Ending youth homelessness in cities

November 2023

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About this study

Acknowledgements:

About Eurocities:

Eurocities is the network of more than 200 cities in 38 countries, representing 130 million people, working together to ensure a good quality of life for all people. Through joint work, knowledge sharing and coordinated Europe-wide activity, the network ensures that cities and people are heard in Europe.

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Foreword
by Yves Leterme

Chair of the European Platform on
Combatting Homelessness Steering Board

In our contemporary, sophisticated western societies, multilevel governance is the most appropriate way of developing public policies. Well-designed, efficient policies can only be implemented if all levels of government are involved.

This is certainly the case for the collective and public efforts needed to prevent and combat the unacceptably high number of people across the EU who are roofless or homeless. This includes young people, who face complex and often hugely traumatising situations that lead to their becoming homeless, but whose experiences are often overlooked.

It is therefore crucially important that the EU institutions, Member States, cities and representative civil society organisations recently joined forces to set up the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH).

However, while the root causes of individual cases of homelessness are often related to national and supranational decisions and policies (or the lack thereof), it must be remembered that homeless women, men, youth and children are individuals with their own multifaceted personal history. The way public policies and services organise the help they require must take their unique experiences into account.

Local and regional institutions are best placed to directly connect to the people concerned and to the private and public initiatives that support them. Many of local authorities have already successfully deployed initiatives, services, policies and actions to help bring about change.

However, for all kinds of reasons, the number of homeless people, including young people, in the EU is still going up. Meanwhile, in many cities and municipalities across Europe, there is a rising awareness and political will to act.

In this report, Eurocities provides an excellent update on the vision and practice of cities in combatting youth homelessness. It is at local and regional level that efforts to find better and sustainable solutions to rooflessness and homelessness have been increasing in recent years. Eurocities must be commended for further stimulating discussion on this important topic.

The report goes beyond figures and statistics. It depicts the reality in the streets and neighbourhoods, close to the people concerned and their needs. It showcases policies and actions that work. It is a toolkit that can be used by stakeholders at all levels of EU government to eradicate one of the most extreme forms of exclusion of which almost one million EU citizens suffer today.

Let me conclude by quoting the 17th-century poet John Dunne: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."

This certainly goes for every person in our hyperconnected, wealthy part of the globe in 2023. No human being should be left behind. We need inclusion, opportunities and support.

The daily engagement and work of women and men in municipalities, cities and regions is essential to make inclusion a reality throughout Europe. This report is an inspiring road map for that journey.

Yves Leterme
Chair of the EPOCH Steering Board

Introduction
by André Sobzack

Secretary General
of Eurocities

As a signatory to the Lisbon Declaration,[1] Eurocities is fully committed to working closely with all Achieving this ambitious goal is key to demonstrating that social justice remains a priority for our continent. It will also show that the European Union is committed to making to making social justice a reality.

As a network of cities, we know there is no single solution for ending homelessness. Local challenges and solutions differ according to the economic, social, legal and political context. Despite (or because of) these differences, the role of cities is crucial. While cities are where most homeless people are found, cities also have the potential to invent and implement the solutions to face this challenge, because they are the level of governance closest to citizens and can bring together various stakeholders. Mayors show a strong political commitment in this field. Within the Eurocities political campaign *InclusiveCities4all*, 20 cities from 12 European countries presented pledges on Principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, dedicated to housing and assistance for the homeless.[2]

Cities are also ideally placed to better understand the situations and deal with the specific needs of different categories of homeless people. This report focuses on youth homelessness in European cities. This choice is in line with Eurocities' overall commitment to work increasingly for and with the young generations who are the future of our continent. It also makes sense because youth homelessness is increasing in European cities and constitutes a particularly worrying form of social exclusion with a high risk of lifelong homelessness. Understanding better its causes and impacts to identify ways to fight youth homelessness is a crucial element of an overall strategy for ending homelessness.

Eurocities supports its member cities in this fight, by both raising awareness and organising knowledge exchanges. This report is an important step in collecting qualitative data to better analyse the causes of youth homelessness as well as the possible responses. One year ahead of the elections to the European Parliament and the appointment of the next European Commission, it identifies what is necessary to end youth homelessness, which may inspire political leaders at all levels of governance.

I warmly thank the many member cities that have shared their data and experiences with the Eurocities team, as well as Solène Molard, the report's author.

André Sobzack
Secretary General of Eurocities

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[1] Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, adopted on 21 June 2021.
[2] Athens, Barcelona, Birmingham, Bologna, Dusseldorf, Florence, Ghent, Glasgow, Hamburg, Leipzig, Lille, Ljubljana, Lyon, Nantes, Poznan, Tallinn, Timisoara, Utrecht, Vienna, Zaragoza

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Key messages

Throughout Europe, the number of young people experiencing homelessness is on the rise. Data from the 29 cities that contributed to this report demonstrates that the crises Europe has been facing in recent years have worsened pre-existing challenges. Even more worrying, cities anticipate that this increase is likely to continue in the coming months.

Ambitious action needs to be taken in order to curb this trend and work towards ending youth homelessness by 2030. Cities are committed to taking action, but they cannot do it alone. The framework of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness as well as the national and local strategies that are being developed provide great opportunities to address some of this report's key findings:

■ Include a youth-focused approach in European, national and local homelessness strategies

With youth homelessness on the rise in most of Europe, there is a clear need to focus on young peoples' specific needs if the ambition of ending homelessness by 2030 is to be realised. Young people face additional vulnerabilities linked to homelessness, such as intergenerational trauma and poverty, and specific challenges related to their age, including mental health and difficulties accessing stable housing. If we do not take ambitious targeted measures, youth homelessness will continue to increase.

■ Mainstream the issue of youth homelessness across relevant policies

The issue of youth homelessness intersects with numerous policy sectors and is impacted by policy choices across various areas. Policymakers should consider the impact of their decisions and legislative changes on youth homelessness rates. The question of youth homelessness should be taken into account in particular when introducing legislation related to education, income and employment, migration and integration, gender and equality, and health and disability. When addressing youth homelessness across these diverse sectors, policymakers should employ the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and its relevant principles as a guiding framework.

■ Improve data collection on homelessness

While the general trends show that cities increasingly have systems in place to regularly collect data on homelessness, notable gaps and challenges remain. The absence of a unified definition and data collection methodologies continue to prevent any potential comparison between and often within countries. More detailed data on the age or gender of homeless people is needed to identify the specific needs of various groups and provide adequate support. Improved data would also be needed to accurately evaluate the impact of specific measures and allow for evidence-based policy-making.

■ Enhance preventive measures targeting groups most at risk of homelessness

In the Lisbon Declaration, national, regional and local authorities committed to promoting the prevention of homelessness. This report identifies a gap in preventive measures targeting young people, despite broad recognition of the many risk factors and need for action. It is essential that all levels of government consider the specificities of the experience of homelessness at a young age and address its key drivers.

■ Ensure integrated responses to youth homelessness

This report demonstrates how interconnected the causes of youth homelessness are and exposes the need for solutions that cut across fields. Policymakers and service providers need to ensure integrated approaches to youth homelessness through access to housing, mental and physical health care, education and employment support. Particular attention should be paid to periods of transition which can often pose substantial challenges for young individuals to navigate.

■ Reinforce policies ensuring sufficient affordable and social housing to combat homelessness

Insufficient availability of affordable and social housing puts pressure on groups of people, such as students, who would not typically be considered vulnerable to homelessness. This scarcity also creates barriers for cities aiming to implement long-term Housing First and housing-led responses to situations of homelessness. It is crucial for European and national governments to assist cities by fostering investment in social and affordable housing and removing barriers such as restrictive state aid rules for services of general economic interest.

■ Boost available funding for city governments to address youth homelessness

In the fight against homelessness, local investments mostly rely on municipal budgets. However, these resources often fall short. To create a sustainable funding framework for municipalities, it is crucial to dedicate additional financial support and explore diverse financing avenues. National strategies against homelessness should include adequate funding for the cities in charge of their implementation. The accessibility and processes of EU funds, in particular ESF+ and ERDF, to local governments should be improved and simplified. Exploring further financing opportunities is also essential, including the Invest EU programme in partnership with the Council of Europe Bank. Public-private partnerships and philanthropic contributions can also provide additional financial resources to support local efforts in combatting homelessness.

■ Reinforce the focus on local level in the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness

Within the framework of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, great progress has been made in the adoption of national strategies. However, national strategies will only be effective if implemented with multilevel governance and in close collaboration with cities. Unfortunately, local governments have so far had limited direct access to the activities of the Platform. The creation of a working group on finance, in which cities have a notable presence, is a great step in enhancing cities' sense of ownership of this ambition. The new set of activities to be implemented by EPOCH as of 2024 will also provide an opportunity to reinforce cities' involvement and the focus on their strategies, needs and continued efforts to end homelessness by 2030.

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Executive summary

Youth homelessness is increasing in cities across Europe and being exacerbated by multiple significant crises, including the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, increased cost of living, unaffordable housing and migration.

Cities consider these trends very worrying given the known long-term consequences for people who experience homelessness at a young age. As Deborah Quilgars[3] said, youth homelessness can be seen as a "faltered or interrupted transition to adulthood" with dramatic repercussions, from increased mental health issues to heightened risk of repeated homelessness throughout a lifetime. Addressing youth homelessness is therefore essential to breaking the lifelong cycle of chronic and repeated homelessness, and to investing in young peoples' futures.

Yet youth homelessness can be prevented when services and stakeholders work together to ensure access, advice and support. Preventing and adequately responding to youth homelessness is therefore a key factor in the ambition to end homelessness by 2030.[4]

This report outlines what is causing youth homelessness in cities across Europe and the positive steps local municipalities are taking to address this significant issue and its complex challenges. It also provides several recommendations about how all levels of government, including municipalities, can work together to address the issues involved in this phenomenon.

There is a noticeable gap in existing data when looking at the previous studies in this field. Few publications provide an overview of the multiple factors at play in youth homelessness. Most research focuses on a specific group or profile of young people experiencing homelessness. Additionally, a significant share of the research is centred on the United States and Canada.

In Europe, Deborah Quilgars's article 'Youth Homelessness'[5] provides an interesting perspective. It is complemented by FEANTSA and Fondation Abbé Pierre's 6th Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe,[6] which provides an understanding of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on young people. However, research covering the local level is limited, with most existing studies focusing on national comparisons or specific projects.

Building on a previous Eurocities publication,[7] which demonstrates the essential role of cities in combatting homelessness, this report aims to bridge this gap by:

- providing an overview of the main causes of youth homelessness and how they manifest at local level;

- gathering evidence of successful and innovative interventions by municipalities throughout Europe;

- outlining key messages to municipalities and national and EU stakeholders on how the challenges driving an increase in youth homelessness can be better addressed at the local level.

The data used to compile this report was provided by 29 cities[8] from 15 European countries,[9] governing over 26 million people, through a dedicated survey, two in-person meetings and several individual interviews. The evidence was gathered directly from city authorities and their partner organisations. The responses were integrated into a comparative analysis to identify trends and map inspiring practices.

Definitions and data collection on youth homelessness

While this is not the main focus of this report, it is important to note that there is no universal definition of homelessness at either the EU or national level. This has resulted in **cities using different definitions of homelessness** and referring to diverse demographics when discussing youth homelessness. Eurocities' mapping revealed that even within the same country, cities tend to use different definitions.[10] The main categories covered by local definitions are detailed in the graph below.[11]

These categories can also be interpreted differently by each city, leading to variations. One example is how cities include migrants in these statistics. Some cities only incorporate migrants of a specific status into homelessness statistics (for example unaccompanied minors) while other categories (people living in emergency accommodations for asylum seekers) are counted separately or excluded entirely.

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[3] D. Quilgars, Youth Homelessness (2016).
[4] As per the ambition set up in the Lisbon declaration.
[5] D. Quilgars, Youth Homelessness (2016).
[6] FEANTSA & Fondation Abbé Pierre, Sixth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe (2021).

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[7] Eurocities, Access to affordable and social housing and support to homeless people (2020), accessible here: https://tinyurl.com/5n74rc7w
[8] Cities covered: Barcelona, Berlin, Bialystok, Bologna, Braga, Bratislava, Dublin, Dusseldorf, Ghent, Glasgow, Gothenburg, Leipzig, Lisbon, Ljubljana, Lyon Metropole, Madrid, Malmo, Munich, Nantes, Poznan, Stockholm, Tallinn, Tampere, The Hague, Toulouse, Utrecht, Vienna, Warsaw and Zaragoza.
[9] Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, The Netherlands.
[10] In this publication, we noted differences in France, Germany, Poland and Spain.
[11] These categories are based on ETHOS-light definition.

Categories of homelessness covered by the local definition

Category	Percentage
Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends	56%
People living in nonconventional dwellings due to lack of housing	56%
People living in institutions	60%
People living in accommodation for the homeless	100%
People in emergency accommodations	100%
People living rough	92%

■ Percentage of cities covering this definition

Similarly, there is **no unified definition of the age range included under the category 'youth'**. Most cities consider 'youth' to be those aged between 18 and 25 years old. In Dublin, 'youth' refers to 18 to 24-year-olds, while some cities include a wider range (The Hague up to 27, Bratislava 29, and Leipzig, Lisbon, Nantes and Vienna 30). A few cities even cover minors starting from age 7 (Tallinn), 15 (Bratislava), 16 (Toulouse) and 17 (Utrecht). While most cities referred to single young individuals, some contributions mentioned cases of young families facing homelessness.

Some cities, like Berlin or Dusseldorf, do not have policies or data disaggregated by age, although they usually count minors separately. Additionally, different municipal services may categorise 'youth' differently, but they usually adapt their response to specific age-groups.

Beyond the lack of a unified definition, another challenge for European comparisons is the **variety of methods used for data collection**. Half of the respondents use reporting from services and stakeholders to collect data. A few cities rely exclusively on street counts, but many combine both approaches. The frequency of such reporting varies from monthly, annually, or biennially, to entirely irregular intervals. Within these local counts, information on the age of the person is not always recorded. Conversely, cities such as Bratislava[12] or Lyon Metropole have specific research on homeless youth.[13]

Given these limitations, this report is not aimed at comparing and evaluating specific figures but rather identifying trends and compiling and analysing qualitative data. It is, however, important to keep in mind that our findings reflect the profiles of young people known by local service providers. Potential biases in the methods and implementation of the data collection, as well as instances of 'hidden homelessness',[14] should therefore be factored into the interpretation of our findings.

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[12] The specifics of the needs of homeless young people in Bratislava (2012) (available only in Slovakian).
[13] Upcoming publication.
[14] Hidden homelessness generally refers to people who are not accessing housing support resources and are therefore 'hidden' from national statistics. This can include 'sofa surfers' but also groups such as women or LGBTQI+ persons who tend to rely less on services due to their inadequacy or fears of adverse experiences when using them.
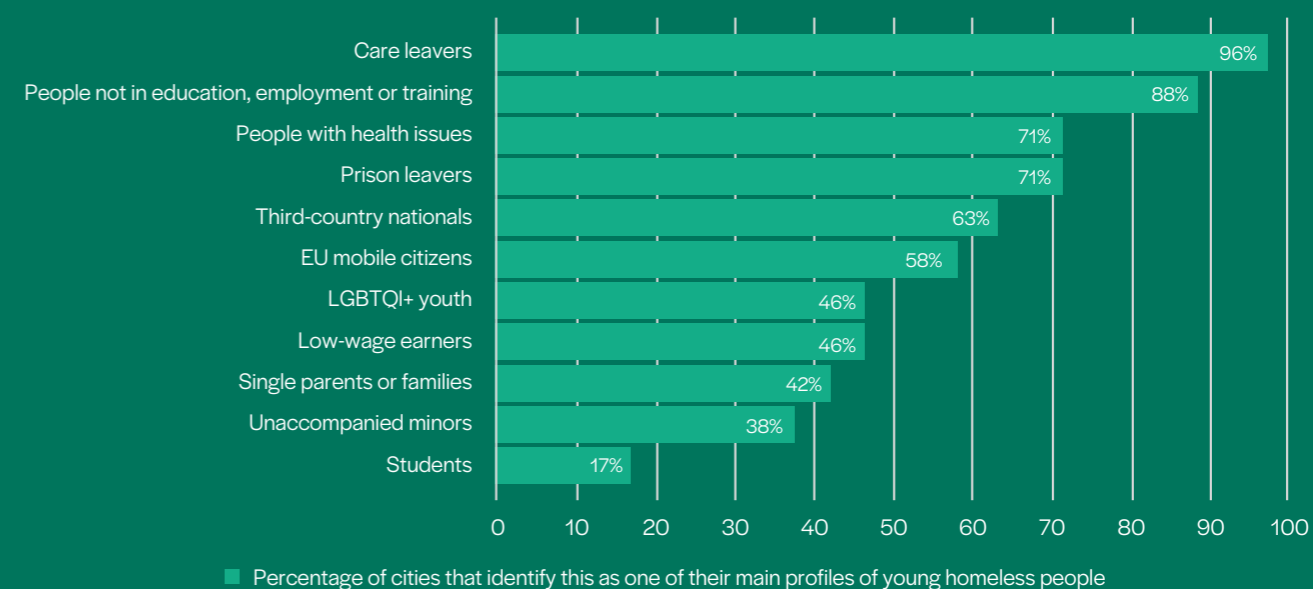
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Youth homelessness in cities

A phenomenon increasingly affecting the most vulnerable

Levels of youth homelessness reported by cities vary greatly, with numbers ranging from a few dozen to over a thousand. The consistent trend across Europe is evident: **homelessness is on the rise among young people**. In Barcelona, even a substantial budget increase of 59% was insufficient to curb this rising trend. Some groups seem disproportionally affected. The profiles of young people most affected by homelessness, as reported by local services, are included in the graph below.

It is notable that all responding cities reported that many young homeless people have lived in the foster care system. Like them, most young homeless people have in common specific additional challenges during the key period of transition to adulthood and independence (leaving school and struggling to find employment, being released from prison, arriving in a different country, etc.).

Profiles of young people most affected by homelessness

Profile	Percentage
Care leavers	96%
People not in education, employment or training	88%
People with health issues	71%
Prison leavers	71%
Third-country nationals	63%
EU mobile citizens	58%
LGBTQI+ youth	46%
Low-wage earners	46%
Single parents or families	42%
Unaccompanied minors	38%
Students	17%

■ Percentage of cities that identify this as one of their main profiles of young homeless people

In some cities, however, these profiles are evolving, and specific trends are emerging. While only four cities (Bratislava, Dublin, Lyon and Toulouse) reported having homeless students, this seems to be an emerging trend in several municipalities with attractive universities. Dusseldorf and Munich witnessed an increase among families with youngsters and children – with all members experiencing homelessness – while Nantes noted an increase in the number of homeless women, although they remain a minority.

Improved quality of services provided in Dusseldorf (especially after the renovation of the shelter, which now offers individual spaces) encouraged more women to access them for the first time. Several cities, such as Bialystok and Zaragoza, also reported a rising share of young people supported by homeless services as displaying mental health symptoms. In Warsaw, this increase extends to physical health concerns, such as chronic diseases and disabilities.

The trends in Glasgow and Utrecht seem less consistent. According to Glasgow survey responders, this might be linked to reduced use of services during the pandemic, while Utrecht's service providers report stable numbers but with early signs of a potential increase. **Overall, many cities expect this trend to worsen in the coming months or years.** Only Tampere and Malmo reported decreases, particularly among individuals who experience a housing crisis rather than complex needs intertwined with, for example, health and substance misuse issues.

While not usually accounted for when measuring housing exclusion, cities such as Gothenburg, Lisbon, Stockholm, Tallinn, Utrecht, and Zaragoza report that young people also tend to stay longer in the family home. This is a strong indicator of their struggle to afford and access housing. Similarly, cities see signs that more young people rely on 'sofa surfing',[15] a phenomenon which often precedes other forms of homelessness.

Current socio-economic trends impacting homelessness

The different crises that Europe has recently faced or is still facing are significant factors in the escalating rates of homelessness, particularly among youth.

Covid-19 pandemic
The impact of Covid-19 on youth has been well documented. The pandemic exacerbated a variety of pre-existing challenges and risks, resulting in increased vulnerability among young people. Lockdowns led to job losses, particularly among young people in precarious jobs, impacting their ability to pay bills. Record numbers of young people had to rely on food aid for survival. Dropping out of school and lack of socialisation during lockdowns also put them at increased risk of homelessness, especially when combined with mental health issues. Many students were compelled to return to their family homes, interrupting their path to independence and self-sufficiency. Extended periods with families sometimes led to strained relationships and rendered cohabitation difficult.

Rising cost of living and inflation
The sharp rise in inflation levels and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis are mentioned by almost all cities as major contributors to the heightened levels of homelessness. Their impact is profound and direct. They not only affect rent levels but also costs of services, food, and other necessities. In a majority of countries, income levels do not rise, reducing young people's disposable income and forcing them to compromise between rent, food, energy bills, etc. Their decreased budget also reduces their capacity to secure housing, particularly in highly competitive markets. The risks of poverty and specifically of energy poverty are a pressing concern. The cost-of-living crisis not only puts more people at risk of homelessness but also forces many young people to live in inadequate or unstable housing conditions.

The consequences go beyond the risks of housing exclusion. High prices affect people's sense of safety and well-being. They impact educational and professional choices and outcomes. And many cities observe the impact on mental health and risks of addiction.

Housing crisis
The repercussions of the cost-of-living crisis are exacerbated in big cities where housing is often unaffordable. Over the last few years, rent prices have soared due to both inflation and market pressure, making it particularly difficult for young people to enter the housing market. In Berlin and Stockholm, as in many cities, this is particularly evident for single persons or low-income flats. Students find it increasingly difficult to find adequate housing solutions. This impacts young people's choices in relation to their university education, with some people choosing to study at home or even forgoing higher education due to the cost of housing. The escalating prices in the for-profit housing market also impact the affordable and social housing sectors when more and more people rely on it, thus leading to a general housing crisis across all income levels.

Migration
Many European cities see a connection between increasing numbers of migrants and the national policies governing migration on the one hand and the rise in youth homelessness on the other hand. This is to say that national level regulations can create situations where, for instance, cities are prevented from providing housing to homeless undocumented migrants. Across Europe, the lack of regular status might also discourage some migrants from accessing services out of fear of being registered and having their status communicated to law enforcement and potentially being forced to return to their country of origin or a different third country.

Specific circumstances also exacerbate the levels of homelessness among migrants and affect the ability of cities to provide adequate services. UK cities refer to the restrictive regulations established after Brexit.

In countries neighbouring Ukraine, particularly Poland but also others including Germany, tremendous efforts were made to house Ukrainian refugees. Despite this, the scale of the phenomenon still proved challenging.
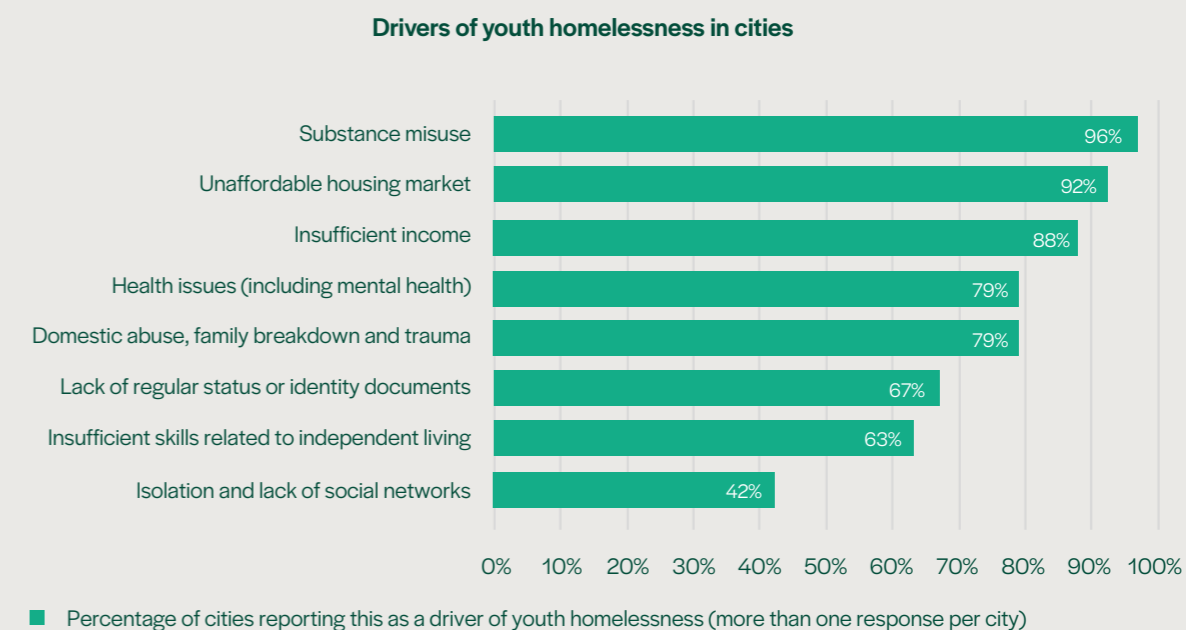
Malmo is the only city reporting improvement in the migratory situation.

Main causes and city responses to youth homelessness
What causes youth homelessness?

For the purpose of this report, we identified the **main causes of homeless experience among young people.** We combined these findings with **evidence of measures that cities take to address them**. This approach has allowed us to determine the **key success factors** when developing measures and policy responses to address youth homelessness.

Local data and reporting from social workers highlight the following drivers as being the most prevalent.

Drivers of youth homelessness in cities

Driver	Percentage
Substance misuse	96%
Unaffordable housing market	92%
Insufficient income	88%
Health issues (including mental health)	79%
Domestic abuse, family breakdown and trauma	79%
Lack of regular status or identity documents	67%
Insufficient skills related to independent living	63%
Isolation and lack of social networks	42%

■ Percentage of cities reporting this as a driver of youth homelessness (more than one response per city)

Before focusing specifically on the main causes of youth homelessness and how cities address each of them, we have highlighted two overarching elements that are essential in cities' strategies to end youth homelessness.

Prevention of youth homelessness: a critical yet often overlooked aspect

While an increasing number of cities have prevention strategies or include a strong focus on prevention in their homelessness plans, few respondents report measures focusing specifically on youth at risk. In some locations, this may be linked to the low number of reported cases, which can be addressed through case-by-case solutions. With an increasing understanding of the value of prevention efforts that help young people avoid housing crises and homelessness, other cities have started to recognise this as a gap in their approach.

Due to this lack of preventive solutions, cities often rely on crisis responses, such as **prevention of eviction** (Ghent, Vienna) or **rapid rehousing, as well as measures designed to prevent repeated homelessness spells**. This approach of preventing recurring homelessness is essential, given that trajectories to 'exit' homelessness are not linear. Quick solutions are also important to prevent longer periods of homelessness which can have dramatic negative long-term consequences, both by increasing the risk of future experiences of homelessness and by contributing to more complex situations and needs.

Vienna's preventative approach to homelessness

In Vienna, a variety of measures have been put in place to prevent homelessness of young people. For residents under 17 who need to live independently, the city can provide access to social housing under certain conditions. A similar system is in place for young care leavers to ensure that they access their own apartment and do not become homeless. Other measures such as support to education or integration into the labour market are also available depending on the situation and the wishes of each individual. Specific support also targets young people who have experienced homelessness with their families in order to prevent inherited homelessness when they become independent.

✓ **Success factor:**
recognising and addressing the specificities of youth homelessness

The first success factor lies in recognising the specificities of the homelessness of young individuals and placing it at the centre of the intervention model. This means considering both the specific needs and expectations of the person, as well as their developmental stage. This approach should be combined with choice-oriented, individualised approaches. As one respondent said, room to experiment must be created in order to "let them learn from their mistakes" in a supportive manner. For this purpose, it is recommended to co-create policies with the young people who will be directly affected and implement these policies in their own environment. Cities consistently highlight flexibility and creativity as important components in their work with young homeless people.

✓ **Success factor:**
focusing on prevention

Strategies for combatting youth homelessness should include a strong focus on prevention, which considers the specific risk factors and early signs of homelessness among younger individuals. This includes, for example, fostering education and training opportunities, identifying early signs of conflicts at home and fostering the well-being and mental health of children and young people.

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Outreach work and low-threshold services

Establishing a first positive contact with a homeless individual can be a challenging task for local administrations due to significant trust issues and disconnection of the vulnerable individual from the available services. **Low-threshold services and outreach work** are therefore important to create a first contact and facilitate connection with the available support structures. Gothenburg, for example, has several centres for homeless people that serve as initial contact points for homeless individuals to connect with support services. The municipality has the Centre Against Homelessness, which offers advice and counselling, while the NGO Skyddsvärnet has two units; most users of the latter's Pop In centre are under 25. The Värnet Centre also does active outreach by touring the city in a bus.[16]

The Hague has a 'Street consultations' team composed of professionals and volunteers with in-depth knowledge of the target group. In Berlin, the outreach team visits locations where young homeless people gather, including public squares and parks. They offer a range of support including working with public authorities, providing assistance in finding education or work opportunities, offering advice in case of conflicts with parents and relatives, schools or employers, and accessing leisure activities.

Several cities focus on reaching out to groups that were identified as particularly vulnerable in their context. Dusseldorf and Vienna, for example, target young individuals who still live with their parents but increasingly spend time away from home. Other cities, such as Lisbon, focus on school leavers. Lisbon's law for child protection ensures that consistent absences from classes or school by a student trigger notification to the 'Family commission'. Social services are then able to intervene and provide care and financial support as needed. In Barcelona, the focus is on migrants and non-violent youth gangs.

✓ **Success factor:**
actively reaching out to young people in need

Successful approaches include active measures to reach out to young people who might be homeless or at risk of homelessness, rather than passively anticipating that they will seek the services themselves. Many young homeless people do not identify with the traditional (somewhat stereotypical) image of the homeless person. Their previous experiences with social or care services might also have deterred them from asking for assistance. It is important for homelessness teams to engage with young people who might be homeless in places where they typically spend their time.

Outreach and low-threshold activities then serve as an entry point for longer-term responses. These approaches often focus on specific factors that contribute to youth homelessness.

Mental health and substance misuse

Substance misuse is the driving factor most frequently mentioned by cities. It is, however, mostly seen as an **inadequate coping mechanism and a form of self-medication for mental health issues.**

Many young homeless people have gone through traumatic experiences. A key feature of young people experiencing homelessness is low economic and social capital due to adverse childhood experiences and limited educational outcomes. This is particularly the case for young individuals who were placed in the social care system. The circumstances leading to their placement and the experience itself might have been traumatic.

High levels of trauma are also prevalent among refugees that had to flee their countries because of persecution, war or violence. Similarly, migrants who had to leave behind their country, community and often families experience traumatic events during their journey or after arriving in a new country.

At the critical period in life when stability and social connections are particularly important, these teenagers and young adults face serious challenges and are often ill-equipped for them.

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[16] More information on Gothenburg's approach to youth homelessness can be found in Eurocities' paper Fighting youth homelessness in cities: https://tinyurl.com/h99996sh

They may have not yet developed healthy coping mechanisms and might lack positive role models. In these circumstances, the lack of guidance and trust can make it particularly difficult for them to seek out and access services during major life transitions. Even if they reach out to mental health services, the long waiting lists of these often underfinanced and undersized systems can prove discouraging or exacerbate their health conditions. Additionally, the high costs of some of these services can be unaffordable to young individuals without private insurance.

In the most serious cases, the consequent experience of rough sleeping in turn contributes to further deterioration of their mental and physical health. All of these factors can result in social isolation and substance and alcohol misuse, resulting in a vicious circle of escapism.

For those who do live in traditional housing, substance misuse can also increase the risk of eviction and subsequent homelessness, if it interferes with everyday tasks such as maintaining the flat, keeping a regular job or managing finances.

Being able to improve one's situation is made even more difficult by the limited services that are accessible for people actively using substances. Indeed, many cities offer services only to those who are sober. Staff in homeless services are usually not trained in providing appropriate support to substance users, while addiction treatment and mental health services often do not adequately cater to patients experiencing homelessness. This leaves homeless people actively using substances in a state of limbo with no services truly adapted to their circumstances.

City responses

To address both the issues of mental health and substance misuse, several cities, such as Glasgow, have **developed care and treatment services tailored to a younger public**. These services are designed to accommodate the specific needs of this target group by offering a mix of specialised settings and open, more flexible environments. In Leipzig, a youth drug support centre offers counselling sessions for young individuals and their families. Besides drug misuse, they also address pathological media use. In Bialystok, primary care physicians are used as a first entry point in an attempt to limit hurdles in accessing care and facilitating regular follow up.

Everyday activities: an entry point for care in Barcelona

The city of Barcelona realised that younger patients struggled to adhere to the traditional health system. They created 'Dar Chabab', a daycare centre for young people where they can access health, psychological and psychiatric care in an open environment. This service is complemented with outreach work targeting young people in public spaces without expecting them to be the ones seeking the services. The city has also been very reactive to trends they have identified. In the summer of 2019, during the peak of detection of young people in situations of homelessness, the city established a specific temporary programme to help identify young people in vulnerable situations. Various activities, such as sports, cooking classes, bicycle repair, etc., were offered to establish trust and facilitate other types of interventions. Following the pandemic, Barcelona also created CRAB Llar d'Oportunitats, which provides specialised care for 18–21-year-olds (up to 25 in specific circumstances), including people with mental health issues and or drug use problems.

HOPE 4 Lisbon

'Homeless Outreach Psychiatric Engagement for Lisbon' is a collaborative project between the psychiatric hospital and the municipality. An outreach team was created specifically to conduct psychiatric evaluations and provide counselling and mental health referrals in a street context. By collaborating directly with the psychiatric hospital, they ensure proper continuity of services, addressing a common challenge in providing comprehensive care.

In order to better serve young people already benefitting from housing services, access to mental health support is facilitated by **involving specialised professionals directly in the existing services**. In Vienna, psychiatrists and psychologists are available in both the housing units and the emergency shelters. In Lisbon, these services also include designated rooms for safer consumption of alcohol and drugs. Similarly, in Malmo, mental health professionals work directly in the supported housing units, ensuring that mental health care is integrated with housing services. Madrid's work with mental health services is coordinated through a collaboration agreement overseeing emergency care for rough sleepers. However, this partnership is limited to the most serious cases, creating a service gap for those whose needs are not deemed urgent.

Besides involving mental health professionals in housing services, cities also **train social workers and housing service providers on adequate responses and support for people experiencing mental health issues**, including addiction (Dusseldorf, Glasgow, Leipzig and Vienna). Several cities focus on trauma-informed practices where awareness and knowledge of trauma and its impact on individuals is integrated into their policies, procedures and practices. By building on a strengths-based perspective, and providing beneficiaries with safety, respect, and choice, this approach ensures that the individual's life experience is taken into account while avoiding further re-traumatisation.[17]

Success factor:
increasing mental health and well-being support

Measures addressing youth homelessness need to take into account the mental issues faced by many young homeless individuals. Trauma-informed approaches should be mainstreamed, and low-threshold outpatient help needs to be available to foster adherence to the support programme. This support should cover both mental illnesses and potential substance misuse. However, participation in these programmes should remain voluntary (except in life-threatening cases, and in line with each country's regulation) with no imposed adhesion to a care plan.

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[17] More information on cities' work on mental health and homelessness can be found in Eurocities paper https://tinyurl.com/mrxacpt5.

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Corporate parenting in Glasgow

Glasgow has established a system of 'corporate parenting' under which the city, represented by its employees, is expected to take over the responsibilities that are associated with parenting. This goes beyond the provision of basic needs and safety and also covers tasks such as establishing trust with and providing advice and guidance to the young person, fostering their emotional development, etc. Similarly to traditional parenting, this corporate responsibility does not end when the individual turns 18. Instead, support and guidance are expected to remain available as long as the person needs it.

Family breakdown, isolation and learning to live independently

Family breakdown is also a frequent cause of trauma and a driving factor in experiences of homelessness. In Dublin, 30% of young people report it as the cause of their situation, while in Warsaw, it is estimated that almost 20% of people run away from their homes as a consequence of intra-family conflict.

Family breakdowns can be caused by many factors, including generationally reproduced poverty and homelessness, overcrowded living conditions or inherited trauma. For some young people, and particularly women or LGBTQI+ youth, leaving the home abruptly (by one's own choice or being forced to leave) might be a way to escape physical and psychological abuse. Experience in the criminal justice system and prison stays can also have devastating consequences on family connections. Despite significant attempts to maintain links within families, placement of children and young people in social care settings are also associated with family breakdowns (including due to pre-existing circumstances that would have prompted the placement).

It is particularly striking to know that foster care leavers face a significantly higher risk of experiencing homelessness.[18] Cities such as Madrid even report that this phenomenon is on the rise. The experience of being part of the social care system can be particularly challenging. Young people must navigate the issues of compartmentalised and complex support systems that contribute to their care. The sudden pressure of self-sufficiency upon reaching the age of majority and transitioning out of the system can intensify their anxiety. Additionally, for many of them when they age out of care (in most countries at the age of 18), no transition is organised from youth to adult care or towards full independence.

When they leave foster care, they are expected to live independently at a young age. This requires financial management, administrative, housing maintenance, social and other skills. These young care leavers might have lacked appropriate role models to learn from or had to prioritise dealing with their traumatic experiences. As a result, they might be unequipped to handle independent living. It is important to recognise that young people living with their families are rarely expected to be fully independent, both emotionally and financially, on their 18th birthday!

Legislation in some countries is gradually shifting to ensure that young people with experience in care have access to accommodation and practical and emotional support from their local municipality that reflects their needs for an extended transition period and their particular challenges. Yet in some cases, transition plans do not accommodate the unique circumstances of these young adults (such as flexibility to change regions, careers or study plans).

As a result, young people who have experienced family breakdowns or have spent time in foster care settings often find themselves more isolated, lacking social and family networks.

They are disconnected from supports and resources usually available to their peers and might face stigma. The impact that their situation will have on their education also makes it more difficult to secure a stable job and financial resources. Coupled with the typical requirement for one or more guarantors to access the private housing market, these factors accentuate their risk of homelessness.

City responses

As an essential measure to address the significant role family breakdowns plays in youth homelessness, cities such as Dublin, Glasgow, Lisbon, Tampere and Utrecht often prioritise **mediation with families and other support networks** or even re-engagement (Lisbon, Tampere, Utrecht) when the disagreements have escalated. Dusseldorf has even set up advice centres to identify and address situations before they transform into severe problems. Mediation services pay specific attention to groups identified as being particularly at risk, including LGBTQI+[19] persons who often face discrimination, even from their own families, as evidenced in Dusseldorf, or migrants who have undergone family reunification and have to overcome the trauma of a previous separation, as reported in Zaragoza.

But it is not always possible or recommended to recreate links with problematic family members. In such cases, alternative forms of support provided by cities become essential in enabling young people to achieve full independence. Warsaw, for example, provides intensive interdisciplinary support to victims of domestic violence, and Poznan has dedicated secured housing for this target group.

When family relationships are not supportive of a young person's recovery from homelessness, cities can help the person to create new healthy support networks of relationships, for example by fostering connections with supportive neighbours, as in Utrecht. Tampere has developed a support network where individuals who have experienced homelessness advise and assist young people who are currently going through these challenging circumstances.

For certain groups, this strategy is particularly important in preventing future homelessness spells. Utrecht therefore recommends this approach for young individuals with a criminal past.

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[18] In the UK, one in three care leavers become homeless in the first two years immediately after they leave care. See M. Stein and M. Morris, Increasing the Number of Care Leavers in 'Settled, Safe Accommodation' (2010).

[19] One in five LGBTIQ+ young people experience homelessness, according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. This ratio increases to one in three for trans people and nearly 40% for intersex people. See A. Ritosa et al., Perceptions: Comparative findings from a study of homeless service providers and LGBTI-focused organisations about LGBTIQ youth homelessness in Europe (2021).

Success factor:
building the young person's skills

Skills for independent living are an essential part of the transition to independent adult life. Yet they are not innate. While most people learn them from family members, it is vital to provide support for those who were not in a position to acquire such skills. Education that teaches how to find and maintain housing, administrative tasks, navigating service administrations, and financial literacy should be available to all.

For those who have aged out of social care systems, maintaining healthy family ties can be more problematic. Acknowledging these challenges, cities such as Glasgow, Lisbon, Munich and Warsaw **allow different forms of placement back into child protection systems** (for example, by reuniting with their previous foster family if they remain available) or even ease the transition in and out of the system by establishing a presumption that care provision can last longer than the typical cutoff age, usually until 25 years old. In Warsaw, this approach, combined with assistance to continue education and financial support, has proven successful. The rate of young people who successfully established their own household rose from 45.6% in 2017 to 79.4% in 2022.

Insufficient income and lack of affordable housing

Homelessness is a complex phenomenon, resulting from a combination of social and structural issues. Recent trends, as well as the analysis of the prevalence of drivers of youth homelessness, tend to demonstrate that **structural issues including housing affordability and income disparities play an increasing role in putting people in or at risk of homelessness**. General policies addressing these issues are therefore a necessary condition in the fight against homelessness.

In many cities, private rental markets are saturated and housing prices are increasing. This is especially prevalent in attractive cities, capitals and metropolises. Combined with a lack of social housing in most of Europe, pressure on the housing support systems is increasing, resulting in constantly growing waiting lists. Cities such as Berlin have noticed that reaching the end of a lease is becoming a trigger for the experience of homelessness. In some places, even access to emergency shelters is allocated based on a waiting list.

Young people tend to be particularly vulnerable to these phenomena. They are more likely to struggle to access accommodation within the private market, where a broad social network can often facilitate access to rental properties before they are publicly advertised. Furthermore, young people also fail to meet the waiting time criteria for social housing (over 10 years in some European cities), which means they are more likely to be left without solutions. Few cities have dedicated affordable social housing programmes for younger tenants and some young individuals (particularly migrants) might not be eligible for certain types of support.

In this context of rising prices and high inflation, the income levels required to rent a house become unattainable for many young people. Indeed, those aged 18–24 are most affected by poverty in the EU.[20] Young people with lower levels of education or who have left school early, often rely on low-skilled work or irregular forms of employment with lower salaries.

These positions can be hard to find in some cities, leading to a higher prevalence of unemployment amongst both qualified and unqualified young people.[21] In several countries, young adults are either not eligible for income benefits (in France) or get reduced amounts (in the Netherlands when under 21). Some young people also choose not to use these benefits due to trust issues and stigma.

In some countries, for young people to be able to access certain benefits such as income support, they have to meet a defined set of criteria that can prove excessively challenging for vulnerable young individuals. Failure to meet these criteria can result either in cuts to or complete withdrawal of these benefits.

Additionally, Feantsa's research reveals that public budget cuts following the 2008 financial crisis disproportionally affected welfare benefits for young people.[22] Tragically, in cities such as Berlin, young people are facing overwhelming debts and all the consequences associated with it.

With lower incomes, less stable contracts and difficulties in providing upfront payments, finding and sustaining a tenancy can become extremely difficult.

City responses on access to housing

While housing regulation and income support (particularly defining eligibility and adequate level) tend to be national competencies, cities use all the opportunities at their disposal to address insufficient income and lack of affordable housing.

In particular, local authorities have a strong focus on fighting the unaffordability of the housing market, both because it is considered one of the primary drivers of youth homelessness, and because local authorities possess more significant (although limited) competencies in this area.

The primary response consists **of increasing the availability of social and affordable housing for young people**. This usually includes implementing new legislation favourable to building affordable housing or directly commissioning new construction. In Malmo and Munich, a proportion of the new housing is targeted specifically at younger tenants. Other cities such as Barcelona or Lyon Metropole also take measures to regulate the private housing market, including tourist rentals, which in cities with a high tourist turnout tend to push local vulnerable populations to the city outskirts. Bratislava is currently running a pilot project to strengthen the partnership between the city and the private sector and expand the housing opportunities for people with low income.

Besides these more general measures, cities have established solutions that are more targeted to individuals at risk of housing exclusion. Several cities (including Bratislava, Ghent, Tallinn, Toulouse, Utrecht and Vienna) provide **housing benefits or other forms of financial support**, sometimes supplementing existing national schemes. In addition to financial support intended for direct housing costs, some cities also consider more indirect costs linked to moving in, such as rental deposits or furniture needs (Utrecht).

Gothenburg gives people and furniture a second chance!

Gothenburg has developed a 'Second Chance' partnership with Ikea. The company donates furniture and home decor items, which are then made available to vulnerable people when they first move into their flat. This arrangement not only alleviates the financial costs of the move but also helps beneficiaries create a sense of home and ownership. The municipal unit Smedjans Sysselsättningscenter coordinates the process of collecting these products from Ikea and ensures their delivery to the beneficiaries.

[20] Eurostat, EU-SILC (2021).

[21] In May 2023, youth unemployment rates reached 13.9% in the EU compared to 5.9% for the general population, according to Eurostat unemployment statistics.
[22] FEANTSA & Fondation Abbé Pierre, Sixth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe (2021).

From emergency solution to stable housing in Bratislava and Ghent

In Ghent, night shelters and 24/7 shelters have been complemented since 2022 by an emergency studio system that provides accommodation for up to 10 young individuals. A team of social workers focuses on outreach to young people without permanent residence and offers these solutions as a respite until a longer-term solution is found.

In Bratislava, flats are available for young people or families in crisis (health issues, loss of employment, eviction, etc.). They can stay in this apartment for six months, allowing them to take time to stabilise their situation and become independent or to be redirected to another support system.

But the challenges to accessing the housing market can go beyond financial difficulties. Cities such as Bratislava, Tallinn and Tampere have therefore also created **counselling services focusing on housing**.

In situations of immediate risk of homelessness or rough sleeping, the longer-term measures mentioned above can be insufficient to respond to a crisis situation. Cities have devised emergency responses such as shelters or transitional housing. Utrecht has created a shelter for young adults in response to a critical need. Several cities also provide short-to mid-term housing solutions whose beneficiaries receive intense support aimed at guiding them towards long-term alternatives.

In The Hague, the Doorbraakplan seeks to create more places for young people leaving care by transforming existing real estate, such as offices or former hospitals, into residential spaces and developing temporary housing. In some cases, however, and particularly when cities have very tense housing markets, residents can struggle to find long-term housing solutions and therefore end up relying on support that was foreseen to be transitional for extensive periods of time.

To ensure more stability for young people who have been in or at risk of homelessness, European cities use several types of housing solutions. They take into account the specificities of this age group, their needs for connections and various degrees of autonomy, as well as their personal preferences. Therefore, the offers range from individual flats scattered around the city to shared housing (Toulouse) or congregate living (Glasgow).

For young people with more extensive needs, **supported housing** is available in most cities (Bratislava, Dublin, Gothenburg, Leipzig, Malmo, Nantes, Stockholm, Utrecht, Vienna). Several cities propose housing with targeted support for certain profiles of youth, including people with mental health or substance misuse issues (Glasgow, Malmo), young migrants (Lyon Metropole, Munich, Toulouse), individuals transitioning out of the care system (Barcelona, Bialystok, Ghent, Poznan, Vienna, Warsaw) or youth with a history in the criminal justice system (Glasgow, Utrecht). For those with mental health and addiction challenges that require more intensive support, Barcelona and Vienna have provisions for places in specialised care settings.

Going a step further, several cities (Bratislava, Dublin, Dusseldorf, Lisbon) have adopted the principles of the **Housing First** model[23] to provide support alongside open-ended housing provision. While some cities make the general Housing First system available to younger homeless people, others (Glasgow, Gothenburg, Lyon Metropole, Toulouse) have chosen to pilot or adopt the dedicated Housing First for Youth model.[24]

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y): Lyon Metropole

HF4Y upholds the core principles of Housing First (particularly immediate access to housing without preconditions, individualised client-driven support and self-determination) while adapting some of the key concepts and service delivery to the specificities of supporting a young person. This includes replacing harm reduction with the ambition of building a good life for the young individual and focusing specifically on relationship building in all its aspects.

In Lyon Metropole's project Logis Jeune, support is available from 9.00 to 21.00, thus adapting to the rhythms of younger adults. These young people are supported in building their own projects to learn autonomy and safely transition into independence. The association running the project for the metropolis also holds official tenancy of the flats for the first 18 months, giving each young person the time to get used to traditional rental rules (paying rent on time, not disturbing neighbours, etc.) before they take on the lease directly.

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[23] More information on Housing First and its implementation in European cities in Eurocities' paper Cities implementing Housing First in Europe – Learning from Lyon (2020). https://tinyurl.com/2fjmy9s9
[24] More information on Housing First for Youth in Fighting youth homelessness in cities.

✅ Success factor:
facilitating access to housing

Providing access to housing is one of the key success factors in the fight against youth homelessness, as demonstrated by the eagerness of cities to adopt housing-led, Housing First or Housing First for youth initiatives. Solutions such as developing affordable and social housing, including ring-fenced programmes for youth, will also help establish long-term solutions to youth homelessness. However, in a context of a tense housing market and given the time required to construct new housing, cities recognise the need for high quality alternative forms of housing to provide a timely response.

City responses to increase young people's income levels

While housing provision is a necessary part of the fight against homelessness, it is often not sufficient, particularly among young individuals. The high poverty rates among this group, as well as indicators showing that so-called young people Neither in Employment, Education nor Training (NEETs) are at increased risk of homelessness, highlight the importance of contributing to their financial independence. Cities therefore include in their services **interventions focusing on education, training and employment opportunities** (Bialystok, Glasgow, Leipzig, Lisbon, Lyon Metropole, Madrid, Poznan, Stockholm, Toulouse, Utrecht, Vienna).

In Bialystok, a dedicated fund incentivises care leavers to continue their education and training. In Glasgow and Lyon Metropole, projects combine housing provision with job activation. Lisbon's 'This is a restaurant' programme offers training opportunities as well as employment opportunities to youngsters who are interested in the hospitality sector. They serve real clients in a dedicated restaurant that operates with a social mission.

Besides fostering access to employment, cities offer assistance to address high indebtedness (Lisbon, Vienna) or direct financial support (Lisbon). While the national government is reluctant to extend the existing minimum income schemes to unemployed youth under 25, Lyon Metropole is experimenting with a dedicated minimum income scheme (18-25 years old) and will be evaluating its impact on different aspects of their lives, including access to housing.

Alternative work paid by the day: Nantes and Toulouse

Nantes and Toulouse have created opportunities for youth with addictions who often experience difficulties in maintaining longer-term contracts. Thanks to the municipalities, youth have the opportunity to take on very short-term jobs (even for a few hours or a single day with direct payment at the end of the day). Specific support is available to accompany them in executing their tasks. This system is particularly successful at accompanying individuals in challenging situations without overwhelming them with unrealistic expectations. Being able to execute these jobs even while in active addiction improves their mental health and especially their self-confidence, helps maintain some social connections and interactions, and contributes to facilitating their recovery.

✅ Success factor:
supporting the economic independence of young individuals

To create long-term prospects for young people, cities recommend including measures to support their further education or requalification in order to improve each individual's prospects of earning a decent and stable income. These measures are essential both as a response to situations of homelessness and in the context of prevention strategies. However, individual measures should be combined with broader discussions related to structural issues, such as a guaranteed living wage or unconditional basic income, led by the EU institutions and national governments.

Lack of residence permit

The hurdles mentioned in previous sections are heightened when the young person does not have a legal status or residence permit. For these so-called irregular migrants, it is exceedingly difficult to access services related to social housing, training or employment counselling. National authorities usually only provide for access to emergency housing, where, especially in cities experiencing higher arrivals of migrants, places are scarce.

Rights and support tend to be more extensive for minors. Yet gaining recognition as an unaccompanied minor presents its own set of difficulties. Moreover, once they turn 18 the transition to adult status can be challenging. While some countries have established transition periods during which services can still be provided, cities such as Barcelona report that the process to obtain a stable legal status is made particularly complicated by national policies. The 2021 Spanish law reform allows young migrants from Catalonia's Protection System to work upon turning 18. However, those outside this system must have a three-year uninterrupted stay in Spain and a specific job offer with specific conditions to legally work, which is often challenging.

Besides the high risk of homelessness during these transition periods when young migrants might struggle to continue to access services, the long waiting periods are time lost for their integration process. These delays can impact their ability to pursue education or access different forms of support which also contribute to increase the risk of future experiences of homelessness. Additionally, the long waiting times, associated with the uncertainty and the fear of being forced to return to their country of origin, act as increased stressors, which can have long-term implications for their mental health. As demonstrated previously, this plays a key role in young people's experiences of homelessness.

The lack of a residence permit is, however, not the only barrier to accessing housing. Research shows that refugees also face an increased risk of housing insecurity and homelessness compared to the general population.[25] This is often linked to a combination of factors, including low or unstable income, language barriers, discrimination and limited knowledge of the housing market and their rights.

City responses

While legal status and residence permits, or lack thereof, are important factors related to homelessness in cities, local authorities are extremely constrained in tackling them, because the governance of migration statuses is a national level competence. Cities rely on measures mentioned in the previous sections to support young people with a migration background. In particular, they focus on providing counsel and ensuring that young migrants access the support they are entitled to. Low-threshold services, for example, tend to be accessible to all, regardless of status. For those with a regular right to stay in the country, municipalities provide services to inform them about their rights and accompanying them through the application process for different forms of support such as healthcare, housing applications, etc.

Cities have also developed other forms of support for young people with a migration background. In Lyon Metropole, tiny houses are made available for mothers with a migrant background, alongside social support. Cities also often focus on measures fostering young migrants' inclusion in the labour market as a way to increase their chances of earning a living wage, becoming financially independent and therefore reducing their risk of experiencing homelessness.[26] In many cases, cities' responses to youth homelessness do not differentiate based on the migration background of the beneficiaries. Municipalities have, however, reported that some of their services attract mostly young migrants in or at risk of homelessness.

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[25] B.M. Khan, J. Waserman & M. Patel (2022) Perspectives of refugee youth experiencing homelessness: A Qualitative Study of Factors Impacting Mental Health and Resilience.
[26] For more information on cities' work on integration of migrants, please refer to Eurocities' Integrating Cities report (2022).

Madrid's Quinta Cocina

La Quinta Cocina is an integration project aimed at young people between the ages of 16 and 23 who are mainly migrants at risk of social exclusion. Its objective is to train young people as kitchen and waiter assistants to support their professional and social integration. Once they have concluded the training course at La Quinta Cocina, trainees gain paid work experience at actual restaurants and in the wider hospitality industry in Madrid. The project also offers leisure activities to create a social network as well as specific training courses on fire safety, first aid, and other skills of use in a professional kitchen setting.

© ASPA adolescents and young people Project. City of Madrid

Identifying and reaching out to young people in need can prove challenging. Young migrants, particularly those who do not have a residence permit, might avoid public authorities due to mistrust in institutions, negative past experience or fear of being sent back to their country of origin. In this context, collaboration with NGOs can play a key role in removing some of the barriers to access support.

Working together to end youth homelessness

The responses from 29 cities highlight complexity and interdependence of the driving factors leading to youth homelessness. Therefore, any adequate and effective measure aiming at ending homelessness requires **broad cooperation across city services**. This can include collaboration between homelessness services and departments in charge of a variety of social issues, such as poverty, employment, families, education and disabilities. In cities with a high number of homeless migrants, partnerships with the migration services are also frequently developed. Some cities also work with departments overseeing activities that can help identify people in need of support (urban planning, park and gardens or cleaning services) or act as a good entry point (sports and culture).

Besides collaboration across city services, working with other public local services has also proven to be important. This includes justice, prison or police services to organise transitions out of institutions, as well as with housing providers, whether social, private or cooperatives. Partnerships with health services are also quite common.

However, successful delivery of services relies on more than the collaboration of city or local public authorities. Most cities have formed close partnerships with NGOs that contribute to delivering services. While some cities maintain project-based collaborations, an increasing number of municipalities are moving towards more permanent, sustainable funding. Utrecht has developed effective collaboration with human rights advocates who help push those responsible to maintain the quality of services. It is important to note that municipal authorities have a key role in coordinating such partnerships and developing integrated responses to youth homelessness. National governments need to recognise this and ensure that funding is channelled through municipal authorities.

While essential, not all cities report multilevel governance and collaboration with different levels of government (most frequently national or regional levels, in some cases county level) as being established. Some even highlight these exchanges as particularly challenging.

These limitations in sharing the responsibilities and policy responses to fight homelessness can also be found when looking at the **financial sources available** for measures implemented at local level. While all cities dedicate a share of their municipal budget to finance measures to support people experiencing homelessness, only half benefit from national funding. European funding also remains underused, with only 35% of respondents declaring having used EU funds for their homelessness policies. Alternative forms of financing such as foundations or public-private partnerships are quite rare, with only four and two cities respectively using them.

✅ **Success factor:**

multilevel and multistakeholder collaboration

Besides the type of services available, the way in which support is delivered remains an essential success factor. Strategies aiming at fighting youth homelessness require multilevel governance bringing together policymakers from different levels possessing the relevant competencies. Additionally, collaboration and strong partnerships with NGOs and private stakeholders are also necessary for effective implementation. Finally, integrated service delivery is only possible through close coordination of work across city departments.
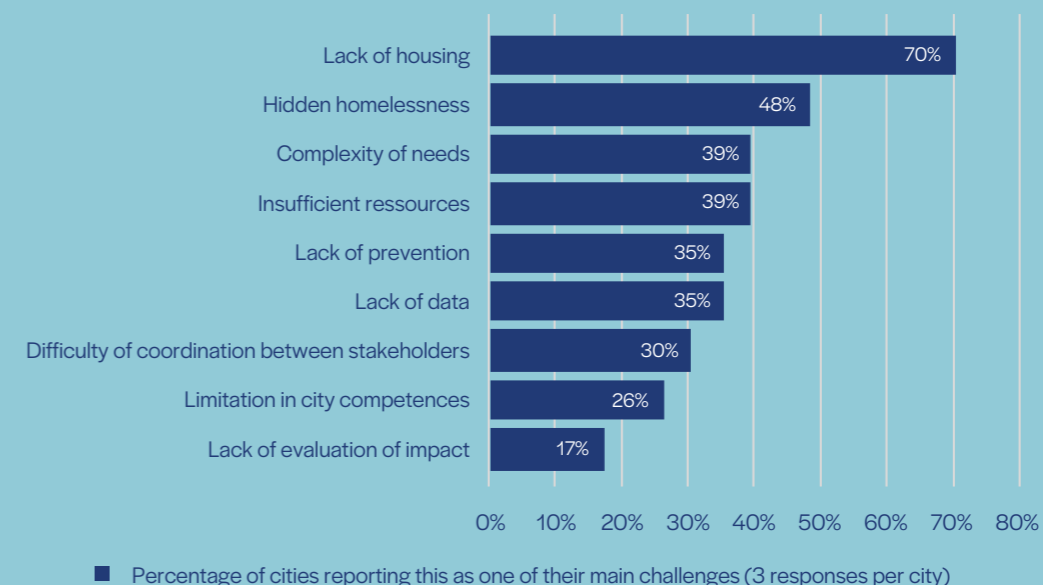
Navigating persistent issues in city-level responses to youth homelessness

Several challenges impede cities and their efforts to develop ambitious policies and services aimed at combatting youth homelessness.

Lack of housing is the challenge most reported by cities. This is in line with the identification of lack of housing as a major cause of youth homelessness in our report. In addition to affecting young people's ability to access housing, the ongoing housing crisis also prevents cities from providing effective long-term responses to homelessness based on housing-led and housing-first approaches. As a result, cities are often compelled to rely on emergency solutions or transitional and unconventional forms of housing such as tiny houses, high quality container houses, etc. The lack of affordable housing, coupled with inflationary trends within housing markets, are compounded by young people's relative low incomes and precarious position in the labour market.

The second most significant hurdle for cities' ambition to end youth homelessness is the **prevalence of hidden homelessness**. Both researchers and service providers estimate that a significant share of young people without a stable home rely on couch surfing, thereby remaining unnoticed by social services. A considerable number of these hidden homeless young people are young migrants without legal status. Fear of being forced to return to their country of origin and lack of knowledge of their rights and services available to them often lead them to intentionally avoid support provided by local governments. Some of these young migrants are known by NGOs who accompany them, but it is likely that many of them rely solely on their communities.

Challenges faced by cities in combatting youth homelessness

Challenge	Percentage
Lack of housing	70%
Hidden homelessness	48%
Complexity of needs	39%
Insufficient ressources	39%
Lack of prevention	35%
Lack of data	35%
Difficulty of coordination between stakeholders	30%
Limitation in city competences	26%
Lack of evaluation of impact	17%

■ Percentage of cities reporting this as one of their main challenges (3 responses per city)

Conclusions

Particularly vulnerable in the transition between childhood and adult life, young people are exposed to a higher risk of homelessness and the many consequences it entails.

The number of young people who experience homelessness is on the rise in European cities, and the current geopolitical and economic context make city authorities fear that this could worsen, despite their active investment in and commitments to preventing it.

The lingering impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, combined with the war in Ukraine and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis, have impacted and worsened the main pre-existing drivers of youth homelessness. Mental health issues are on the rise among younger individuals who sometimes turn to drugs in an attempt to self-medicate. For those who cannot rely on healthy and supportive family relationships, experience of trauma combined with the challenges of navigating a complex social care system make the transition to adulthood abrupt and difficult.

Highly tense housing markets and high youth unemployment also create a dramatic combination for young people, particularly those who dropped out of schools or were not able to continue to pursue their education. For those who lack a residence permit, all of these challenges are exacerbated by the impossibility of benefitting from a variety of public services or welfare benefits which become indispensable to living decently.

Cities have developed multiple approaches to respond to the needs of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Housing units are made available, often combined with support such as flexible health care, counselling to find supportive communities and measures to facilitate their access to education, training and work opportunities. The impact of these measures is, however, impeded by constraining legal frameworks, a dire lack of affordable and social housing and heavily constrained budgets which affect the availability of all social services and in particular mental health care.
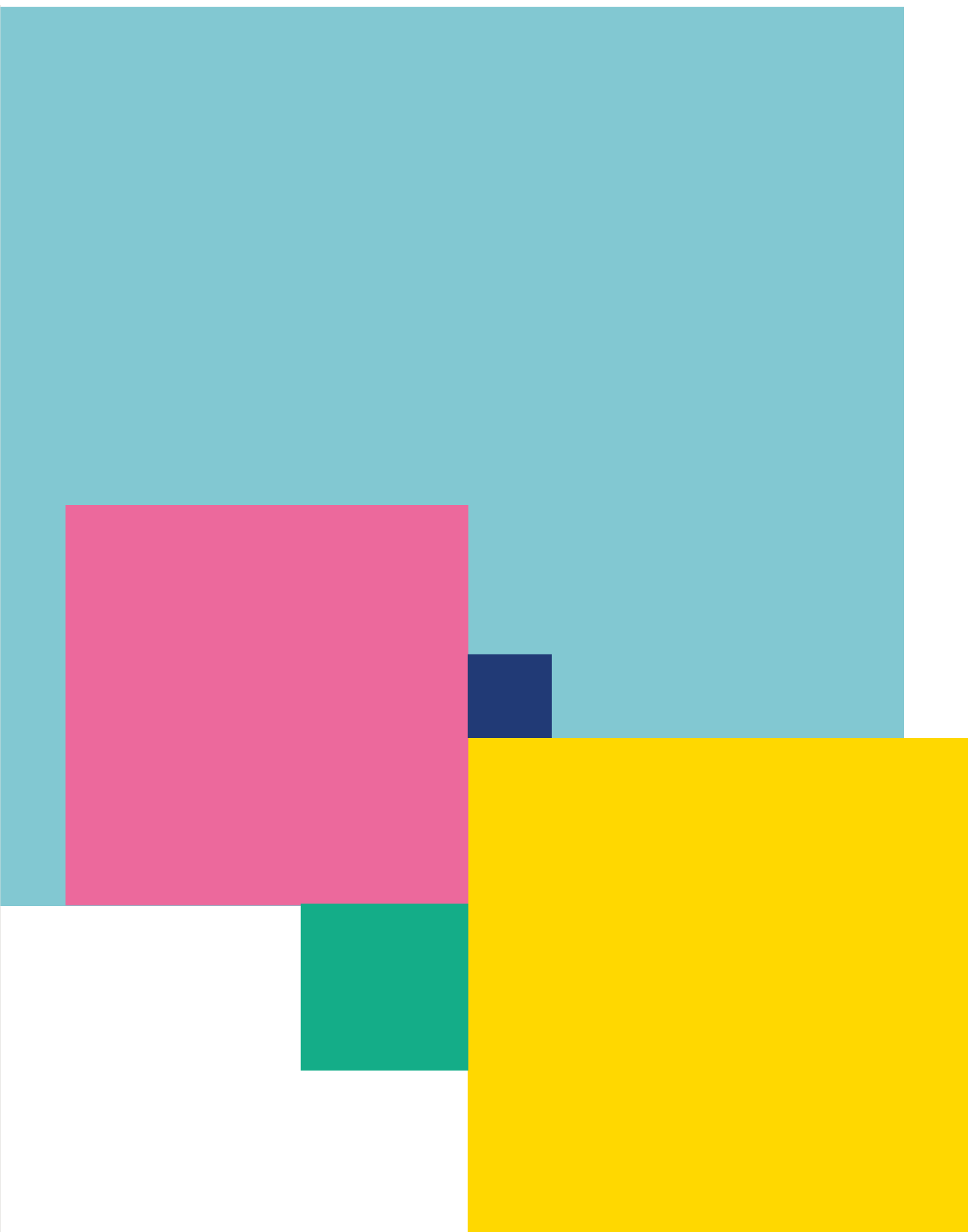
While the issue of youth homelessness is complex and presents many deep-rooted, intertwined challenges, successful solutions exist. Ambitions and commitments from cities are strong, but local governments need to be provided with the means to achieve the goal of ending homelessness by 2030.

Great progress has been made to adopt national strategies through the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, but these strategies must be carried out with multilevel governance and in close collaboration with cities.

Looking ahead, next year's European Parliament and Commission elections will provide a new EU mandate and with it the potential to review and improve EU policies and advance work to tackle youth homelessness. Europe's cities are ready to work with the EU to achieve this goal. It is crucial that the European institutions give cities an active role in this process, reinforcing their involvement and focusing on their strategies, needs and continued efforts to end homelessness by 2030.

For those who are identified and supported by cities' homelessness services, **the complexity of their needs** and the lack of integrated service responses across health, housing and social services can also undermine efforts to meet their needs. The different drivers identified in this publication mostly get intertwined in the unique circumstances of each individual. Intensive, long-term integrated support is often required to help these young people permanently exit homelessness.

Yet the provision of these services is compromised by **insufficient resources**, strained budgets both for homelessness services and other required care providers (particularly mental health care) and difficulties in retaining staff. The turnover rate among social workers is particularly high across Europe and many cities have reported struggling to find employees. The regular changes in case workers in charge of their support further distresses young people who may already struggle to establish a relationship of trust.

As highlighted at the beginning of this report, most cities identify a **gap in prevention measures**, especially due to a lack of targeted measures for youth at risk. This constitutes a missed opportunity to intervene as early as possible before a situation requires dire measures.

The **limitation in available data** also prevents better targeting of the profiles of young people at risk as well and complicates informed policy-making. Improved local data could support a better understanding of the needs of young people who are homeless or at risk, improved adaptation of services and more accurate definition of needed resources. Comparable data collection at European level would also facilitate mutual learning and evaluation of successful practices. This is also reflected in the fact that some cities find it challenging to objectively **evaluate the impact** of their measures.

Finally, limitations in city competencies, particularly in the field of migration governance, tend to constrain cities' ability to act on certain domains. In this context, collaboration remains particularly important, but, as highlighted in the previous section, multilevel governance on highly sensitive issues such as migration and homelessness can prove difficult.