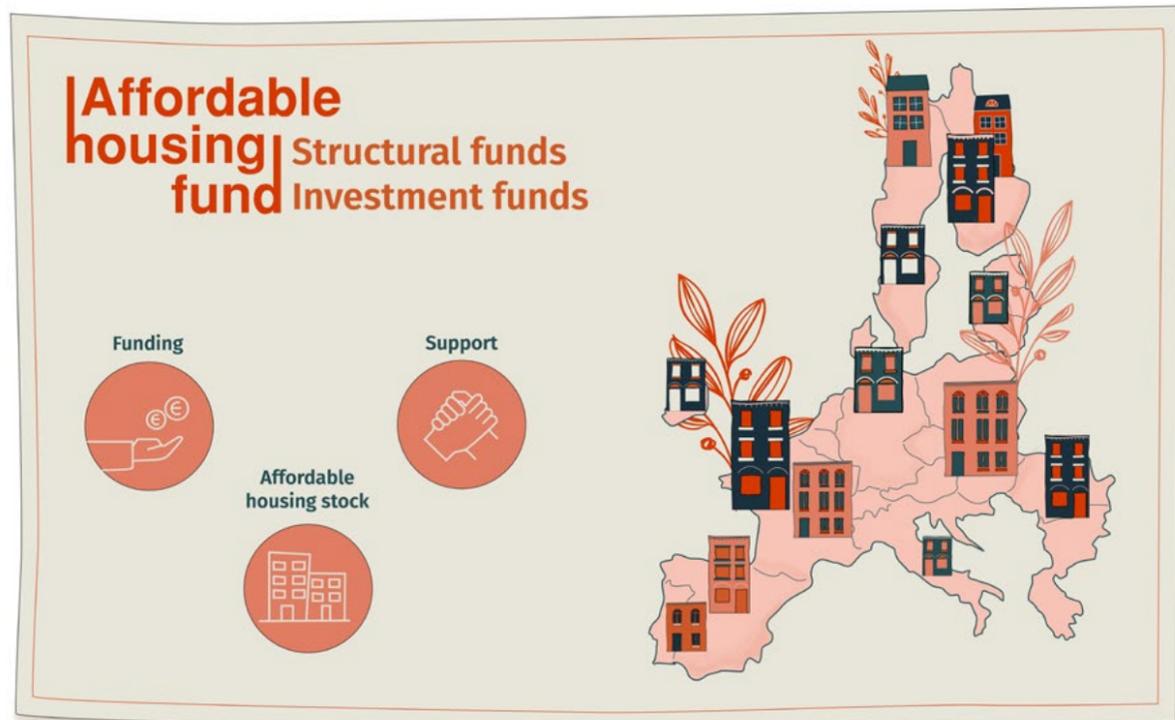
SUBMESSAGES TO KEY MESSAGE ON HOUSING FIRST/LED

• The EU should promote Housing-led approaches as crucial to tackling homelessness and Housing First as particularly effective on reducing complex homelessness and reducing costs on the public purse.

• The EU should regard homelessness and housing inequality as urgent public health and safety issues and should support and fund coordinated Housing-led/Housing First approaches across cities in order to enable new ways of working and partnerships to be established.

• The EU must create real opportunities for cities to share knowledge, collaborate and build capacity on delivering Housing-led and Housing First approaches in order to co-design solutions with our citizens and to end homelessness in Europe.

• The EU and Member States must work with cities to design and implement Housing First approaches, which provides long-term results to end complex homelessness.

4

The EU should allocate EU Structural and Investment funds to tackle homelessness by expanding affordable housing stock and providing support to allow people to live and thrive independently.

By establishing the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, the EU is showing a clear intent about the need to take assertive action on tackling homelessness. Drawing on a combination of setting strategic priorities, changing EU practices and promoting innovations will allow Member States to develop the confidence and skills required in order to make instrumental changes in this area. The continuation of partnerships like ROOF will add critical capacity, much needed knowledge transfer and create a community of practice grounded in innovation.

Whilst a great deal of progress can be made on this agenda within existing resource allocations by delivering policies and services differently because of the scale of transformation required, there is a pressing need to resource these developments appropriately. Homelessness and housing insecurity can be addressed by horizontally embedding this into flagship EU funding programmes. New resources will be required to enable Member States to build new homes, renovate existing ones and provide the services and support needed in order for people to live and thrive independently in society.

SUBMESSAGES TO KEY MESSAGE ON FUNDING

• The EU must address housing insecurity, which is linked to many other inequalities, as a priority and link it horizontally into EU funding programmes and enable flexible modes of delivery of housing and support.

• The EU should set the tone for addressing housing inequality and must invest in building new housing and renovating existing properties to a high quality to be used by the public and social sectors.

• The EU should target funding at initiatives within Member States which assist homeless people into housing, maintain tenancies and access wider networks of support.

• The EU must integrate standard references to social and affordable housing in all reports of EU institutions when discussing housing markets and financial stability.

#ROOFTOPEU2022
#endinghomelessness

Ghent (BE), 13 May 2020