

Cities implementing Housing First in Europe – Learning from Lyon

On 24-25 November 2020, Eurocities' working group homelessness met for its first online policy transfer. The two-day discussions aimed at enabling mutual learning around the Housing First approach and its implementation in Lyon Metropole. The interactive format gave an opportunity for the 72 participants from 26 cities¹ and partners² to share their experience and exchange advice on common challenges.

On this occasion, Gordon Smith, chair of the working group homelessness launched the latest Eurocities' [report](#) on access to affordable and social housing and support to homeless people. This report is part of a series on cities delivering social rights. It focusses on the implementation of Principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights and shows the main challenges faced by cities when providing assistance to homeless people, as well as the key actions taken by cities. These are illustrated by examples of good practices from the 24 responding cities. Among the policy recommendations, the promotion of integrated approaches such as Housing First was identified as a key component.

Lyon Metropole's action plan for Housing First and the fight against homelessness

Since 2018, Lyon Metropole is one of the 22 territories selected by the French government for an accelerated implementation of the Housing First approach. The unique combination of competences from the Metropole – which covers housing, urban planning, the fight against social exclusion, disability, ageing or child welfare – creates a framework particularly suited for the implementation of Housing First. Indeed, this approach that ensures that housing is provided to homeless people without requiring them to be 'housing ready' is accompanied by a variety of support services for the beneficiaries.



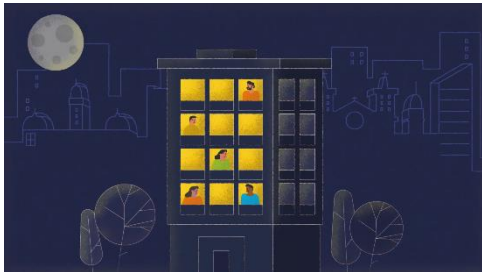
With applications for social housing seven times higher than the number of available places, many people struggle to find a decent and affordable house. To respond to this situation, the Metropole

¹ Amsterdam, Arras, Barcelona, Bordeaux, Bristol, Brno, Dublin, Ghent, Glasgow, Gothenburg, Grenoble Alpes Metropole, Grigny, Leipzig, Liège, Ljubljana, Lyon Metropole, Munich, Poznan, Strasbourg Metropole, Tallinn, Thessaloniki, Toulouse Metropole, Uppsala, Utrecht, Vienna, Zaragoza

² ADOMA, ALPIL, AVDL, European Commission, FEANTSA, Fondation Abbé Pierre, Foyers Matter, Habitat et Humanisme, Seine Saint Denis county

dedicates ambitious €106million budget to its housing policies. The 5-year plan for Housing First and the fight against homelessness in one of the key elements of this policy. It focuses on 3 strands.

Increasing availability of housing



This first priority aims at increasing the number of housing places available, but also at developing new forms of housing to accommodate a variety of situations, preferences and needs. Under this strand, Lyon Metropole developed original formats of housing, like boarding houses (small structures with a 'host' that supports the residents), grouped housing (less support but the dwellings are not scattered around the city), accessing private

housing or proposing intermediary housing before another long-term solution is available.

Combining housing and new forms of support

Through a tight collaboration with a variety of partners, Lyon Metropole provides diverse forms of support enabling a multi-disciplinary, need-based approach centred on the choices of the person.

Specific attention is put on accessing employment, supporting young people and in particular those leaving foster care and ensuring continuity of housing for those that leave institutions like prisons or hospital. Besides the support to the individuals who have been re-housed, the metropole also focusses on prevention, especially through a set of measures against evictions.

Changing mind-sets in favour of Housing First

To ensure a long-lasting change beyond the 5-year plan, the metropole also works towards inducing a paradigm shift by training stakeholders (workers, partners, politicians), encouraging partnership approach and involvement of the beneficiaries, as well as through close monitoring and evaluation of the measures. In particular, the metropole is asking the state to conduct a national survey on homelessness, in order to provide accurate and up-to-date data on the situation.



Yet the commitment to house every person in need in Lyon Metropole goes beyond the partnership with the state. The metropole developed solutions for the people who experience obstacles in their access to housing (administrative issues, health conditions, urgency of the situation compared to a lack of available places etc.). Options currently being developed include tiny houses (see picture), social hotel with support, temporary vacant housing and legalisation of illegal settlement that provide decent conditions. These options are expected to complement Housing First approaches when there is a

lack of alternatives.

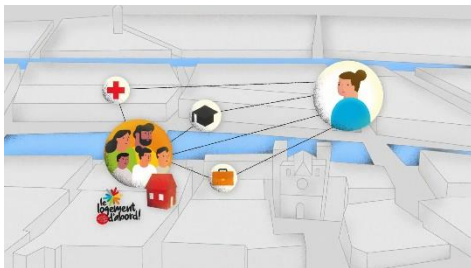
Deep diving into local good practices from Lyon

After a series of interviews on the action plan, its priorities and their implementation, the partners of Lyon Metropole presented 3 projects which illustrate the key aspects of the fight against homelessness.

ADOMA presented an innovative format of housing: the boarding houses. The inhabitants of these houses enjoy their own flat as well as common spaces. During the day, a 'house host' provides

support and guidance to these individuals which have often lost the skills and confidence to live in full autonomy. In this safe environment, they can learn how to manage their own living space, take care of the laundry, cook, etc. A strong focus is also put on building self-esteem, especially through cultural activities. The discussions that followed with the participants highlighted the difficulty to find the right balance between low rent (so that it can be covered by housing subsidies guaranteed by the state) and other forms of funding while providing sufficient support in line with the sometimes complex needs of the residents.

The second project called 'a school, a roof, rights' aims at implementing the Housing First approach to families without income (including through welfare support). The beneficiaries of this projects are families with school-age children who were living in extremely precarious situations (often illegal settlements or rough sleeping). Many of these families are EU mobile citizens and therefore have a right to work. Within this project, the city grants them a vacant flat owned by the municipality and provides support in finding employment, ensuring schooling of the children and fulfilling basic needs (through an initial allowance). Preliminary results show that after 2 years, all households had accessed social housing and at least one member of the family was employed. The project has also proven to be financially advantageous as the costs of sheltering one household in a hotel for 2 months (under the traditional system) can cover the costs of accommodation for a full year under this project.



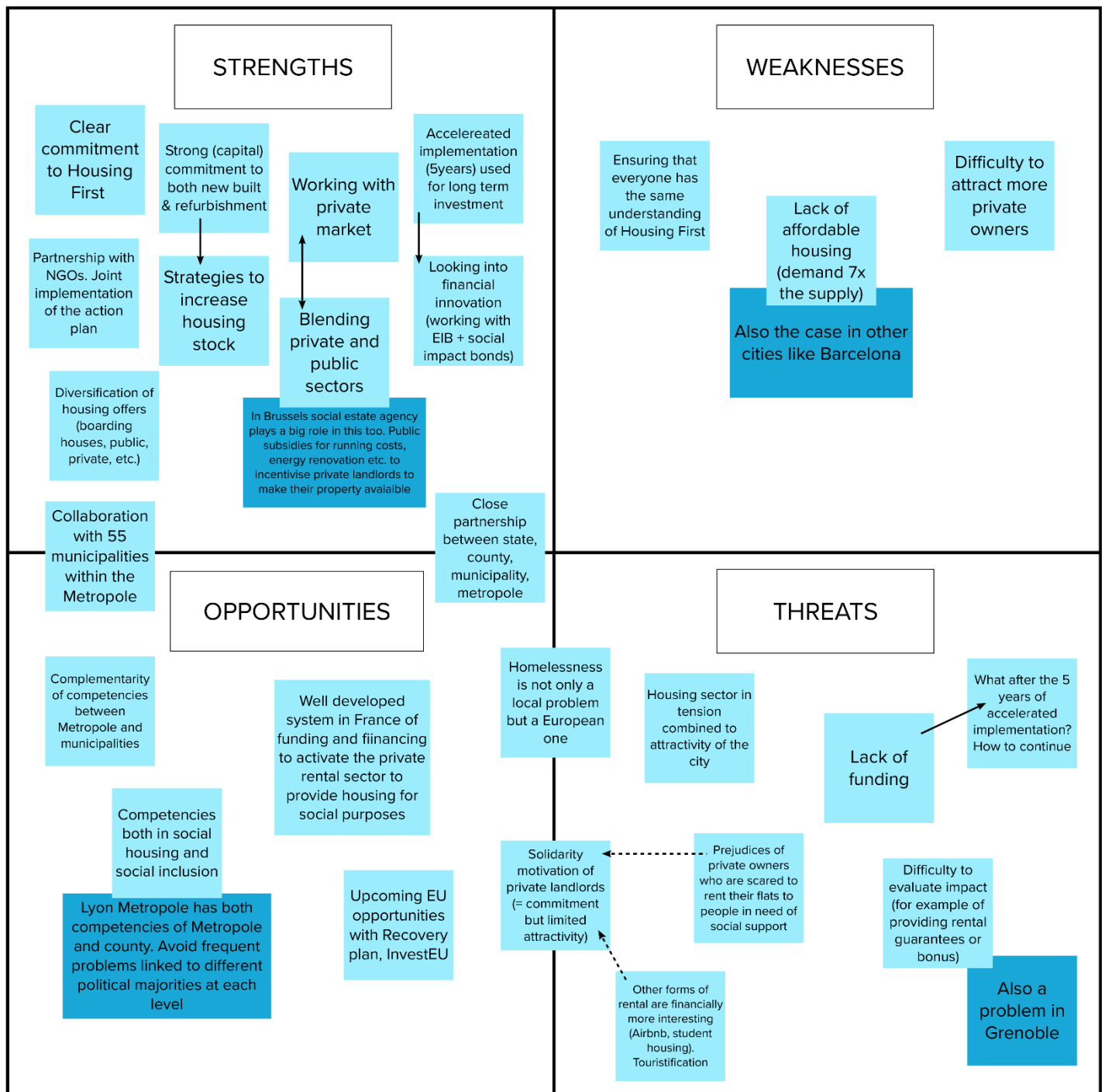
Another partner, AVDL, insisted on the importance of ensuring that these people access the rights and benefits they are entitled to, but also of helping them define realistic expectations and representations of what their life could be like in France. Calvin Covaciu shared his personal experience, from living with his family in very bad conditions in an illegal settlement for almost 10 years to accessing a house and the support he needed thanks to the project.

Calvin is now employed as peer worker by AVDL and supports the accompaniment of families newly involved in the project. His testimony highlighted the vicious circle between not being able to rent a house due to the lack of income and not finding employment because of his homeless situation. He also expressed the importance for him and his family to have an active role in their inclusion process and his pride in being now in the position to help others.

The third project presented during the working group aims at making private housing available to homeless people. Private owners who are looking for a meaningful use of their dwelling entrust Habitat & Humanisme with the management and rental of their flat. The system offers tax deduction, financial incentives or opportunities for renovation as well as guarantees (rent payment or against degradation) in exchange for a long-term commitment (6 to 9 years) to rent their dwelling at a low price to those in needs. 432 flats have been made available to Housing First programmes through this system. Pierre-Luc Barbe, one of the solidary owners shared the importance of finding a social use for his flat while remaining in control of his property and being able to put it back on the traditional housing market after a defined period of time.

Taking stock of the lessons learned from Lyon's model for homelessness

To foster exchange and mutual learning opportunities, the second day was dedicated to interactive discussions. First, the participants exchanged on the key lessons learnt and shared their analysis of Lyon Metropole's approach. A SWOT analysis was conducted. It showed the positive response to the integrated approach adopted in Lyon.



This discussion was continued through a +/Δ analysis, which enabled participants to both identify successful elements that they could adapt to their local context and share their own experience to benefit Lyon.



What is good and should be kept / reinforced?

Providing a variety of social support to the tenants

Providing guarantees to private owners so that they have enough trust and security to make their properties available to social rental

Rent guarantee in case tenant does not pay

Other cities like Barcelona have similar approaches. In Munich it depends on the profile of the tenant



What can be improved?

Improving the knowledge of people in need

Need to reach private owners that are motivated by other elements than solidarity

In Grenoble the Metropole created a financial bonus for landlords which accept to rent of 5€/square meter (way below market prices)

Ongoing reflection in Grenoble Metropole. In Lyon this is one of the points of discussion regarding the investment with EIB

Offering follow up support when moving from one scheme to another (e.g. social or private housing). Gives support for people + more trust/guarantees for private owners that there will be follow up

Experience from Munich

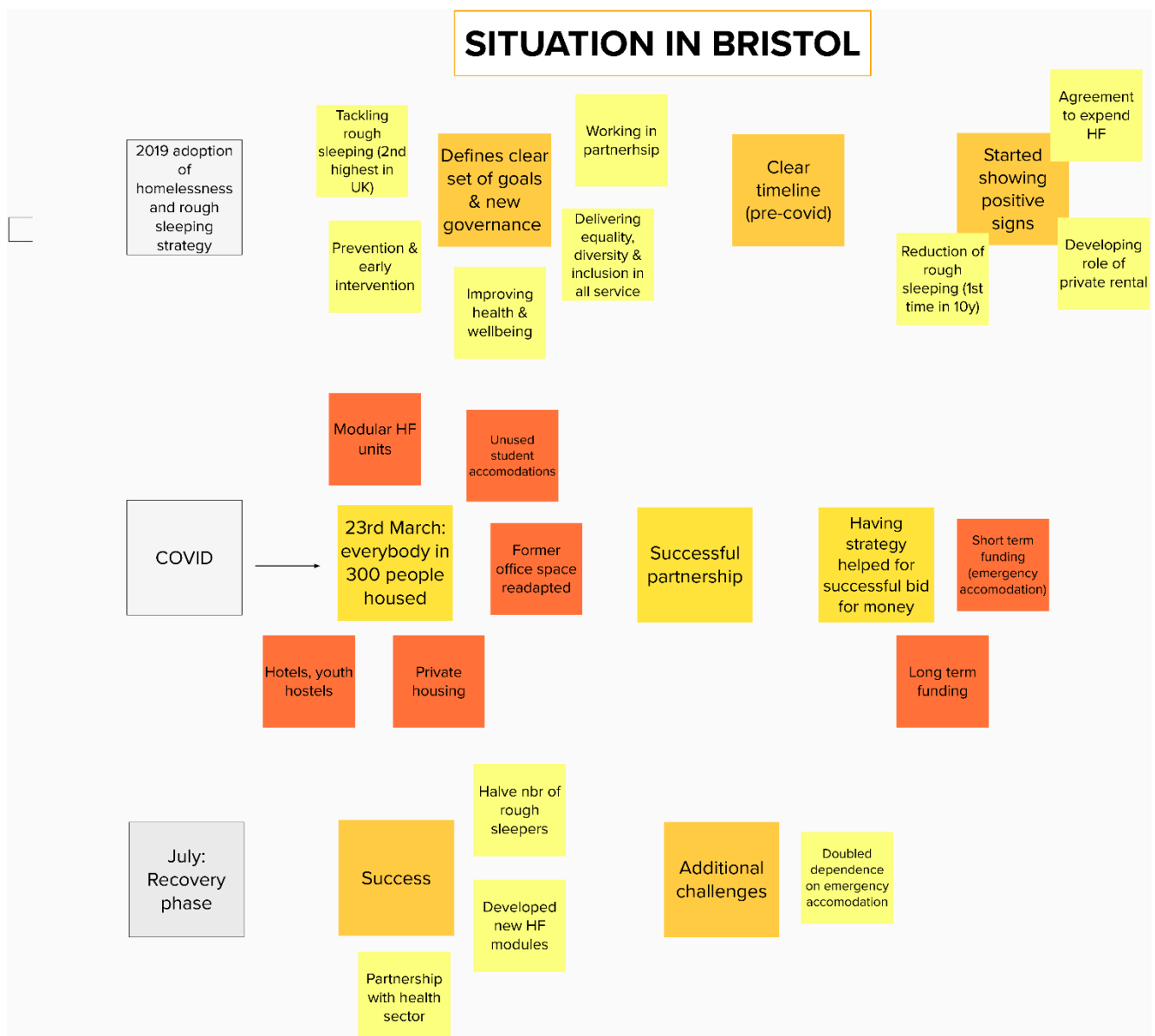
Opportunity to work with ethical banks

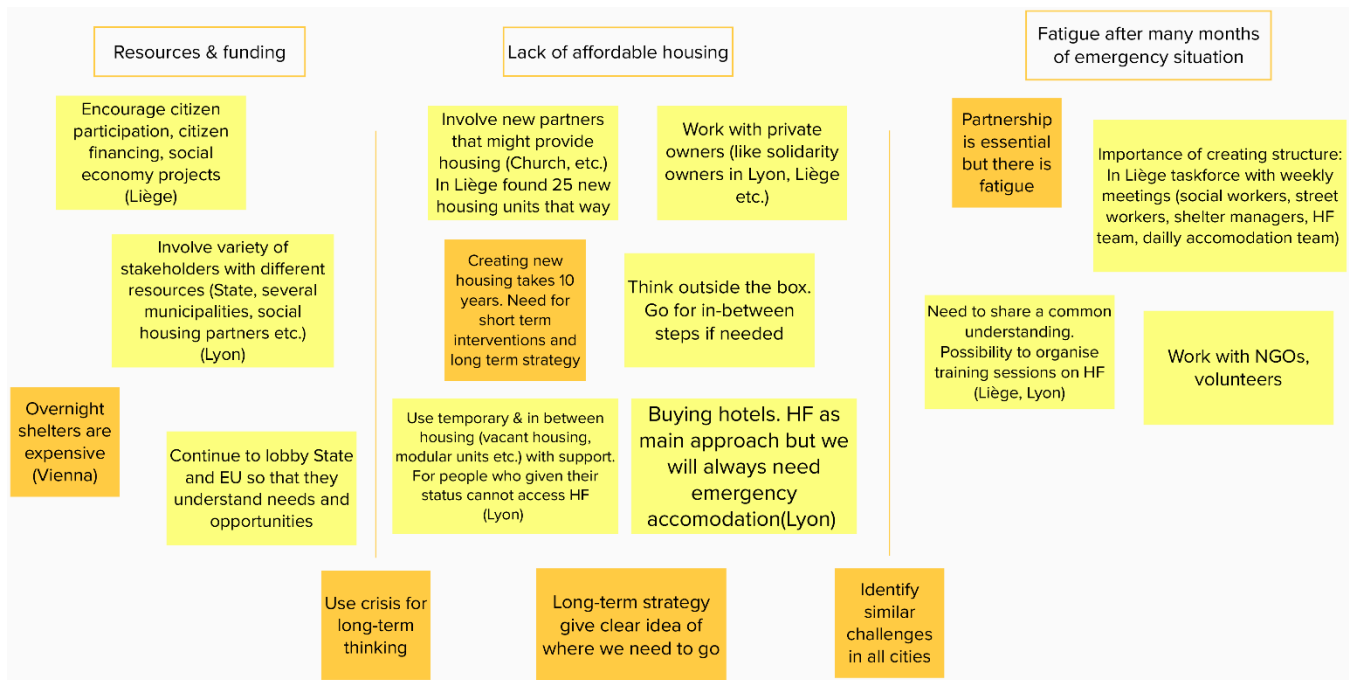
Warm Bristol partnership

Financial incentives for private landlords require to dedicate important amounts of municipality or public finances for rather short term schemes (e.g. here 6years contracts with landlords) but would that money be better invested in increasing stock of public/ social housing (long term investment)?

Transferring good practices between cities: homelessness in times of covid-19

While the context of the pandemic and lockdowns that are implemented in many European countries was discussed throughout the meeting, a specific session was dedicated to this topic. The participants discussed the long-term impact that covid-19 is having on homelessness services and measures that can be taken to mitigate its impact and even use it as an opportunity for future measures on supporting homeless people. To ensure that the discussions would be as concrete as possible, Graham Jones presented the situation in Bristol and the challenges that were identified. These were then further discussed by all the participants.





Upcoming EU initiative on homelessness

In the context of increasing poverty levels linked to the economic and health crisis, the European Commission decided to launch a new initiative on homelessness. This set of measures will be part of the Action plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) that is expected for the Spring of 2021. The specific measures on homelessness should aim at reinforcing Principle 19 of the pillar and will be launched on 21 June 2021 under the Portuguese presidency of the Council. This initiative will be composed of several elements.

First, the European Commission will launch jointly with the Portuguese presidency an EU platform on combatting homelessness. This platform should enable regular dialogue between European institutions, member states and other stakeholders including cities. It should aim at establishing a common understanding of what is meant by homelessness. A declaration on combatting homelessness should also be adopted by the Commission and the member states to create a strong political signal that would be more specific than Principle 19 of the EPSR.

Principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights: Housing and assistance for the homeless:

- Access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need
- Vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction
- Adequate shelter and services shall be provided to the homeless in order to promote their social inclusion

The second component would be a research project. It aims at identifying who are the homeless, where do they live and what are the root causes of homelessness. It should help define realistic targets to end homelessness and contribute to identify which measures are currently being implemented, by whom and why they are (in)effective. Additionally, this study should provide tools

to measure impact and reinforce prevention. Besides desk research, the project should be constructed around 7 regional roundtables with representatives of all stakeholders involved in homeless services (national, regional, local authorities, civil society, service providers) as well as academics. The results of this research should contribute to the production of a toolkit defining homelessness, how to measure it, which policy measures are efficient and how to implement them.

Finally, the European Commission will collaborate with FEANTSA on the creation of a European Award on Combatting Homelessness to promote innovative and sustainable projects that were financed under ESF and FEAD.

This presentation of future opportunities measures on homelessness and the discussion that followed on cities' involvement in this process concluded the 2-day exchanges.

Useful documents:

On Housing First in Lyon:

- [Video Lyon puts Housing First](#)
- [Background note on Housing First in Lyon Metropole](#)
- [Case study](#)
- [Presentation of the project Housing and Employment First](#)
- [Summary of a study on Housing First in Lyon](#)

On homelessness in European cities:

- [Eurocities' report on city measures to support homeless people in times of covid-19](#)
- [Eurocities' report on access to affordable & social housing and support to homeless people](#)



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