

# 'Face-to-face for housing' Interviews (2nd edition)



The 400Toits campaign is a partnership between the following organisations:



## The 400Toits campaign

Despite the availability of support services for homeless people in Brussels, homelessness is a growing problem in our city. In 2014, the homelessness organisation [La Strada](#) found more than 400 people were sleeping on the streets, an increase of 25% since 2010. Their 2016 street count showed that the problem had increased again, with more than 700 people sleeping rough. In the 21st century, in the city of Brussels, we believe that no-one should sleep on the streets and it is time to find new ways of housing people.

The [400Toits campaign](#), which aims to find 400 homes by 2020, is led by several Brussels organisations that are working to end homelessness.

As it has been demonstrated in different cities around the world, the end of homelessness is an achievable goal when homeless policy is developed based on three main principles:

- accessible housing;
- prevention; and
- Housing First

As part of its work to end homelessness, 400Toits aims to make housing accessible to the most vulnerable homeless people.

## A global movement to end homelessness

The 400Toits campaign is part of wider European and global movements to end homelessness.

- The [European End Street Homelessness Campaign](#) - coordinated by World Habitat - brings together 13 cities across Europe.
- [A Place to Call Home campaign](#) is co-ordinated by the Institute of Global Homelessness and currently works with 9 cities from around the world.

## 'Face-to-face for housing' interviews

**A key part of the European End Street Homelessness Campaign is a [Connections Week](#). This involves volunteers meeting with people who are street homeless and talking to them about their experiences and what support would benefit them most.**

Over three nights and one morning in September 2018 over 250 volunteers (supervised by 22 team leaders) met 604 people living on the streets of Brussels. They carried out 276 interviews with the following results.

- More than one-in-four (28%) are highly vulnerable.
- Over four in every five (81%) people frequently sleep outdoors.
- About three in every five (59%) have not had stable housing for over a year.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) have no income.
- One-in-three (33%) cannot meet any of their vital needs (washing, changing clothes, going to the bathroom, finding food and drinking water).
- Nearly one-in-five (18%) had to leave their homes because of mental health problems or alcohol or drug use.

- Almost half (46%) have been attacked or beaten on the street.
- One-in-three (33%) have a chronic health problem, affecting vital organs.
- Fewer than one-in-ten (9%) were evicted from housing because of drug or alcohol use.
- Four women are pregnant.
- More than half (52%) said they had no activity that brings them joy and fulfilment.

### **Trends from 2017 to 2018**

The first 'face-to-face for housing' interviews were held in June 2017. We interviewed 294 homeless people in the Brussels-Capital region. Since 2017, the following trends have emerged.

#### **Degree of vulnerability**

- More than one in four people have a very high degree of vulnerability and require intensive support. The proportion of homeless people in each vulnerability category is roughly similar between 2017 and 2018.
- The number of homeless women who are classed as the most vulnerable has increased from 28.6% in 2017 to 34.5% in 2018.

#### **Time on the streets**

- The number of people who have spent more than a year on the street has fallen slightly from two-in-three (65%) in 2017 to almost three in every five (59.1%) in 2018. However, this is still far too high.
- While more men than women have spent more than a year on the street, there has been a dramatic increase in the proportion of homeless women affected in just one year. In 2017, just over one-third (34.3%) of women spent more than a year on the street compared to over half 51.7% in 2018.

#### **Risk**

- Violence on the street remains a major issue. In 2017 and 2018, nearly half of people living on the streets have been attacked or beaten since they became homeless.
- There has also been a significant increase in the proportion of homeless women with dangerous lifestyles (such as prostitution, needle exchange, having unprotected sex with strangers). This has increased from 1 in 20 (5.7%) in 2017 to around 1 in 7 (13.8%) in 2018.

#### **Meeting basic needs**

- There is an increase in homeless people without income from just over half (51%) in 2017 to approaching two-thirds (62%) in 2018. This includes a rise in the proportion of homeless people who are Belgian from just under one-in-four (23.9%) in 2017 to over one-in-three (35.7%) in 2018.
- There has also been an increase in homeless people who are unable to meet their basic needs, from more than one-in-five (22%) in 2017 to one-in-three (33%) in 2018.

## **Future Actions**

In 2019, the 400Toits campaign will focus on **three** main strategic priorities.

### **1. Political advocacy**

The situation in Brussels-Capital is deteriorating. The number of homeless people is increasing despite the emergency solutions put in place by the public authorities. This increase is not specific to Brussels, nor even to Belgium. In European cities - and many others across the world - there are similar increases in homelessness. It is time to adopt a new mindset, one that focuses on developing policy that will end homelessness. The 400Toits campaign will undertake political advocacy at the municipal, regional, national and European levels to engage and help create and influence policy change.

### **2. Moveable modular housing**

In 2017 the first modular homes were placed on a wasteland in the municipality of Brussels-City. Initially developed to test the model, this housing will soon be hosting homeless people who will be supported by members of the 400Toits campaign. In 2019 this model will be further developed in Brussels and elsewhere for the benefit of homeless people, thanks, in particular to, private investors and funds from Cabinet Fremault. However, the development of moveable modular housing is not the only solution to end homelessness: the 400Toits campaign will continue to develop different types of innovative housing.

### **3. Awareness**

While the 'face-to-face for housing' interviews have enabled us to collect reliable information, it has also increased awareness of homelessness and engaged hundreds of volunteers. It is crucial to maintain community engagement to develop new solutions and opportunities to end homelessness.

Homelessness does not only affect people sleeping on our streets. It also has an impact on the entire community. During 2019, we will maintain and continue to raise awareness amongst the local community about homelessness in our country and abroad.

## **Conclusion**

The number of people living on the street in the Brussels-Capital Region has been increasing steadily in recent years. According to reports by homelessness organisation LaStrada, between 2014 and 2016 there was an increase of around 72% in the number of street homeless people – from 412 to 707. The 2018 figure has not yet been published. However, given the realities and observations made on the ground, it is, unfortunately, very likely that the situation has deteriorated further.

The 276 surveys conducted during our most recent 'face-to-face for housing' interviews have made it possible to know more about our local homeless population and their needs.

However, if it seems that the needs are enormous today, it is important to realise that they are not impossible to meet. A structural policy committed to ending homelessness would allow the establishment of effective solutions so that nobody has to live on our streets in such dangerous circumstances. We therefore call for the commitment of all sections of the community: together, let's put an end to homelessness!

Thanks to the many volunteers and partners who supported the week including:

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