
Platform Against Homelessness

Proposals for the wellbeing of service-users experiencing homelessness
and the removal of service barriers

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Issue 1: No Address

Many people who are roofless or homeless in Malta try to improve their situation by engaging in employment whilst trying to save money to improve their living conditions. Many people try to improve their situation by themselves, without becoming dependent on the state or without the upheaval of moving into a shelter. However, without moving into a long-term shelter, an individual or family who is homeless have no way of acquiring an address which limits their access to the following:

- i. Being able to apply for social housing (although the housing application specifies that people who are homeless are given priority);
- ii. Being able to apply for social security benefits;
- iii. Being able to apply for an ID card;
- iv. Being able to apply for employment opportunities;
- v. Being able to have a vote for the correct district (those without an ID card remain without a vote).

When an individual or family becomes homeless, they are stripped of their home, possessions, and identity. This in itself can be traumatic. All efforts should be made to ensure that their identity is protected and that they still have equal opportunities to access services and improve their situation without making them dependent on the state or institutions where unnecessary.

- Proposal

The Platform proposes that an alternative is provided for individuals and families who are currently homeless or without access to a fixed address. This option could incorporate a P.O. Box address or an alternative address. This address should not highlight the service user's homelessness situation and should be a dignified option. For instance, a shelter's address should not include the shelter's name. The alternative should not include the name of an organisation or service to ensure sensitivity to the person's situation.

Additionally, the Platform proposes that the requirement for a current address is removed from the Application for Alternative Accommodation within the Housing Authority, considering that this client group is among those most in need of this service.

Issue 2: Electoral Registry

Many people seeking refuge in shelters are often at risk of violence. Their current location should remain private both for their and sometimes their family's safety, but additionally because it is their basic right to confidentiality. In the electoral register, which is now also available online, people living in shelters can clearly be identified, with confirmation of their address and with their ID card numbers. This can be detrimental information in the hands of a perpetrator. The choice to share with an employer or family member that someone lives within a shelter, should be their own, and the accessibility of this information risks removing the individual's choice in this situation.

- Proposal

Although it is understood that this information is required for the electoral registry, perhaps an alternative can be provided whereby:

- i. Vulnerable individuals remain safe in their place of refuge
- ii. Sensitive data is only accessible to employees of the Electoral Commission Malta
- iii. Exclusion of information for the general public
- iv. Address to be removed and just the locality remains visible

Issue 3: Amendments to Housing Authority Application for Alternative Housing

Those who are most in need of alternative housing are those who are currently homeless, including roofless people experiencing hidden homelessness or alternatively institutional or transitional homelessness. The application for social housing acknowledges that this client group should be prioritised for housing, yet the application requires that the service user list their current address. As people experiencing homelessness generally do not have access to a current address, this creates a barrier for them to be able to apply for social housing. This also often encourages people to enter shelters to gain an address, thus promoting dependency when not always necessary. Additionally, service users experiencing domestic violence may be in desperate need of social housing and may choose to remain in an abusive situation in lieu of alternative accommodation. Listing their current address on a housing application might further put them in harm's way as the perpetrator may become aware of the person's intention to leave.

Whilst experiencing homelessness, the amount of personal belongings that the person can carry with them is limited. The situation becomes even more problematic as persons experiencing homelessness or rooflessness often move from one place to another, leaving them with minimal stability. Whilst in this state of survival, without even one's basic fundamental needs being met, lengthy procedures for renewing housing applications may be far from possible.

- Proposal

Whilst it is understandable that the Housing Authority has its procedures in place and a list of information that it requires from its applicants, the below suggestions take into consideration the realities of people who are homeless or roofless and still uphold procedures:

- i. The requirement for a current address should be removed from the social housing application or alternatively the application should be allowed to proceed with the person writing 'homeless';
- ii. Domestic violence and human trafficking cases should be given the same option as above whereby the service user can still access this service without the provision of an address. This could be included in the social work report which is also a prerequisite of the application to explain the absence of an address. For example. The option of a PO Box, the option of a postal address of a relative or friend, contact with the social worker etc;
- iii. When the service user has changed their address, the creation of an 'Address Change' form would make the process much easier than having to collect all of the required documents once again. This could have a time bar should the question of income be questionable.

Issue 4: Need for a National Definition for Homelessness

For far too long, the issue of homelessness has faded into the shadows, further pushing away individuals and families experiencing this vulnerable situation to go into hiding and be ashamed to come forward and seek assistance. As a nation, we have an obligation to acknowledge this social issue, which begins with defining homelessness. Having a national definition of homelessness and rooflessness creates awareness, enables services and professionals to be sensitive to who may be experiencing homelessness, and creates a foundation for quantifying how many people are struggling with homelessness and what solutions are needed. Such definition would also ensure that the services created or launched in the future have a solid basis and an informed policy. Hence the available services would truly address the needs of those who experience the trauma of homelessness and/or rooflessness.

- Proposal

The Platform Against Homelessness Malta, defines homelessness as a state whereby a person of any age, nationality or gender is experiencing:

- i. Rooflessness (visible homelessness) whereby they do not have a roof over their heads, are 'sleeping rough' or on the streets;
- ii. Hidden homelessness whereby the person may have a roof over their heads however does not have adequate or humane living conditions. These include people who are:
 - a. 'Sofa surfing' - moving from one place to another with instability
 - b. Living with family or friends
 - c. Living in inhabitable buildings
 - d. Squatting or living in illegal occupation of premises
 - e. Living in garages
 - f. Living in cars
 - g. Living in insecure and inadequate housing

- h. Living in hostels or hotels
 - i. Living in severe overcrowding
- iii. Transitional or Institutionalised homelessness whereby they are living in an institution or temporary housing as they lack the option of returning to a premises that is their home or because upon release from an institution they also lack the option of living independently. These include people who may be living in:
 - a. Homeless shelters
 - b. Domestic violence shelters
 - c. Elderly care homes
 - d. Children's homes
 - e. Maternity shelters
 - f. Detention centres
 - g. Open reception centres
 - h. Migration facilities
 - i. Correctional facilities
 - j. Rehabilitation centres and programmes
 - k. Addictions rehabilitation programmes
 - l. Medical Hospitals and centres
 - m. Mental Health Hospitals and centres
 - n. Living in other transitional housing

Persons who are homeless may experience chronic, transitional or episodic homelessness and therefore a time frame should not be a prerequisite to considering someone to be homeless.