



Extract from the report to the
Public Accounts Committee on
the services provided to homeless
people

August
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1. Introduction and conclusion

1.1. Purpose and main conclusion

1. This report is about the services provided to homeless people by the Danish Ministry of Children, Gender Equality, Integration and Social Affairs (the Ministry of Social Affairs), the Danish Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs (the Ministry of Housing) and the Danish local authorities. Rigsrevisionen initiated the study in September 2013.

Homeless people often have complex problems that extend beyond the lack of a roof like, for instance, alcohol and substance misuse, mental health problems, crime, limited affiliation to the labour market and lack of a social network. Often, homeless people also have severe health problems and only sporadic contact with the health services.

Homeless people are among the most vulnerable members of society. According to the Danish National Institute for Public Health, the mortality rate among homeless people is considerably higher than for the whole population in Denmark.

According to figures from the National Centre for Social Research, there were 5,820 homeless people in Denmark in week six in 2013 and the centre has estimated that between 13,000 and 15,000 citizens became homeless in the course of 2013, which is an increase of 16 per cent over 2009.

The local authorities shall offer homeless people temporary accommodation in facilities for persons with special social problems and also provide activating support, care and subsequent assistance. Temporary housing may be offered in the following types of facilities, sheltered housing, hostels, sheltered boarding houses and residential institutions for families. In the report, these types of accommodation will be referred to as sheltered housing.

The Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for legislation in the social affairs area, whereas the local authorities are responsible for helping homeless people before and after their stay in a sheltered housing facility.

The local authorities are also responsible for ensuring the availability of an adequate housing stock, whereas the Ministry of Housing is responsible for legislation in the housing area.

2. The purpose of the report is to examine whether the local authorities provide a coordinated and coherent package of support to homeless people, and whether the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Housing have supported the local authorities in their efforts to do so. The report answers the following questions:

- Are the local authorities providing an adequately coordinated and coherent package of support to homeless people?
- Has the Ministry of Social Affairs supported the local authorities' efforts directed towards homeless people in a satisfactory manner?
- Has the Ministry of Housing supported the local authorities adequately in their efforts to secure appropriate accommodation for homeless people?

Mapping of homelessness by the Danish National Centre for Social Research
The Centre has since 2007 mapped the number of homeless people in week 6 every two years. The mapping is based on reports submitted by the administrators of around 1,400 social services, who keep records of all individuals who have received services or are known to be homeless.

Action plan cf. the Danish Act on Social Services, section 141, sub-section 3

The action plan shall specify

- 1) the purpose of the initiatives;
- 2) the action necessary to achieve the purpose;
- 3) the expected duration of the initiatives; and
- 4) any other factors relating to accommodation, employment, personal assistance, treatment, aids, etc.

The Danish Act on Social Services

Consolidation Act no. 254 of 20 March 2014 on social services.

The Danish national homelessness strategy covered the years 2009 – 2013. During this period 17 Danish municipalities tested various methods to tackle homelessness based on a "housing first" principle, according to which the first priority would be to provide permanent, independent housing for the homeless person and then follow up with coordinated social support based on the needs of the individual citizen.

MAIN CONCLUSION

Overall, Rigsrevisionen does not consider the effort directed towards homeless people adequate.

Rigsrevisionen has established that the local authorities do not offer to work out action plans for the homeless people to the extent required, and as specified in the Danish Act on Social Services. This means that the local authorities do not use the very instrument designed to provide the required overview and coordination of measures implemented.

The study shows that homeless people are having lengthy stays in sheltered housing facilities, which are meant to serve only as temporary accommodation.

Rigsrevisionen finds it particularly problematic that the number of young homeless people is on the increase and that efforts directed towards this group of homeless people are so ill founded as demonstrated by the study. Young homeless people are to a wide extent staying in sheltered facilities despite the stated policy that the local authorities should provide alternative accommodation for young homeless people.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has been aware of these problems for some time and since 2009 homelessness has been a major item on the strategic agenda, as reflected in the so-called *Homelessness Strategy*. The main purpose of the strategy is to provide permanent housing for homeless people and follow up with the support required by the individual homeless person. The strategy increased the focus on homeless people and their situation in the 17 municipalities that were involved in testing the strategy and the Ministry of Social Affairs intends to roll out the strategy in other municipalities in the coming years. However, the steps taken by the ministry to ensure that the local authorities prioritise the action plans, reduce the length of stay in sheltered facilities and strengthen the efforts directed towards young homeless people are not considered adequate by Rigsrevisionen.

One of the major obstacles in tackling homelessness is the lack of available suitable housing. The Ministry of Housing has informed Rigsrevisionen that the availability of affordable housing for homeless people - and particularly for young homeless people - has decreased significantly over the years 2007-2013.

The local authorities have a duty to ensure that the availability of housing meets the requirements of the citizens. The local authorities have access to various options and schemes through which they can secure accommodation for homeless people. However, the local authorities have informed the Ministry of Housing repeatedly that these schemes do not suffice to meet the demand.

Rigsrevisionen finds it unsatisfactory that the Ministry of Housing has examined neither whether the schemes allow the local authorities to cover the demand for accommodation for homeless people nor if there are barriers to the local authorities' use of the schemes.