

# ENDING HOMELESSNESS: A POLITICAL CHOICE!

Street Nurses memorandum  
for the 2024 elections

September 2023

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**INFIRMIERS DE RUE  
STREET NURSES**

Together, let's  
end homelessness

## Introduction

Since 2008 the Brussels-Capital Region organises censuses of homeless and poorly housed people. In 2022, the count reached a total of **7,134 on the region's territory, including 809 in the public space**. The numbers are constantly increasing. There has been an increase of 18,9% of homeless and poorly housed people between 2020 and 2022. And since 2008, the number quadrupled.<sup>1</sup> All indicators are on the rise while the situation in the field increasingly shows that ending homelessness is an objective that must be reached – and, by the way, Belgium is officially committed to fighting homelessness.

In June 2021, Belgium signed the **Lisbon Declaration** on the European Homelessness Platform. Through this Platform, Belgium is committed to complete a set of objectives to fight and reduce homelessness by 2030 through structural policies. Such an ambition requires the elaboration of an inter-federal strategy on fighting and preventing homelessness with precise objectives and concrete implementing measures to achieve them. Moreover, this strategy must be based on reliable quantified data, which highlights the necessity for better data collection and harmonisation about homelessness at the national level.

To succeed in reducing homelessness, Street Nurses proposes for the Brussels-Capital Region two concrete structural measures to be integrated in the policies under the next Parliament, i.e. **access to social housing and support for mental health care**. These two demands must be part and parcel of a **global coordinated policy**.



<sup>1</sup> Bruss'help, [Dénombrement des personnes sans-chez-soi en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, Septième édition](#), 8 November 2022.

## RECOMMENDATION 1.

### Access to social housing

**Homelessness is an extreme violation of the right to housing enshrined in the Belgian Constitution.** The question of affordable, sustainable, and quality housing must be placed at the center of the problem. And given its scale, it is crucial to take targeted and structural relocation measures to address the problem rapidly: **without housing, people cannot escape from street life.**

For that reason, **we propose to set up, within the Public Service Real Estate Companies, a minimum quota of 5% of social housing to be reserved for homeless people**, together with appropriate psycho-social support provided by housing integration services.

The aim of this obligatory quota is to grant social housing to particularly vulnerable people who, for reasons of administration, money, health, discrimination, find themselves in **extreme situations of social exclusion**, particularly with regard to housing.

Setting up a social housing quota for homeless people is a demand supported by organisations addressing homelessness and the right to housing: it figures especially in the memoranda of the AMA-Federation, the Bico-Federation and the *Rassemblement Bruxellois pour le Droit à l'Habitat* (Brussels Association for the Right to Housing).



## RECOMMENDATION 2.

### Quality mental health support

**The streets of Brussels are probably the biggest psychiatric hospital in the city.** Statistics for homeless Brussels people are not available but, in 2020, among homeless intra-European migrants, 33.5% (87 among 260) suffered from mental health problems.<sup>2</sup>

For Wallonia and Flanders, in the towns of Arlon, Liège, Gent and the Limburg province, mental health problems among homeless people are guessed to be around 20 to 30%.<sup>3</sup>

To ensure quality support for homeless and recently rehoused people, as well as for continuous care as provided for by reform 107, **all relevant services need better financing and more capacity**, i.e.:

- **Out-patient services** such as medical centres and mental health services, as well as mobile teams meeting people in public spaces or at home;
- **Low-threshold psychiatric institutions** which welcome homeless people in need, e.g. for long-term psychiatric hospitalisation, cures, observation;
- **Specialised institutions** such as homes for psychiatric care or protected housing initiatives for long-term housing of homeless people.



<sup>2</sup> FEANTSA, [Mobile EU citizens experiencing homelessness in Brussels: access to rights, employment, and healthcare](#), Report, February 2022.

<sup>3</sup> King Baudouin Foundation, [Dénombrement du sans-abrisme et de l'absence de chez-soi, Rapport global 2022](#), 31 March 2023.



## RECOMMENDATION 3.

### Regional coordinated policy

**Homelessness is at the crossroads of several policies:** social, housing, health, employment, migration, etc. **An integrated, transversal, and coordinated approach is therefore crucial.**

Accordingly, in order to achieve convincing results on homelessness, we advocate that:

- **the competences on housing and assistance to people be attributed to one single Minister;**
- **the Brussels-Capital Region adopt, under the next Parliament, a regional strategy for fighting and preventing homelessness, which is consistent with our international commitments and up to the challenges.**



## Sectorial demands

Although access to social housing and to mental health care are priorities for Street Nurses, **we join the demands of the sector (broadly defined)**, which are absolute necessary to guarantee the right to housing and to take concrete action to prevent and fight homelessness, namely:

- **Lower rents;**
- **More social housing**, through construction and renovation;
- Stronger **measures against the vacancy of homes and offices;**
- Obligatory **relocation in case of expulsion;**
- Obligatory **relocation of a homeless person dismissed from an institution;**
- Decent welcome for **undocumented people.**





## About Street Nurses

Street Nurses was created in 2005 as a psycho-medical-social organisation which aims at getting homeless people permanently off the street by applying the Housing First methodology and concentrating on the most vulnerable.

We are convinced that it is possible to end homelessness in Brussels and elsewhere.