



Together for a home

National Action Plan to
Tackle Homelessness



Federal Ministry
for Housing, Urban Development
and Building

**TOGETHER
FOR A HOME**
National Action Plan
to Tackle Homelessness



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Preamble

The Federal Republic of Germany committed itself early on to the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. The first sustainability goal calls on the international community to end poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030. Sustainability Goal 11 also calls for all people to have access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services. The social state principle enshrined in the German constitution obliges the state to ensure a dignified existence for citizens in social and economic difficulties. This is complemented by the right to housing enshrined in the UN Social Covenant and the European Social Charter. Preventing and overcoming homelessness, as well as providing adequate assistance with housing costs, is therefore a mandatory task of the social state.

The housing shortage is a particular challenge. Germany is not alone here. Housing shortages and homelessness are a growing problem in many European and non-European countries. Affordable housing is often lacking, especially in the low-income segment. The European Union is therefore committed to ending homelessness in its Member States by 2030, in line with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). Principle 19 on housing and assistance to the homeless in the EPSR calls on all EU Member States to combat homelessness as part of their subsidiary responsibilities. With the signing of the Lisbon Declaration (Declaration on the European Platform on Combating Homelessness) and the implementation of the coalition agreement

between SPD, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and FDP for the 20th legislative period, the German government has committed itself to this goal.

A key prerequisite for combating homelessness is an adequate supply of affordable and sufficiently furnished housing. Nevertheless, even with an adequate supply of housing, individual emergencies can arise that lead to the loss of housing.

For decades, the federal, state and municipal authorities in Germany have been fulfilling their mandate to support people in housing emergencies by providing emergency housing, taking over rent arrears to secure accommodation in accordance with § 22 para. 8 SGB II (Second Book of the Social Code) and § 36 para. 1 SGB XII, providing accommodation under regulatory law, and other measures. The system has proven to be fundamentally successful in practice and will be continued in its existing legal form. A differentiated support system of independent non-profit institutions and services providing emergency housing assistance throughout the country offers a wide range of services, such as specialist counselling centres in accordance with § 67 et seq. SGB XII, central specialist centres, day shelters, housing support services, street social work, social-integrative assistance in the neighbourhood as well as inpatient and semi-inpatient services. Job centres and social welfare offices work preventively to avoid homelessness and, if necessary (e.g. in the case of homelessness, rent arrears, eviction proceedings, etc.), take targeted

measures. Many housing associations and private landlords are also involved in providing housing and preventing homelessness. Courts are obliged to inform the responsible basic security providers immediately of certain eviction proceedings (§ 22 para. 9 SGB II/§ 36 para. 2 SGB XII).

In order to overcome homelessness by 2030, a networked and coordinated joint commitment of all involved institutions and levels of government in Germany is required, which will significantly expand the prevention of homelessness, provide comprehensive support for people in housing emergencies and ensure non-discriminatory access to housing. In particular, the provision of affordable housing must be at the centre of joint efforts.

The National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness is the first to bring together the joint efforts of all levels to overcome homelessness in Germany. The result is a nationwide guideline for action that can only be successfully implemented in close and trusting cooperation between the federal government, the federal states and the municipalities. The adoption of the National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness marks the beginning of a common path that should be continued in the coming years beyond the current legislative period. This understanding is based on the conviction that overcoming homelessness cannot be achieved through a single plan; rather, it requires many coordinated stages and a process in which stakeholders work together on various fields of action and concrete short- and long-term measures.

These are guided by the objectives of the Lisbon Declaration, agreed by all EU Member States, representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, civil society organisations, social partners and cities.

The National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness will be successful if as many actors as possible work together to make it a reality.

Shared values and responsibilities

Human dignity is inviolable. Lack of a home and homelessness are violations of human dignity. Living without a home, and especially living on the street without permanent shelter, is the most extreme form of poverty, exclusion and health risk in our country. It is the duty of all state actors to help homeless people to realise their fundamental and human rights.

Providing them with support and assistance is required not only by the principle of the social state

for public administration at all levels, but also by the social responsibility of all actors and the solidarity of people with each other in a caring society. This responsibility applies regardless of how people got into this situation and regardless of ethnic origin, social status, gender, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

The focus of joint action is on providing housing and supporting people to remain independent in their own homes. People with current or past experience of homelessness have been involved in the development of this National Action Plan. The participation of people who have experienced homelessness and their active involvement will be continued and expanded in the implementation of the Action Plan.

The reasons for an unsuccessful housing search or loss of housing are many and varied. The biographies, circumstances and needs of people experiencing homelessness are also diverse. In many places, housing markets are tight and make it very difficult for homeless people to find accommodation. An effective system, which prevents homelessness or helps people to overcome it, must provide sufficient affordable housing and needs-based assistance for different target groups. Counselling, programmes or measures must be as individualised as possible and designed without barriers to access, e.g. through multilingual services.

The major cross-cutting social task of overcoming homelessness cannot be tackled by the federal government alone due to federal responsibilities. The concrete improvement of prevention and the placement of homeless people in housing are the responsibilities of municipalities. The federal and state governments create and improve the framework conditions and structures to enable municipalities to act locally. All the actors involved – the federal government, federal states and municipalities, civil society, the housing industry, emergency housing services and advocacy groups for the homeless, who have joined forces in this National Action Plan – share the goal of overcoming homelessness. The focus of the joint action is a constructive debate with a common solution.



Context and challenges

Having a home of one's own satisfies the need for safe shelter and privacy and is also a basic prerequisite for social participation in all areas of life (e.g. health, education, work). People without a home do not have this option.

Extent of homelessness in Germany

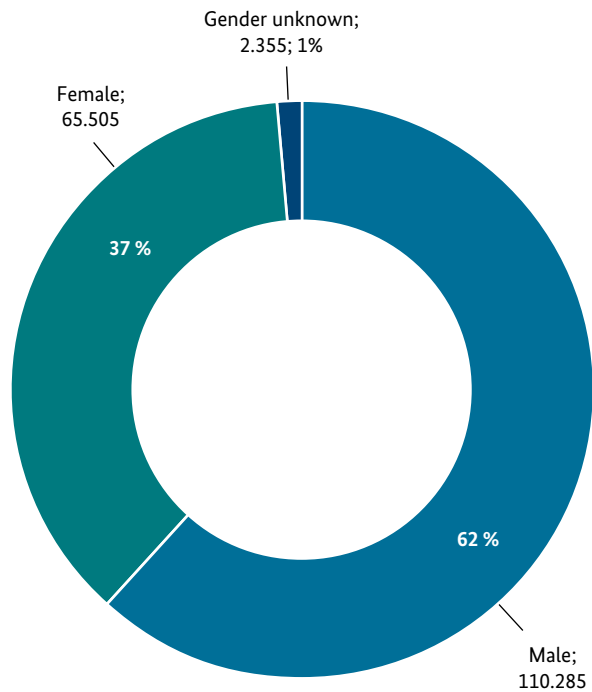
Homeless people are a very heterogeneous group. According to the Homeless Reporting Act (WoBerichtsG), homelessness exists if the use of a home by one person or a majority of people in the same household is not secured by a tenancy or lease agreement or by a right in rem, or if a home is not available to one person or a majority of people in the same household for other reasons. To illustrate this, nationwide figures were collected for the first time in 2022 for the Federal Report on Homelessness using different methods.

Homeless people housed

According to § 2 WoBerichtsG [Homeless Reporting Act], the Federal Statistical Office conducts an annual central survey on 31 January. Data are collected on people who are housed by municipalities or by voluntary providers on behalf of municipalities (which reimburse the costs) because they are homeless (see § 3 para. 2 WoBerichtsG). The main results of the 2022 and 2023 surveys are summarised below.

Of the approximately 178,100 housed homeless people as of 31 January 2022, including approximately 47,200 children and minors, 62 percent were male, 37 percent female and the gender of 1 percent is unknown.

Gender and nationality of homeless people housed in 2022



31 percent had German citizenship, 69 percent did not. Most were refugees. For almost 5 percent, information on nationality was not available, unclear, or the person was stateless. Female homeless people were significantly more represented among those without German citizenship, at 40 percent, than among the German group (29 percent). The average age of the homeless people housed was 32. Men were slightly older on average at 34 years than women at 29 years. There were also differences by nationality – the average age of housed homeless Germans was 43 years, compared to 28 years for non-Germans, who were often families with children.

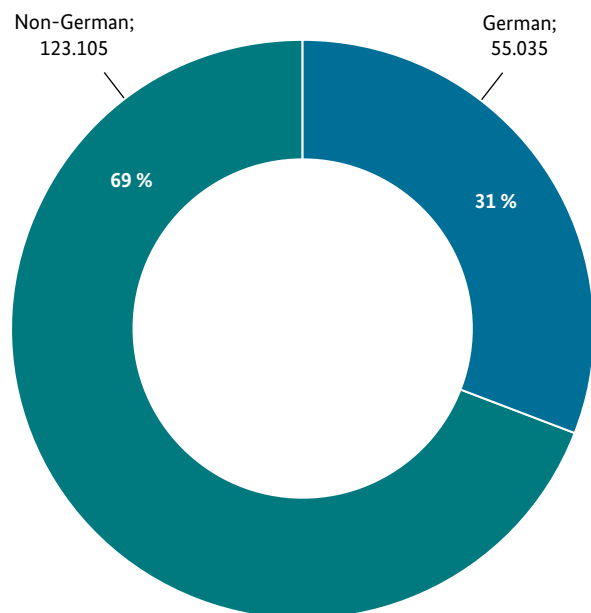


Fig. 1 Source: Federal Statistical Office, own presentation

Age of homeless people housed in 2022

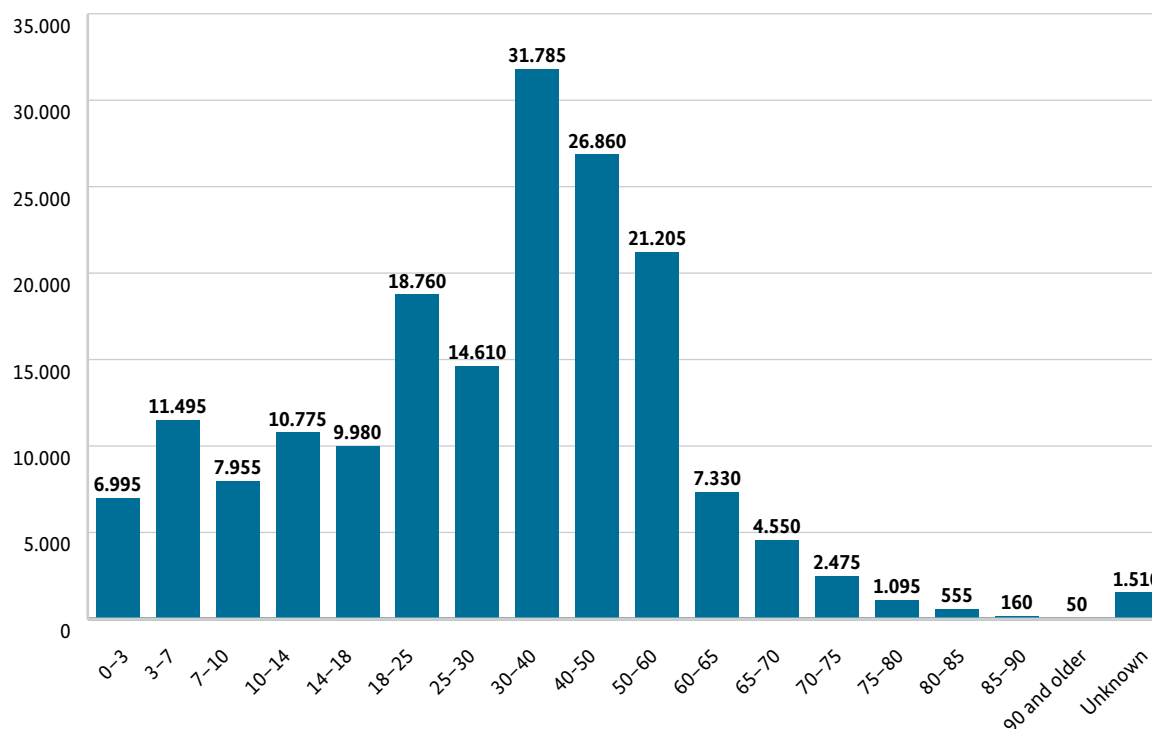
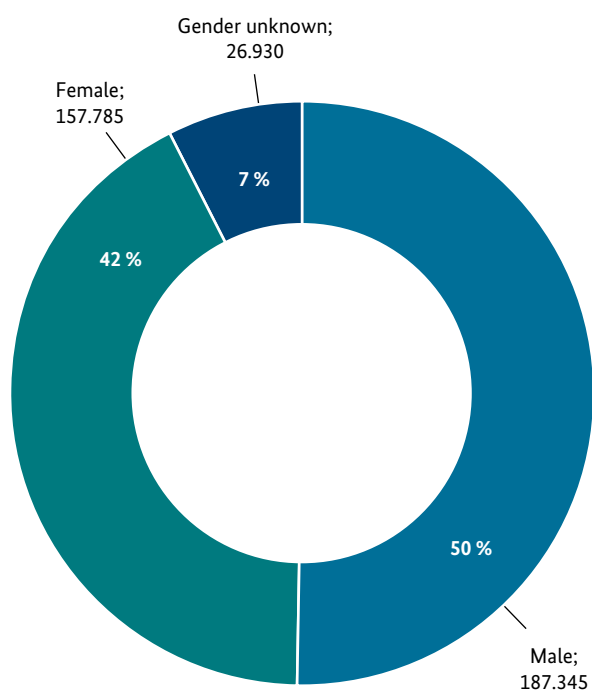


Fig. 2 Source: Federal Statistical Office, own presentation

On 31 January 2023, according to reports from municipalities and institutions in Germany, around 372,000 people, including around 105,500 children and minors, were housed because of homelessness. This means that 28 percent of those housed were minors. Approximately 50 percent of the housed homeless were men and approximately 42 percent were women, compared to 62 percent men and 37 percent women in the previous year. In 7 percent of cases the gender was reported as “unknown”.

Gender and nationality of homeless people housed in 2023



On average, the homeless people housed were 31 years old on the reporting date, slightly younger than in the previous year. More than a third (38 percent) of the housed homeless were under the age of 25 (2022: 37 percent). The percentage of housed homeless aged 65 and over remained unchanged at 5 percent.

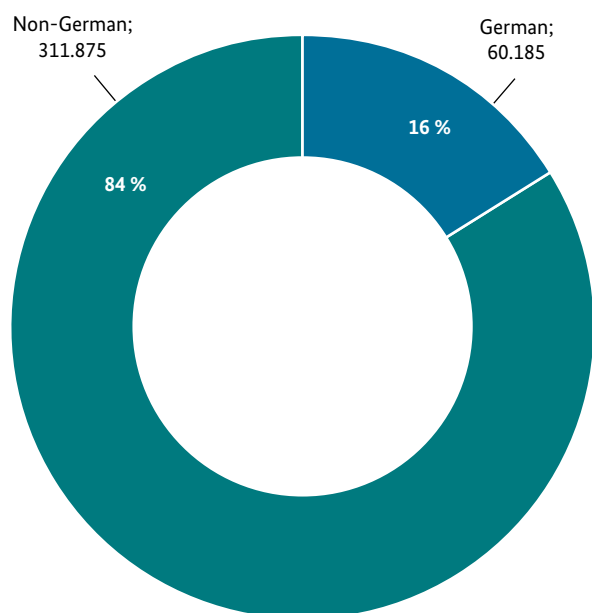


Fig. 3 Source: Federal Statistical Office, own presentation

Age of homeless people housed in 2023

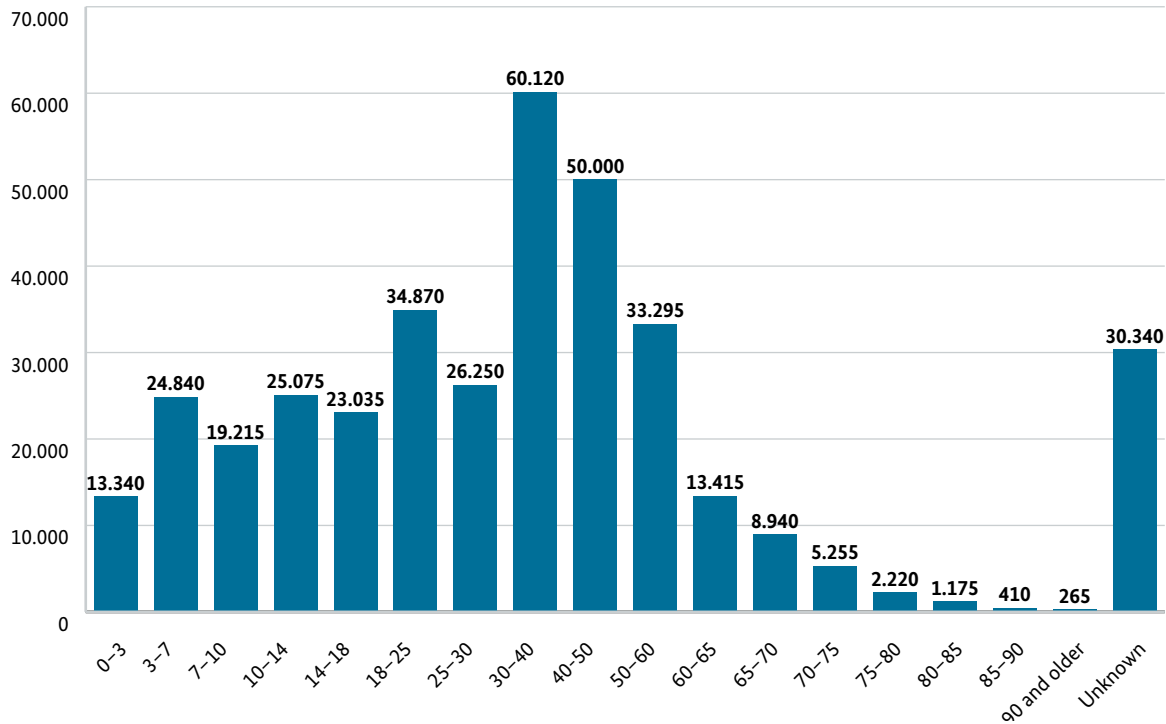


Fig. 4 Source: Federal Statistical Office, own presentation

This means that the total number of homeless people housed has increased significantly compared to the previous year. This increase is partly due to an improvement in data reporting by the participating agencies in the second year of the statistics being compiled. In addition, the number of housed homeless people with a refugee background has continued to increase: In 2023, almost 130,000 refugees from Ukraine who arrived in Germany last year were recorded in the statistics (2022: 305 people). This corresponds to just over a third (35 percent) of all homeless people housed.

Refugees from Ukraine who have been admitted, based on their residency permit, under temporary protection according to § 24 AufenthG (Residence Act) or who have received a corresponding fictitious certificate (certificate of application for a title according to § 24 AufenthG) are to be included in the statistics in the same way as other recognised beneficiaries of protection if they are housed and do not have a tenancy agreement or property. People from Ukraine staying with private persons are not included in the statistics.

Annual comparisons: gender and nationality of homeless people housed

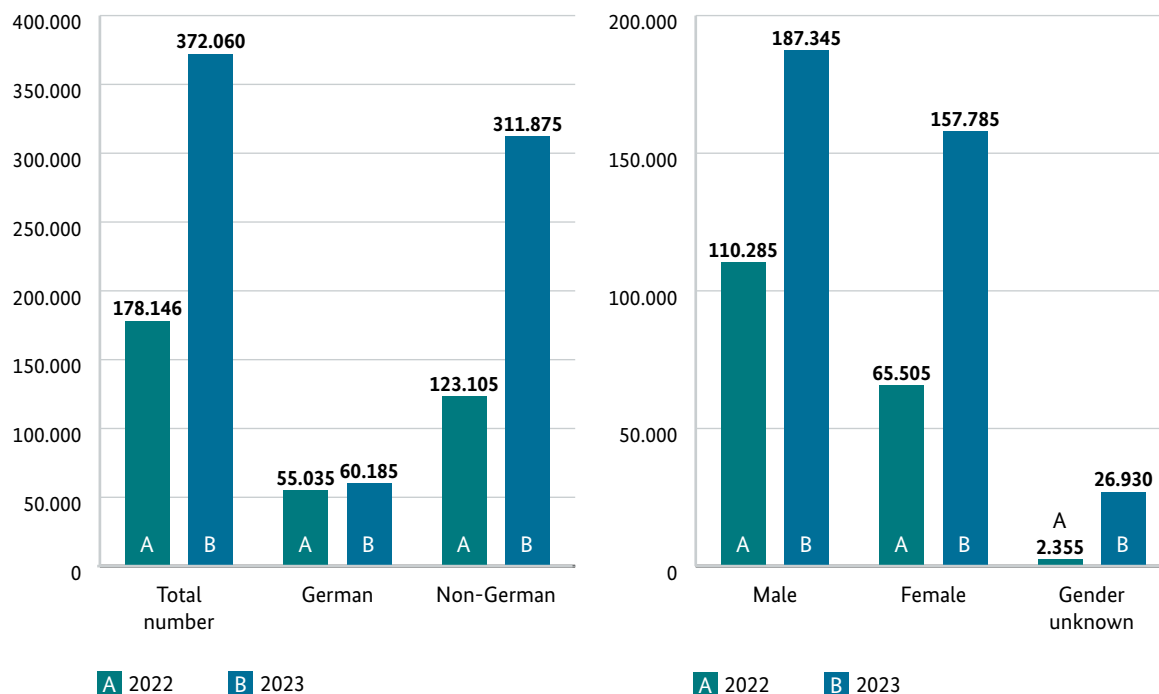


Fig. 5 Source: Federal Statistical Office, own presentation

Homeless people without accommodation and concealed homeless people

The most obvious form of homelessness is homelessness without accommodation. In addition to living on the streets, this also includes long-term or even permanent accommodation in tents or cars, condemned buildings or garages. There are also people who live in concealed homelessness and are therefore much less visible. The concealed homeless do not have their own tenancy agreement and live with relatives, friends or acquaintances. They should also be considered a vulnerable group due to their legal and de facto insecure housing situation and the risk of exploitation and abuse. The Homeless Reporting Act (WoBerichtsG) obliges the federal government to obtain information and analysis on the extent and structure of forms of homelessness,

including for these groups, and to report on this every two years from 2022 onwards. The survey for 2022 is therefore presented below.

The total number of homeless people without housing and living on the street as well as concealed homeless people was estimated to be around 86,700 people during the survey period from 31 January to 7 February 2022. This number consists of around 37,400 people without housing and 49,300 concealed homeless people.

This figure does not include around 6,600 children and minors living on the streets with their parents (around 1,100) or concealed homelessness (around 5,500). Women who lived with their children in women's shelters were also not recorded. This is often because the job centres pay for their housing and they are therefore not

considered homeless. In the 18–24 age group, around 12,500 people are concealed homeless and 3,400 people are living on the street without housing. In the 14–27 age group, there are around 21,000 concealed homeless people and around 6,000 people living on the street without housing. For all these groups of youth and young adults, there is a special obligation to protect them from a human rights perspective and on the basis of child and youth welfare under the Eighth Book of the Social Code (SGB VIII).

The Eighth Book of the Social Code (SGB VIII) offers a wide range of support services. Young adults also have a legal entitlement to help for young adults in accordance with § 41 SGB VIII. Of all adult homeless people without housing and concealed homeless people who provided information on their gender, a total of 68 percent were male and 31 percent female. Just under 1 percent chose “diverse”. Among homeless people living on the street without housing or in temporary housing, 79 percent were men and 19 percent were women. In the second group of concealed homeless, the share of men was 60 percent and the share of women 40 percent. Homeless people without housing were on average 44 years old. The average age of those living in concealed homelessness was significantly lower at 35.

Approximately 28 percent of homeless people and concealed homeless people were not of German nationality (33 percent of homeless people; 24 percent of concealed homeless people). The largest share of non-German homeless people come from EU countries (56 percent in total), almost 20 percent from Asian countries, 13 percent from other European countries and around 10 percent from African countries.

In addition to the housed homeless, the concealed homeless with friends and acquaintances, and the unsheltered homeless living on the street, there are other groups that are considered homeless according to the ETHOS Light typology. These include homeless people in health and psychiatric institutions, prisons, women’s shelters and other shelters, which are not covered by the current survey in accordance with the Homeless Reporting Act (WoBerichtsG).



Causes of homelessness

Housing market conditions

In particular in the tight housing markets of metropolitan areas, homeless people face increased competition for affordable housing from other interested parties. In addition, there is the current difficult situation in the new housing sector due to a shortage of skilled labour and price increases, and the resulting high cost of financing. Under these conditions, it is particularly difficult for homeless people and for the social organisations and agencies that provide services to find suitable accommodation.

Causes of homelessness

In the study for the first Federal Report on Homelessness by the GISS/Kantar Public consortium in 2022, 39 percent of homeless people from both groups (42 percent of concealed homeless people and 35 percent of homeless people without housing) said they have never had their own home in Germany. The main reasons for this are that respondents came to Germany as refugees or, especially among young adults, left their parental home or youth welfare institution.

Around a quarter (23 percent) of both groups of homeless people lost their accommodation solely because of rent arrears, while another quarter (24 percent) cited rent arrears in combination with other reasons. Overall, 47 percent of respondents were affected by rent arrears in some way that contributed to their loss of housing.

In 9 percent of the homeless cases, imprisonment led to the loss of housing. The concealed homeless were particularly affected by imprisonment, with 13 percent losing their home due to imprisonment. Another reason for losing housing was

separation or divorce, where at least one of the parties had to give up their home. This was the case in around 8 percent of cases, with only small differences between the two groups of homeless people. Women reported domestic violence as a cause of homelessness in 7 percent of cases. This category probably also includes the 4 percent of cases in which family or personal reasons caused the loss of housing. These included the death of



family members and also cases in which young people were “thrown out” of their parents’ home. Other reasons for the loss of housing, accounting for 4–5 percent, included inappropriate behaviour, breach of contract and conflicts with neighbours. Less frequently cited reasons included evictions due to personal needs (Eigenbedarfskündigungen), financial difficulties, illness, domestic violence, loss of employment, demolition, renovation or housing problems.

The Documentation System on Homelessness (Dokumentationssystem zur Wohnungslosigkeit, DzW) of the Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft für Wohnungslosenhilfe (BAG W) also collects data on the causes of (pending) homelessness. In the surveys, it distinguishes between the “triggers” at the individual level and “reasons” in the legal sense with regard to the factors that cause homelessness.

The most common triggers are rent arrears and energy debts (19 percent), followed by conflicts in the living environment (17 percent), separation or divorce (16 percent) and relocation (15 percent). Men are more likely than women to lose their home due to imprisonment (9 percent compared to 2 percent) and job loss or change (5 percent compared to 3 percent). Women are more likely than men to report violence by a partner (7 percent compared to 0.5 percent).

In terms of reasons, more than half (53 percent) of all people documented stated that they had lost their housing due to termination by the landlord, eviction or forced eviction. Eviction was cited by 15 percent of people as the reason for losing their housing. Of these, 65 percent of all people stated that the eviction was due to rent arrears, 7 percent due to personal use (Eigenbedarf) and 26 percent due to other problems. A large number of people either terminated their tenancy themselves (17 percent) or moved out without terminating the tenancy (26 percent). Many people face the threat of losing their home due to termination, for example, when rent payments appear to be unaffordable.



Special needs groups

Young homeless people

Due to their specific circumstances, young people are particularly affected by housing shortages and homelessness.

Young people, especially those growing up and living in vulnerable situations or still in qualification and vocational training phases, need their own safe and affordable housing in order to meet the educational requirements and transitions to work that are demanded of them at this stage of life. Previous strategies to tackle homelessness have paid too little attention to these groups.

The causes of youth homelessness are many and complex. Homelessness is often triggered by family breakdown and changes in personal circumstances, such as separation from a partner.

In order to prevent youth homelessness, no young person should become homeless or vulnerable to homelessness during the transition from child and youth services or family life to independence, or between qualification and training phases, or become dependent on homelessness assistance.

Young people are also particularly affected by the inadequate supply of affordable housing.

Existing support services have not adequately reached young homeless people to date. On average, it takes up to two years for young homeless people to enter the support system. There is a need for more support services tailored to the needs of young homeless people, such as specialised services with overnight accommodation for the target group. Youth social work services are needed to build trust and lead to further support services.

Services that follow the Housing First approach, which prioritises the provision of safe housing, have only been sporadically implemented for young people. These Housing First projects could provide an alternative, particularly for young homeless people who are not successfully reached by other youth housing services.

The specific needs of young women must also be taken into account when designing support services. Young women often flee into concealed homelessness and avoid homelessness and emergency accommodations because of the risk of assault (see also remarks in the section on homeless women below).

Homeless women

The situations of women and men with emergency housing needs differ in terms of appearance, life situations (including the importance of partnership and children, work and skills), and support needs and desires. Many homeless women try to hide their homelessness and join forced communities to avoid living without shelter. Gender-specific experiences of violence in the family of origin, in partnerships, in shelters for the homeless and in public spaces shape the daily lives of many homeless women. More than one in three homeless women have been sexually assaulted and/or raped since becoming homeless, and this is true of one in two women without housing. As a result, women in situations with emergency housing needs avoid the often male-dominated, mixed-sex shelters for the homeless. At the same time, specific services for women affected by violence (such as women's shelters) are often difficult to access.

In particular, older women over 50 who have lived on the streets for a long time without housing face multiple barriers such as chronic illness, addiction and/or mental illness.

The situation of homeless women of non-German nationality, especially from Eastern and South-eastern European EU countries, has been a challenge for more than ten years. Access to adequate housing and the German support system is often difficult for the entire migrant group, but women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Gender-specific services in emergency housing assistance, including gender-sensitive health care and prevention, are therefore of great importance and must be expanded accordingly.



Situation of homeless people with (family) migration background, especially non-German EU citizens

People with a (family) migration background are more likely to have precarious (sub)tenancy agreements, to experience racial exclusion in their search for housing and be in conflicts with neighbours, and to receive less support in the face of pending homelessness. Information and counselling services are less well known to them than to people without a (family) migration background and are often not sufficiently available in several languages.

For non-German EU citizens who enter the country to take up a specific job on the German labour market, accommodation is linked to employment in some case groups. This is the case for seasonal work and in sectors such as meat processing or construction. When the employment ends, voluntarily or involuntarily, the accommodation also ends. If workers remain in Germany after the end of their employment, this often leads to homelessness or vagrancy.

According to research for the Federal Report on Homelessness, 16 percent of homeless non-Germans from EU countries surveyed were Polish and 13 percent Romanian; together with Bulgarian homeless people (5 percent), they made up 34 percent. People of Eastern and South-eastern European nationality without housing often live in particularly precarious conditions and are predominantly homeless. Studies such as those by the Documentation Office on Anti-Romani Sentiment (Dosta) also show that many Roma, or people perceived as such, are often denied access to the housing market.

The research for the first Report on Homelessness in 2022 also indicates that some people from Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Latvia are denied access to emergency accommodation due to lack of entitlement and/or valid identification documents. Legally, a distinction must be made between entitlements to social benefits and the legal duty of municipal authorities to “prevent danger” in the face of imminent homelessness.

Specific challenges

In addition to the housing market challenges to overcome homelessness, homeless people face difficulties in other areas of life that need to be addressed.

Health care for homeless people

The health status of homeless people, especially those who live on the street, is often poor. In particular, those living unsheltered on the streets, in emergency shelters, temporary accommodation, precarious shared housing or under threat of tenancy face severe health burdens. Homeless people also have significantly higher rates of mental illness. As homeless women are often victims of violence, there is likely to be a high incidence of untreated trauma-related mental illness and re-traumatisation through new experiences of violence. Poor general health can be both a cause and a consequence of homelessness.

Lack of or unclear health insurance coverage is a common barrier to accessing health services. Clarifying health insurance status is time-consuming and difficult in practice. Homeless people also often have great difficulty in finding a general practitioner, leading to increased use of emergency and acute care structures or the establishment of specialised care services by charitable organisations (e.g. barrier-reducing outreach structures). In some cases, even if they have health insurance, homeless people do not use regular medical services because of shame, fear of language problems or logistical reasons.

In addition, homeless people are comparatively poorly reached by the usual tools (media, alert apps) or the health system for health-threatening and sometimes life-threatening events such as extreme weather and heat exposure. This is especially true for heat exposure, which is particularly high in urban areas where homeless people are, and is occurring more frequently and for longer periods due to climate change.



Municipal regulated housing

In addition to the individual entitlement to benefits to overcome social difficulties according to §§ 67 et seq. SGB XII, the municipal obligation to provide housing for the involuntarily homeless (a measure of risk prevention) on the basis of police and regulatory laws is unique in international comparison. Due to the fundamental priority of social preventive measures, the regulatory authorities act as a last resort when the measures adopted by social authorities have failed or are inappropriate in individual cases.

If, after social preventive measures have been exhausted, further regulatory measures are necessary to avert threats to public safety caused by homelessness, the competent regulatory authorities will initiate regulatory measures to prevent involuntary homelessness.

Despite the nationwide obligation of municipalities, there are cases where access to shelters for so-called non-local homeless people is difficult or limited to a few days. In addition, people experiencing acute homelessness often choose not to seek temporary emergency accommodations. In the Federal Report on Homelessness, 27 percent of unsheltered people and 49 percent of concealed homeless people said they had never used emergency shelters.

There are many reasons for this: there are too many people in a confined space; there is no privacy; and homeless people are vulnerable to violence and theft. In addition, temporary housing often lacks services specifically designed for women or for people with pets seeking assistance. Mixed-sex shelters should have violence prevention policies to prevent and protect against gender-based or transgender violence. Accessible shelters are also needed, but in many places they cannot be provided adequately.

National recommendations on the structural design and minimum furnishing of shelters under regulatory law could be useful. At present, the construction and furnishing of shelters provided by municipalities in an individual case vary. These are emergency shelters designed to prevent acute homelessness as a threat to public safety. They are intended to provide temporary shelter for homeless people while they wait for more permanent housing. The 2022 Federal Report on Homelessness shows that of all housed homeless people, 46 percent had been in their current accommodation for at least two years, and only 10 percent for less than eight weeks.

Violence against homeless people

Violence against homeless people is a common problem in our society. Violence ranges from insults and coercion to theft and robbery, assault, manslaughter and murder. The violence is mainly perpetrated by male perpetrators from different social backgrounds, including perpetrators who are themselves homeless. Right-wing extremist violence against homeless people is also an ongoing phenomenon. There is probably an unknown amount of violence, as homeless people rarely report crimes against themselves for various reasons.

Homeless men and women are victims of different forms of violence and are not equally exposed to the risks of violence. Homeless women are significantly more likely than men to be victims of sexualised violence. There is probably an unknown amount of violence against homeless women, as they try not to be identified as homeless and often live in concealed homelessness. Even in concealed homelessness, they often experience violent dependency relationships.

Digital inclusion of homeless people

Access to digital devices and platforms is a prerequisite for participation in society as a whole, given the increasing digitalisation of all aspects of life. Homeless people are severely limited in their ability to participate digitally because they do not have their own fixed internet connection or mobile phone contract, cannot afford expensive devices and maintenance costs due to financial constraints, and regularly have no easy way to recharge mobile devices. The technology is also vulnerable to weather and temperature.

This is often compounded by barriers to opening a bank account, the need to provide identification to register a SIM card, and high account maintenance fees. As a result, processes such as making an appointment with a government office, buying a train ticket online, online banking, or searching for housing ads online are often fraught with hurdles or simply not possible. In addition, using the internet often requires free Wi-Fi access, which is not available everywhere. This means that homeless people often have to deal with private matters in public places.

Homelessness: a complex challenge

As varied as the reasons for losing one's home are, so too is the situation for people who have become homeless. In order to make the necessary changes, many areas need to be addressed in order to tackle homelessness effectively and give affected people new prospects.

Guidelines for overcoming homelessness in Germany

The federal government, federal states, municipalities and all other participants in this National Action Plan confirm their commitment to further develop and strengthen existing measures to combat homelessness and to develop new measures to overcome homelessness in Germany by 2030, in dialogue and within the framework of their respective responsibilities and competencies.

Different approaches are needed to end homelessness. Many approaches have already proved effective locally, but there is a need to spread these successful approaches more widely. More good ideas need to be continually developed and tested. Assistance systems need to be regularly reviewed to ensure that they are still appropriate to changing professional, legal or spatial conditions and that they are adequately addressing the diverse needs and problems of changing target groups with appropriate services. The agreement on common guidelines within the framework of a National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness must adequately take into account this diversity of starting points and challenges and also the procedural idea of joint action.

In implementing this National Action Plan, we therefore adhere to the following guidelines:

Substantive guidelines for the prevention of homelessness

1. All participants will work together within their areas of responsibility to ensure that by 2030 every homeless person and person at risk of homelessness has an adequate housing offer that enables them to use housing as the basis for a self-determined life in dignity. They work together towards this goal and contribute to the prevention of homelessness, the creation, acquisition and brokerage of affordable housing, and the fulfilment of legal rights to assistance. It is the task of the public authorities to actively ensure the realisation of the legal rights of those entitled.

2. Homelessness shall be prevented as far as possible through co-ordinated preventive measures. All public authorities shall work towards a nationwide system of assistance and support, providing people in housing emergencies with individual and tailor-made services in multiple languages and with sensitivity to diversity. These services are based on the living situation and social environment of homeless people. Through targeted public relations work involving people with current or past experience of homelessness, people at risk of homelessness are informed about existing support and counselling services (including advice on rent arrears). In addition, they are provided with easily understandable and multilingual information material.
3. If homelessness cannot be prevented, the legal right to statutory housing applies. Efforts are made to ensure minimum human rights standards and the shortest possible stay in all accommodations. Access to municipal (emergency) accommodations under regulatory law is granted to homeless EU citizens under the same conditions as to Germans. To ensure this, staff in the relevant offices and authorities are trained to be critical of racism and discrimination. The different needs of people in housing emergencies are taken into account. In addition, easy-to-understand and multilingual information material and guidelines for possible claims are provided. Cooperation at the interfaces between housing under regulatory law and assistance according to §§ 67 et seq. SGB XII.
4. For homeless people whose insurance status is unclear, access to health insurance and health care will be reviewed and clarified in the interests of those affected. At the same time, information and protection of homeless people from health risks related to heat and other extreme climatic effects will be improved.
5. Through targeted public relations and education work, society in Germany is being sensitised to the challenges faced by people in housing emergencies. We include people with experience being homeless here. This helps to combat discrimination against homeless people, who are often also discriminated against on the grounds of ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual identity, and thus contributes to greater social participation.
6. In addition to the existing analogue services, homeless people are placed in the position to make use of the digital administrative services of the public sector and to carry out everyday tasks online. Possible barriers to employment can also be removed. To this end, the technical prerequisites are created and skills and support are provided.

Procedural guidelines

7. As part of this National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness, cooperation, networking and knowledge exchange between the participants is facilitated and strengthened through appropriate platforms. Concrete recommendations, measures and offers provide nationwide ideas for overcoming homelessness. The focus is on cooperation at the interfaces between the parties involved.
8. Transparency is created through existing and additional data collection, analyses, surveys and scientific studies. All participants are working to take action to prevent and overcome homelessness, based on evidence and driven by the needs of those affected.
9. There will be clear lines of responsibility for working together and for following up jointly agreed targets and actions. The goals set and the measures agreed upon will be published regularly.

The 2022 Federal Report on Homelessness and future reports are an important basis for evidence-based work and joint efforts to overcome homelessness. In addition, the federal government and the federal states have also addressed the prevention and ending of homelessness in other areas of action in recent years.

In particular, the package of measures for a construction, investment and innovation offensive of the “Alliance for Affordable Housing” highlights the need for targeted instruments to support homeless people with particularly high needs and access problems in returning to the housing market. Further indications and plans to prevent and overcome homelessness can be found in the federal government’s youth strategy, the decision on a joint refugee policy of the federal government and the federal states, and the 6th Federal Poverty and Wealth Report. The National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness is based on these existing references and incorporates them into the process.

The measures listed in the National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness and the resulting measures and administrative expenses are without prejudice to current or future budget negotiations or the budgets of the social service providers. The federal government can only finance the financial and human resources requirements arising from the measures mentioned and related to them if it has the legislative and administrative competence to do so. They must also be covered by the individual plans concerned within the framework of the current budget allocations and the staffing plan when the respective federal budget is drawn up.



Approach and working methods

The process of drawing up the Action Plan

Based on the above guidelines, the National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness is developed and implemented in voluntary cooperation between the involved state and non-state stakeholders. The aim is to end homelessness by 2030. The focus of the National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness is on people in housing emergencies in Germany according to the European ETHOS Light Typology (European Typology of Homelessness).¹ The guidelines and impulse measures of the Action Plan are intended to make the existing activities of the federal government, federal states and municipalities visible, to supplement them where necessary and to increase the effectiveness of housing provision for homeless people in order to overcome homelessness.

Within the federal government, the Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Construction (BMWSB) has taken the lead for the overall process. The Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), the Federal Ministry of Justice (BMJ), the Federal Ministry of Health (BMG), the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) and the Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, Integration and Anti-Racism are also involved.

On the state level, both the Conference of Ministers of Building (BMK) and the Conference of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs (ASMK) as well as individual states have directly contributed to the development of the National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness. The German Association of Cities and Towns, the German Association of Counties and the German Association of Towns and Municipalities have also been involved.



¹ <https://www.feantsa.org/download/fea-002-18-update-ethos-light-0032417441788687419154.pdf>

In order to support the National Action Plan in an advisory capacity, a group of state secretaries from the federal ministries involved was set up in the spring of 2023. Furthermore, a steering committee was set up in an advisory capacity. In addition to the above-mentioned participants, the following stakeholders are also members:

- Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V.
- Bundesverband deutscher Wohnungs- und Immobilienunternehmen e.V. (on behalf of the associations of the housing and property industry BFW, Haus & Grund, ZIA)
- Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege (represented by the Arbeiterwohlfahrt Bundesverband e.V.)
- Deutscher Mieterbund e.V.
- Gesellschaft für innovative Sozialforschung und Sozialplanung e.V.
- Selbstvertretung wohnungsloser Menschen e.V.

Key points of the guidelines for the National Action Plan were developed at a two-day future conference on 19 and 20 June 2023, with around 70 participants representing the various institutions that contribute to overcoming homelessness. Over the two days of the conference, the participants developed a joint analysis of the problem and discussed initial approaches, which formed the basis for the guidelines of the National Action Plan. Further consultations were held with the self-representation of homeless people, academics and representatives of foundations involved in the fight against homelessness.

The Steering Committee for the National Action Plan was also involved through several committee meetings and the opportunity to comment on the drafts of this National Action Plan. The consultation of non-governmental stakeholders was completed in January 2024. After a coordina-

tion phase with the other federal ministries, the document was presented to the Federal Cabinet in April 2024.

Implementation of the National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness

As a common framework for the implementation of the National Action Plan, the federal government will establish a National Forum on Homelessness. In addition to the federal government, federal states and the municipal umbrella organisations, other institutions interested in participating in the National Forum will work together and continuously on the implementation of the National Action Plan on the basis of voluntary cooperation. The already established group of state secretaries from the participating federal ministries and the steering committee will continue to help shape the National Forum and advise on the implementation of the National Action Plan.

At federal level, the first step will be to establish a competence centre for the prevention of homelessness at the Federal Institute for Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR). The aim is to establish a federal institution against homelessness in the medium term which, in addition to providing specialist advice and support to federal departments, will be a place where information and knowledge are built up and shared, where investments in affordable, climate-friendly housing for homeless people are modelled and where their support is facilitated through networked cooperation with local institutions.

The Steering Committee of the National Forum on Homelessness will, from 2024, advise on annual programmes derived from the guidelines of the National Action Plan to Tackle Homelessness and the contributions of the stakeholders

involved, report regularly to the federal government on their implementation and make recommendations for implementation to the federal government, federal states, municipalities, the business community and civil society. These recommendations will be published on a National Knowledge Platform on Preventing and Overcoming Homelessness. The National Knowledge Platform will also serve the purpose of making nationwide good practices available to interested municipalities, landlords and emergency housing services.

The National Forum on Homelessness will be coordinated by the Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Construction (BMWSB), supported by the Competence Centre on Prevention of Homelessness and the steering committee, and will be organised in specialised working groups, in which state and non-state stakeholders will be fully involved and contribute their expertise on the prevention of homelessness, the fight against acute homelessness and the securing of permanent housing to overcome homelessness.

At the beginning of the implementation process, in the first half of 2024, three specialised working groups will be established:

- Specialist working group on the prevention of homelessness
- Specialist working group on housing supply
- Specialist working group on assistance, assistance systems and emergency care

The specialist working groups take up the guidelines of the National Action Plan, the impulse measures and the annual objectives and measures set out in the annual work programme, discuss them and implement them in part, for example, by drawing up recommendations. To this end, the specialist working groups will examine specific topics in greater depth in workshops, specialist

events or working groups, conduct specialist dialogues with other experts or obtain written expert opinions. In addition, opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning and innovation will be created.

Once a year, an annual congress on the National Action Plan will be held, where the annual programme will be presented to the public and the professional community, and the specialist working groups will present their results to the public. On the fringes of the annual congress, a meeting of those stakeholders involved in the steering committee will take place at management level. This is accompanied by regular, nationwide public awareness-raising measures to draw attention to the situation of homeless people and to promote support for people among the population, public authorities and businesses.

Data collection and research

Evidence-based action by stakeholders is only possible if the relevant data are available. In 2020, the federal government therefore created the basis for nationwide reporting on the extent and structure of homelessness in Germany with the Homelessness Reporting Act and published a Report on Homelessness for the first time in 2022. A research contract was again awarded as the basis for the 2024 Report on Homelessness. Like the report for 2022, it is to contain an empirically based estimate of the extent of homelessness for the entire federal territory and analyses of its basic socio-demographic structure. The special situation of homeless immigrants, in particular Eastern Europeans and refugees, is a key focus of the programme.

Young people who are often disadvantaged compared to their peers are those who cannot grow up with their family of origin, but have to live in a foster family or in a housing facility of the

child and youth services as part of assistance provided by the child and youth welfare services. When they reach the age of majority, they only receive further assistance from child and youth welfare services under certain conditions and for a limited period of time. These young adults are called care leavers. In order to gain insights into the sustainability of child and youth services and possible needs for further development, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) is funding the Care Leaver Statistics Study (2021–2030), which uses a longitudinal study to investigate the social participation of care leavers over the course of life. Among other things, the forms of housing of the study participants are also surveyed.

The federal government's studies are supplemented by further expert reports that provide insights into the situation and number of homeless people. Various countries have commissioned their own country-specific studies. Among other things, the state of Berlin currently commissioned a target group-specific study on homelessness among LGBTIQ+ people in Berlin. Since 2011, the Central Counselling Centre of Lower Saxony has been evaluating the documentation for various Lower Saxony assistance services in accordance with §§ 67 et seq. SGB XII in annual statistical reports on behalf of the state of Lower Saxony. In addition, there are regular local key date surveys to provide an indication of the number of homeless people in Lower Saxony.

The homelessness documentation system of the Federal Working Group for Homeless Assistance has used annual standardised nationwide client data surveys since 1989 to collect personal offers of assistance from the non-governmental emergency housing assistance and thus enables differentiated statements to be made about the life situations of the clients who make use of such assistance.

In addition, a large number of evaluations and studies are available that can be used for the work of the National Forum. In the coming years, the federal government will continue to prepare the Report on Homelessness and carry out departmental research activities in this context.

Transparent action

The implementation status of the measures is regularly discussed at the steering committee meetings, which take place three times a year. Reviewing and updating the targets during the year thus promotes constant adaptation to new findings and changing conditions. At the annual congress, the annual programmes and results from previous years are presented to the public.

Action by stakeholders

Many obstacles that still hinder better prevention and successful housing provision today have already been identified, and there are numerous starting points for individual measures and packages of measures that now need to be put together quickly in order to implement the guidelines and achieve the goal of the National Action Plan.

Overcoming homelessness is only possible if homeless people can (re)enter the housing market and be provided with permanent housing (Guideline 1). All reasonable and proportionate measures from building housing to the individual acquisition of a home in individual cases will have to contribute to this. The federal government, federal states and municipalities will examine whether the provisions of their housing subsidy programmes take sufficient account of the target group of homeless people. Stakeholders from emergency housing assistance organisations that create or procure housing for homeless households need support. New instruments for the sustainable provision of housing beyond new building must be developed in the coming years. Because the housing supply must also include groups that are particularly difficult to care for, Housing First and other housing-led services for people with complex problems will be part of this. In addition, it is important to develop and implement measures to prevent discrimination on the housing market.

An important component of the local assistance and support systems (Guideline 2) consists of specialised prevention centres such as municipal offices for the prevention of homelessness, which have been in place in many municipalities for years. The preventive work of the job centres and social welfare offices is helpful here. Creating such preventative structures in both cities and rural areas will be an important task for the coming years. Due to the increasing share of homeless people with a refugee background or from the European Union, this must also include closer cooperation with existing counselling and support structures for these target groups. Neighbourhood management can offer points of contact in the funding areas of the federal and state urban development programme “Social cohesion” (“Sozialer Zusammenhalt”). In addition to the established federal programme Education, Economy, Work in the Neighbourhood (co-financed with funds from the European Social Fund), measures are implemented here to lead people at risk of poverty, such as the long-term unemployed, low-skilled workers or immigrants, into sustainable employment. To prevent homelessness due to short-term imprisonment, the social welfare offices or job centres and in particular the Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft für Straffälligenhilfe e. V. (Federal Association for the Assistance of Offenders) provide information. In addition, it must be ensured, if at all possible, that people released from facilities such as prisons or hospitals do not become homeless. Youth welfare providers are made aware of the need to avoid homelessness following a youth welfare measure.

In too many cases, rent arrears lead to the loss of a home. Measures such as the housing benefit or the recognition of expenses for accommodation and heating in the minimum security systems are measures for early prevention. Landlords interested in continuing a tenancy at risk should be given the opportunity to actively involve the prevention centres in the cities and municipalities or at the welfare associations in accordance with data protection regulations. If the tenancy is at risk, it should be examined how the involvement of prevention centres can be achieved in accordance with data protection regulations. In addition, language barriers must not be a barrier to obtaining housing, and homelessness must be avoided as far as possible in the event of rent arrears. However, tenants must also be aware of their responsibility to minimise rent arrears they have caused. Tenants with rent arrears should be enabled – with the support of the prevention centres – to initially compensate for the damage themselves. However, if the conditions are met, rent arrears can be taken over by government agencies within the existing legal framework in order to secure accommodation.

Regulatory accommodation (Guideline 3) is primarily concerned with the protection of life and limb. However, this is also where the course is set for rapid re-integration into normal living space. So that the stay is as short as possible and the emergency accommodation for those affected does not turn out to be the “end of the line”, the municipalities will work together with their partners at local level to ensure that the people accommodated are offered further support services that promote integration. It is also important to find ways to improve the privacy of people in emergency accommodation. In addition, this requires close cooperation with the providers in accordance with §§ 67 et seq. SGB XII. For the people affected, making use of emergency accommodation should be associated

with the concrete hope of receiving support to overcome their situation.

Uncertainty about existing health insurance coverage and health insurance debt can be significant barriers to accessing health care for homeless people. To improve their access to the regular health care system (Guideline 4), barriers should be removed as quickly as possible. Existing clearinghouses to explain benefits or claims will continue to play an important role. There is also a need to improve cooperation between homelessness, health care and nursing care systems to support homeless people in need of care. In addition, efforts by federal states, municipalities and other stakeholders to close gaps in care should be strengthened and expanded.

How to address the double discrimination of homeless people on the basis of their ethnic origin or nationality (Guideline 5) is to be discussed between the federal and state governments. Civil society stakeholders and support systems will participate.

The first important step towards digital inclusion for homeless people (Guideline 6) is the rapid expansion of free public Wi-Fi, both in shelters under regulatory law and in emergency shelter facilities and services. Emergency shelter services and facilities will be encouraged and empowered to provide information through social media and possibly digital counselling services to those in need who have not been reached or have not been adequately reached by support services.

Independently of the planned annual work programmes, the following federal measures will be agreed upon as first steps in the National Action Plan to provide the necessary impetus to address and overcome the causes of homelessness.

Cons. no.	Measure	Guideline	To be by
1	Federal financial assistance for social housing construction (In the current financial planning, it is envisaged that the federal government provides the states for the social housing construction in the period from 2022 to 2027 with a total of 18.15 billion euros in programme funds.)	Housing supply	BMWSB
2	Housing benefit for low-income households to reduce the housing cost burden	Prevention	BMWSB
3	ESF Plus programme “EhAP Plus – Inclusion helps to combat exclusion of the most disadvantaged people” to support the most disadvantaged people in Germany. Of the 74 current projects, 43 explicitly target the homeless and those at risk of homelessness and their children. Additional projects are scheduled to begin in December 2024.	Prevention	BMAS
4	ESF Plus programme “STRENGTHEN YOUTH: Bridges to independence” (2022-2027): socio-educational support for young people aged 14–26 in vulnerable situations, such as homelessness.	Housing supply Prevention	BMFSFJ
5	Improving the framework conditions for new housing construction	Housing supply	BMWSB/„Bündnis bezahlbarer Wohnraum“
6	Development of recommendations on standards for accommodation in emergency shelters	Acute accommodation	BMWSB
7	Examination of access to health insurance and care for people with unresolved insurance status, such as the homeless in particular homeless people, for clarification in the interests of the affected persons	Health care	BMG

Cons. no.	Measure	Guideline	To be by
8	Support for pilot projects for the integration of EU citizens into the German labour market	Prevention	BMAS
9	Clarification of the practical relevance and legal framework conditions of a disclosure of information in the event of imminent loss of tenants to public and non-profit counselling centres for the avoidance of termination due to behaviour in breach of contract within the framework of the platform of the federal government, GovLabDE and, if required, preparation of recommendations for the improvement of the legal framework conditions	Prevention	BMWSB, BMI
10	Development of a national knowledge platform on the topic of overcoming homelessness	Knowledge sharing and networking	BMWSB
11	Preparation of an expertise on possibilities and strategies for activating living space for refugees	Housing supply	Integration Officer at Federal Chancellor's Office
12	Promotion of the "Housing instead of accommodation" (Wohnen statt Unterbringung) project by Tür an Tür e.V.: contact points will be established in Augsburg, Dresden, Berlin and Lübeck for diversity-sensitive housing referrals and mobile counselling and prevention.	Housing supply	Integration Officer at Federal Chancellor's Office
13	Implementation of a round table "Fair Access to Housing in an Immigration Society"	Housing supply	Integration Officer at Federal Chancellor's Office

Cons. no.	Measure	Guideline	To be by
14	Efforts by the federal states to optimise the application of aid in accordance with §§ 67 et seq. SGB XII (Aid for Special Life Situations) to overcome homelessness, in particular the “Housing First” approaches, are supported and promoted by the federal government.	Prevention	BMAS
15	Implementation in the coalition agreement of the agreed tenancy law measures (in particular extension of the rent brake)	Prevention	BMJ
16	Check whether the maximum amount for the business balance of the member in § 67 c of the Cooperatives Act (currently 2,000 euros) is still sufficient to protect members of housing cooperatives in the event of private insolvency from the loss of the owner-occupied cooperative housing	Prevention	BMJ
17	Raising awareness among child and youth welfare services to implement the Child and Youth Strengthening Act (Kinder- und Jugendstärkungsgesetz) introduced in Book VIII of the Social Code (SGB VIII) on transitional support and aftercare for young people, also with a view to the housing situation of care leavers	Prevention	BMFSFJ
18	Training of counselling centres (in collaboration with BEMA Berlin) on the topic: EU workers: working without a registered address	Prevention	Integration Officer at Federal Chancellor's Office

Cons. no.	Measure	Guideline	To be by
19	EhAP Plus - Individual objective 3 “Raising awareness and (intercultural) education especially for employees of public administrations institutions of the regular support system, as well as local social work providers dealing with the living situations and needs of the target groups and the topics of anti-Romani sentiment and anti-discrimination”	Prevention Education	BMAS
20	As part of the ESF Plus programme EhAP Plus is a pilot project for low-threshold information and counselling in social media . In this way, homeless people and those at risk of homelessness who are not reached by local projects can be reached nationwide. Efforts will also be made to combat misinformation, prejudice, anti-Romani sentiment and hate comments on social and digital media.	Prevention Education	BMAS
21	The federal government supports the standardised uniform application of the provisions for the social support of foreign nationals (§ 23 para. 3 and 3a SGB XII).	Acute accommodation	BMAS
22	The federal government is in favour of a larger announcement of the technical instructions on the benefits of citizen’s allowance (§ 7 SGB II) for a standardised interpretation of the eligibility requirements.	Prevention	BMAS
23	Improving education and the protection of homeless people from heat-related health risks through recommendations for action	Health care	BMG

Cons. no.	Measure	Guideline	To be by
24	Expansion of the media offers of police crime prevention for more respect and civil courage with respect to homeless people in order to prevent violence against this group of people	Education	BMI
25	Application of topics relevant to EU citizens (work without a registered address for EU-AN, health care, registration and deregistration, labour protection, accommodation costs) via visuals in social media (Facebook) via the project CADS (Community Advisors Digital Streetwork) funded by the Integration Officer	Education	Integration Officer at Federal Chancellor's Office
26	Development of recommendations for action and working materials in the area of homelessness of EU-AN	Education	Integration Officer at Federal Chancellor's Office
27	Promotion and deepening of international cooperation at EU level (EPOCH) and beyond	Knowledge sharing and networking	BMWSB
28	Establishment of cross-stakeholder specialist working groups on the topics of housing, prevention and assistance, assistance system and emergency care	Knowledge sharing and networking	BMWSB
29	Development of a departmental research programme on the topic of homelessness	Data collection	BMWSB
30	Preparation of a study on outward migration of EU citizens from Germany, among others, with the thematic focus on accommodation and access to housing	Data collection	Integration Officer at Federal Chancellor's Office
31	Realisation of a dashboard for the presentation of the National Action Plan on the Internet	Tracking	BMWSB

The 142nd Conference of Ministers of Building in Baden-Baden in November 2023 decided to support the National Action Plan on Homelessness. The Conference of Ministers of Building noted that homeless people are among the target groups of social housing subsidies in the context of the social housing subsidies laws and programmes of the states. States are working with investors and stakeholders who want to use social housing subsidies for projects to meet the housing needs of the homeless.

The 100th Conference of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs welcomed the development of the National Action Plan on Homelessness in Berlin in December 2023. The Ministers and Senators of Labour and Social Affairs of the States have adopted the Lisbon Conference's goal of ending homelessness by 2030, and that new approaches to solutions are needed in addition to the proven tools of emergency housing assistance.

In recent years, the federal states have also initiated or are in the process of developing measures and state programmes for their respective states. The following overview of ongoing state activities illustrates this.

Baden-Württemberg

The State Association of Public and Charitable Welfare in Baden-Württemberg, with the participation of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health and Integration, is developing a statewide professional concept for the further development of emergency housing assistance in the state. This will provide districts with guidance and recommendations for a variety of specific needs.

From the beginning of 2023 until the end of 2024, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Health and



Integration of the State of Baden-Württemberg will support a total of 21 projects in the state that contribute to the prevention of family homelessness or support families in the good and healthy upbringing of their children and in overcoming family homelessness with the help of targeted, low-threshold and sustainable measures. From the end of 2021 to the beginning of 2023, 18 projects have been successfully funded by the state and may be continued in subsequent funding.

From 2024 to 2026, the Housing First approach will be tested in pilot projects in Baden-Württemberg. The project is funded in cooperation with the Vector Foundation. The goal is to place people who are chronically homeless and have complex problems into permanent tenancies and to continue to provide them with assistance. The pilot projects will be integrated into an overall municipal approach to overcoming homelessness.

Bavaria

In Bavaria, homeless households or those at risk of homelessness have access to subsidised housing as long as they meet the other criteria. Existing or imminent homelessness is given special consideration in assessing the urgency of housing allocations. In addition, housing projects have been implemented in the past specifically for this group of residents and supported by existing housing subsidy programmes.

The Bavarian state government also established the Bavarian Homeless Aid Foundation in 2019. The focus is on targeted support for pioneering and innovative projects supported by seed funding. In addition, the Bavarian state government's "Help for the Homeless" action plan supports pilot projects that provide start-up funding, usually for a maximum of two years, to improve the care



of homeless people. The primary focus of the support is to provide socio-educational counselling and assistance to those affected so that they can find a way out of their precarious living situation and reintegrate into society. Another focal point is the prevention of homelessness. In addition, various types of pilot projects are supported and contribute to improving the structures of homeless assistance.

As part of its activities in the area of climate change-related health protection, the Bavarian State Ministry for Health, Care and Prevention (StMG) has launched a heat and UV protection initiative for homeless people in the summer of 2023 in cooperation with the Railway Missions (Bahnhofsmissionen). In coordination with the Katholischer Verband für Mädchen- und Frauensozialarbeit IN VIA Bayern e. V. (Catholic Association for Girls' and Women's Social Work IN VIA Bavaria), water bottles and sunscreen were provided to the Bavarian Railway Missions for distribution to the homeless.

Berlin

The state of Berlin is increasingly using the Housing First approach to combat homelessness. Six projects are now active in Berlin. Transferring Housing First to regular funding is a high priority for the state of Berlin.



As part of its social housing promotion, Berlin is supporting the creation of new housing in rental and cooperative housing to provide affordable housing, particularly for low-income home seekers. In the case of construction projects with more than 15 subsidised apartments, at least one quarter of the total number of subsidised apartments must be allocated to households with a housing entitlement certificate for special hous-

ing needs valid in the state of Berlin in accordance with § 27 para. 5 of the Housing Subsidies Act. Homeless people are included as a subgroup in the category of special housing needs.

Furthermore, the additional funding referred to as "Housing for Special Needs Groups", which will be introduced at the end of 2023, is expected to result in targeted housing for homeless people through the possibility of linking all or part of construction projects to a Housing First approach. In addition, the state of Berlin promotes the creation of housing for assisted living and cluster living with the "Administrative Regulations for the Implementation of a Project Call for the Subsidising of New Housing for Social Service Providers". Again, cluster housing or housing for the homeless would be eligible for subsidies.

In terms of housing, Berlin has established 24/7 shelters as another tool to reach out to people living on the streets and show them ways out of homelessness.

Brandenburg

In Brandenburg, homeless people are included in the target group for housing subsidies. The individual provision of housing is given special consideration by the competent authorities through the exercise of allocation and occupancy rights.



Within the framework of pilot projects, the social housing subsidies are used to support projects under the title "Building for Social Purposes", which are handled in close coordination and with the financial participation of the responsible municipality. These are modular construction projects. In addition to refugees, other social groups, such as the homeless, will be housed in these construction projects during the com-

mitment period. Individual project-related requirements are taken into account in terms of construction requirements, the exercise of occupancy rights and financing.

Bremen

In the state of Bremen, people at risk of homelessness are a special target group for social housing assistance and are given special consideration.

20 percent of new subsidised housing is for them. Accommodation may be in the new subsidised apartment or in another apartment in the subsidy recipient's portfolio. There is a special agreement between the housing companies and the State Department of Social Affairs. This department also arranges housing through the Central Office for Housing Services (ZFW), which provides further assistance (including accompaniment during the apartment inspection, rent security through direct transfer of the rent, a fixed contact person for the landlord in the ZFW). There is also a wide range of emergency shelters, social programmes, and support services for the homeless, which includes cooperation with housing providers and is primarily organised at the municipal level. This includes the Housing First pilot project.



Hamburg

In 2022, the Hamburg Senate passed a 7-point programme to increase the supply of urgently needed housing (WA Housing Supply Package 2030). This programme gathers measures and new instruments aimed at improving the supply of housing for homeless households in the existing housing stock and supporting housing construction through financial incentives or guarantees and



services for landlords. Part of this includes measures to directly assist the homeless and help with housing across various departments. This is accompanied by an intensive dialog with the housing industry, based on the Alliance for Housing in Hamburg (<https://www.hamburg.de/bsw/buendnis-fuer-das-wohnen/>).

Hamburg has a highly differentiated system of assistance for homeless people. The overall concept of homeless assistance in Hamburg continues to evolve. The basic approaches of prevention, low-threshold assistance, public housing and housing placement are continuously updated through interim supplements of projects and initiatives. Specialised Housing Emergency Offices have existed in the seven district offices for almost 20 years, and their staffing has been continuously improved, including in the context of expanded responsibilities (e.g. most recently for so-called couch surfers).

The number of places for temporary living according to §§ 67 et seq. SGB XII has been expanded over the years.

There have been and continue to be significant qualitative and quantitative improvements and innovations in low-threshold services for the homeless. Capacity, housing standards, and counselling services are continually being expanded. The new concept for the qualitative and quantitative strengthening of street social work for the homeless is on track. The care of the most vulnerable and mentally ill homeless people is an increasing concern. Given the lack of or limited entitlements and access to regular care systems (in Hamburg, about two-thirds of the homeless are not from Germany), the largely state-funded homeless assistance, as a voluntary service required under regulatory law, now performs a very important compensatory service for medical, nursing and other care services.

Public housing is increasingly differentiated according to target groups and specific needs. There are specific types and locations of shelters for young adults, people with care needs, older people, LGBTIQ+ people, and vulnerable women who have experienced violence. Efforts are also being made to create a simple and cross-border care concept for mentally ill homeless people.

The provision of housing has been pursued for many years, although it is particularly challenging due to the aggravated conditions of a city-state and the continued access of those in need of protection. A Housing First model project for 30 long-term homeless people has been in place since 1 July 2022. Pilot projects such as these are evaluated and tested for sustainability. In the context of housing placement, a subleasing concept was developed and implemented in which F&W Fördern und Wohnen AöR, a municipally owned company, leases apartments for two years and sublets them to public housing households. For landlords, there is an “Assured Guarantee Package” to financially secure the rental of housing to homeless households. A single point of contact is available to potential landlords to provide information on the procedures and support offered by the city for renting to vulnerable people seeking housing.

Hesse

The Hessian Ministry of Labour, Integration, Youth and Social Affairs, the relevant local social service providers, the non-local social service providers, as well as the institutions and services of the free social welfare in Hesse regularly coordinate existing problematic situations and corresponding solutions and measures in the framework of the Hessian Conference on Homelessness (HFKW). The goal of the Hessian Conference is to improve



and make sustainable the assistance to overcome special social difficulties in Hesse. Through recommendations, suggestions and expert meetings, the basis is created for the further development of the system of assistance for people with special social difficulties.

Hesse also promotes widespread debt counselling and addiction assistance services. Targeted debt counselling is already being used to prevent homelessness. The Hessian state government currently funds recognised debt counselling centres with municipal state funds amounting to a total of 3.7 million euros per year. This funding should continue in the future.

Analogous to the analysis of the housed homeless, there is a great interest in Hesse to also cover people living on the streets (homeless) as well as the “concealed homeless” (people who have been temporarily accommodated by relatives or friends). The state of Hesse, together with the Hessian Conference on Homelessness, is currently working on the results of the official homelessness report for Hesse to supplement these elements. The goal is to shed light on the unknown number and living conditions of homeless people. The aim of this accompanying research, which is based on various sub-studies on the extent and structure of homelessness in Hesse and on support structures and assistance for people in housing emergencies, is to provide a concrete planning basis for policymakers, administrators and practitioners. The aim is to fill existing gaps in knowledge and to provide a basis for the further development of support for people at risk of and experiencing homelessness across the country.

Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

The state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania has various social housing subsidy programmes to contribute to improving the supply of housing (especially low-barrier, barrier-free, wheelchair-accessible housing) for people with low and moderate incomes. This is achieved in particular by the requirement that at least half of the new housing units be built under the first funding stream, which ensures that housing is built at the lower end of the price segment and is also available for accommodating the homeless. The good and affordable housing supply in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, most of which is rented out by municipal or cooperative housing companies, has a significant downward effect on rents and actively contributes to reducing homelessness.



Lower Saxony

Lower Saxony promotes a comprehensive range of social debt counselling and addiction assistance services. In addition, Lower Saxony has created a comprehensive and demand-driven support network for people in social difficulties. Since 2022, these support services have been funded 90 percent by the state as an inter-regional social welfare provider and 10 percent by the municipalities as local social welfare providers. The support system is currently being developed in an inclusive and participatory process, but even now it does not primarily require a home for outpatient services. As part of this further development, pilot digital cafes were set up in Meppen and Cuxhaven in 2023 for people with social problems in order to test targeted digitisation offerings for people with social problems and at the



same time to create opportunities for meeting and social participation.

In addition, self-help structures have been continuously promoted for more than 15 years in neighbourhoods with tense social structures.

North Rhine-Westphalia

To support municipalities in the state, the government of North Rhine-Westphalia has launched the state initiative “Finally a HOME!” The goals of the state initiative are to prevent the loss of housing, to create housing for people without homes of their own, and to improve the living conditions of homeless people, people without homes, and people at risk of losing their homes. A key component of the government initiative is the so-called “Worrier” (Kümmerer) projects, which work closely with the housing industry on the basis of a cooperation agreement between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the housing industry. These projects were expanded nationwide in 2022. In addition, the state government is funding three pilot projects for homeless youth and young adults in Dortmund, Essen and Recklinghausen. In Recklinghausen, the local job centre is responsible for the Worrier project. In total, all job centres in North Rhine-Westphalia are actively involved in the “Finally a HOME!” process.



In addition, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (MAGS NRW) has developed recommendations for the design of housing under regulatory law for homeless people. With these recommendations, the ministry aims to provide cities and municipalities with advice on the design of dignified and modern shelters for the homeless within the legal framework.

Rhineland-Palatinate

The state of Rhineland-Palatinate is promoting specialised counselling centres for housing security and Housing First to further develop homeless assistance. Housing First adds a new approach to the existing system of homeless assistance to give homeless people a chance to have their own permanent, safe place to live. The innovative approach to combatting homelessness focuses on providing permanent housing without conditions. In 2023, three projects were included in the funding programme for the first time. The cities of Koblenz and Landau and the Westerwald district were selected as the first pilot municipalities. The Ministry of Social Affairs supports the pilot projects with an annual grant for personnel and costs. Each pilot project is designed to house and care for a minimum of eight individuals. Three more projects are expected to join the programme in 2024.

In addition, the Rhineland-Palatinate Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs, Transformation and Digitisation, in cooperation with homelessness service providers and interested municipalities, supports specialised counselling centres for securing housing. These counselling centres are expected to serve not only “classic” homeless people living on the streets, but also people who have been placed in substitute housing by municipalities under police and regulatory law, or who are at risk of losing their housing. Counselling focuses on securing housing by contacting landlords and social service agencies, providing temporary housing in emergency shelters and hostels when necessary, placement and assisting in obtaining housing, providing counselling and assistance in applying for short-term subsistence benefits, clarifying and assisting in the enforcement of other entitlements under social



legislation, and providing counselling for personal and social problems and the development of possible perspectives. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Transformation and Digitisation in Rhineland-Palatinate is currently funding eight specialised housing security counselling centres with start-up funding for personnel and material costs.

To improve health care advisory structures for socially disadvantaged people, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Transformation and Digitisation in Rhineland-Palatinate is promoting clearinghouses for health insurance as pilot projects. The goal of the clearinghouse is to reintegrate people without (adequate) health insurance into the public or private health insurance system. If, despite clarification and advice, access to the regular system is not possible, those seeking advice will be referred to other advisory and support structures as appropriate. Clearinghouses provide an easily accessible service for people who want to regain access to support systems in the event of illness. The establishment and promotion of clearinghouses is an important step towards better health care for those affected and a contribution to poverty alleviation. Health insurance clearinghouses are funded by the Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs, Transformation and Digitisation in Mainz, Ludwigshafen, Worms and Koblenz.

In Rhineland-Palatinate, 63 debt and insolvency counselling centres (without including the centres responsible for gambling addiction) are recognised as appropriate centres in the consumer bankruptcy process. Of these, 53 counselling centres are funded by the Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs, Transformation and Digitisation. Debt counselling centres also offer free help with rent arrears and the threat of losing one's home.

Saarland

The Ministry of Social Affairs of the Saarland initiated a 5-point plan for further action against homelessness in Saarland, which was agreed upon by all relevant stakeholders in the field of homelessness assistance in February 2023. They have jointly embarked on a journey to further develop the existing support system conceptually and to establish new communication structures. The “Round Table on Homelessness” they formed analysed the situation of homeless people in Saarland, identified gaps in services, and developed and jointly adopted a concept with a total of 31 measures to end involuntary homelessness in Saarland by 2030. The Saarland’s commitment is intended to support the federal government’s policy and the EU’s measures to prevent and combat homelessness by 2030.



So far, one pilot project has been supported. As part of the accompanying research to the pilot project, a guideline was developed on the basis of the findings in the pilot project and made available to other municipalities and counties for the implementation of potential municipal homeless assistance projects according to the “Housing First” approach. It also includes a “checklist” to help municipalities determine the human, material and time resources needed to implement such a project.

In addition, there is a “Joint Announcement of the Saxon State Ministry for Social Affairs and Social Cohesion, the Saxon State Ministry for Regional Development and the Saxon State Ministry of the Interior on the Prevention and Elimination of Housing Emergencies” dated 10 March 2021. The recommendations were developed in cooperation with charities and municipal umbrella organisations and deal with measures to protect homeless people or people at risk of homelessness and their reintegration into society. They are intended to provide guidance to the appropriate authorities.

Saxony

In the Free State of Saxony, the issue of “homelessness” is anchored in the coalition agreement for 2019–2024. In the future, this topic will also be part of Saxony’s social reporting. Social reporting will be the basis for strategic social planning. The 2019–2024 Coalition Agreement explicitly includes support for the municipal level with preventative approaches to homelessness, specifically mentioning the “Housing First” approach. With the approval of the government programme “Start 2020”, support has been given to the municipal level for innovative, preventive approaches to homelessness.



Saxony has allocated funds in the state budget to support municipal projects with a preventive approach. There is a special focus on “Housing First”.

Saxony-Anhalt

In Saxony-Anhalt, the state capital of Magdeburg is explicitly testing the “Housing First” approach with two pilot projects. Various municipalities maintain community shelters for single homeless people. Housing cooperatives provide housing for homeless families and offer direct support and emergency care, especially for families with young children. In addition, the state of Saxony-Anhalt provides annual grants to municipalities under an integration guide directive for the support of refugees and immigrants by volunteer integration guides and their qualification. The activities of the integration guides include finding housing, dealing with landlords, furnishing the housing,



etc. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Equal Opportunities is in discussion with the municipalities. Experiences from the “Housing First” model project and from individual municipalities provide lessons on how to better coordinate cooperation at the interfaces, especially in the case of multiple problems.

Schleswig-Holstein

As part of Schleswig-Holstein’s social housing subsidy programme, low-cost housing construction is to be massively boosted in order to systematically combat housing shortages. The programme “Housing for Special Needs Groups” is aimed at municipalities and investors – especially social or church providers – that want to create affordable housing for people with low incomes and for specific groups in need. The programme is designed to primarily benefit those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It also supports the Housing First approach by providing a way for the provider to refinance higher approved rents.



Since 2018, the “Women’s Housing” project (“Frauen_Wohnen”) has been providing quick and uncomplicated support to women with children (but also single women) who no longer require acute protection in a women’s shelter, and to other women who have been affected by or are threatened by violence and for whom a change in their housing situation can contribute to an improvement in their quality of life, in their search for their own adequate and affordable housing. For women who have not yet been placed in a women’s shelter, a prerequisite for inclusion in the project is that one of the counselling centres funded under the Financial Compensation Act (FAG) communicates the need for support to the regional service centres. This is a

very direct way to help women. In addition to the challenges of finding housing, many women find the cost of moving, renovating, or buying new furniture prohibitive – this is where the “Women’s Housing” project comes in. Women (and their children) are counselled, monitored throughout the process, and provided with post-rehousing support. The Ministry of Social Affairs will support the housing project with approximately 867,000 euros in 2024.

Thuringia

Since June 2023, Thuringia has been developing a strategy against homelessness in a participatory process. The Thuringian strategy against homelessness should be based on the principle of preventing homelessness, reducing it when it occurs, and supporting those affected.



The federal states are also taking responsibility on their own for developing their own initiatives and action plans, setting out measures and reporting regularly on their implementation on behalf of the Conference of Ministers of Building and the Conference of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs as part of their participation in the National Forum against Homelessness.

The same applies to the municipal umbrella organisations, which will contribute to the multifaceted commitment of the districts, cities and municipalities through appropriate measures and also regularly report on their implementation.

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