

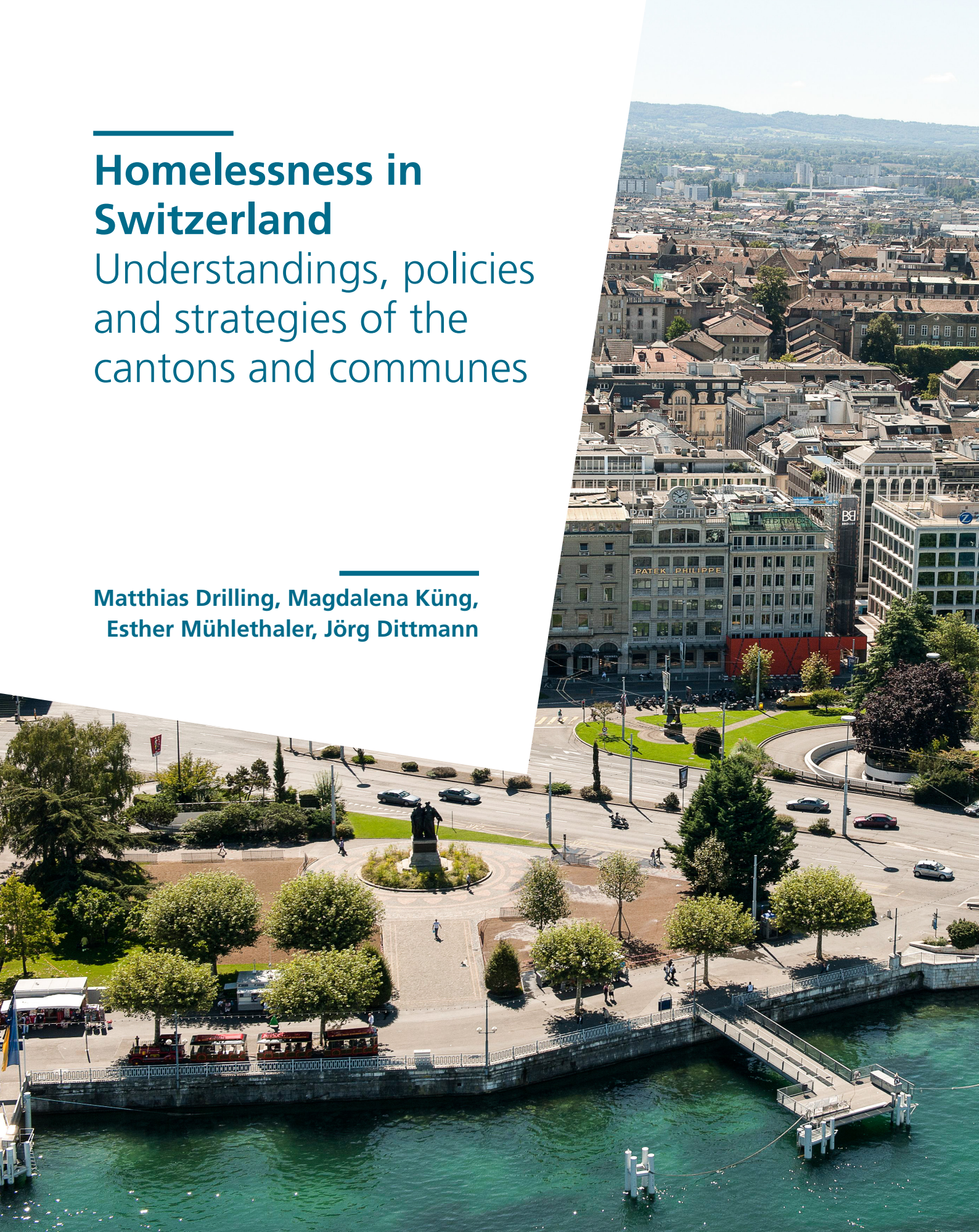
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# Homelessness in Switzerland

Understandings, policies and strategies of the cantons and communes

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Matthias Drilling, Magdalena Küng,  
Esther Mühlethaler, Jörg Dittmann



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### **Editor**

Federal Office for Housing FOH  
Hallwylstrasse 4, 3003 Berne  
Tel. +41 58 480 91 11  
info@bwo.admin.ch, www.bwo.admin.ch

### **Download**

www.bwo.admin.ch

### **Project management**

Doris Sfar, FOH

### **Authors**

Matthias Drilling (corresponding author: matthias.drilling@fhnw.ch)  
Magdalena Küng  
Esther Mühlethaler  
Jörg Dittmann

FHNW School of Social Work  
Institute for Social Planning, Organisational Change and Urban Development  
Hofackerstrasse 30  
CH-4132 Muttenz

### **Sounding Board**

Eliane Belser, City of Lausanne, Union des villes suisses / Schweizerischer Städteverband SSV  
Remo Dörig, Conference of Cantonal Directors of Social Affairs / Konferenz der kantonalen Sozialdirektorinnen und Sozialdirektoren SODK  
Babette Fluri, City of Zürich, Union des villes suisses / Schweizerischer Städteverband SSV  
Corinne Hutmacher-Perret, Swiss conference for social welfare / Schweizerische Konferenz für Sozialhilfe SKOS  
Géraldine Luisier Rurangirwa, Federal Social Insurance Office FSIO  
Michael Zeier, All Together in Dignity / ATD Vierte Welt

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The report reflects the views of the authors, which do not necessarily coincide with those of the client or the Sounding Board.

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## Summary

This study examines the various measures taken by cantons and communes to tackle and prevent homelessness. The European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) defines 'rooflessness' – the main category of homelessness – as the condition of having to live on the streets or stay in an overnight shelter. The present study goes beyond the issue of rough sleeping to include people at risk of losing their home. As such, it also addresses some of the potential precursors of homelessness: precarious, unstable and inadequate housing.

The study was organised in stages. The first step was to analyse the legal basis for government action and conduct guided interviews with representatives from 22 of the 26 cantons. Questions were asked about their understandings of homelessness, the structure of the actor landscape, specific cantonal assistance, best practice examples and the need for action. In the second step, Switzerland's communes (i.e. municipalities) were surveyed online about their perceptions of homelessness and the threat of losing one's home, the assistance available, strategies to prevent and tackle the problem, and various forms of cooperation.

It is clear from the survey that the cantons recognise that preventing and combating homelessness is a state responsibility. However, implementation in this area varies greatly. Very few cantons have developed a comprehensive assistance system or a specific 'homelessness' service area, with the result that much uncertainty exists on the extent and structure of homelessness and its precursors. Many experts see support as being closely linked to social assistance, which is why homelessness is primarily tackled through the structures of social and emergency assistance. This has its limits, however, when people do not meet the eligibility criteria for social assistance or when they do not come forward. On the other hand, the cantons have developed a number of best practices, ranging from regional cooperation to cantonal housing provision and the expansion of social planning.

Among the communes, 616 (around 28%) responded to the survey. It is clear that estimates of homelessness and the threat of losing one's home can be quantified. Overall, it is estimated that around 2,200 people are homeless and around 8,000 people are at imminent risk of losing their home. The proportion of communes with people affected by homelessness is higher in German-speaking Switzerland than in the French or Italian-speaking parts of the country. Homelessness is primarily a challenge for the communes of large and medium-sized built-up areas, and particularly for the six Swiss cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. The threat of losing one's home is also an issue in communes serving as a hub in rural and intermediate areas. The communes recognise their limits in combating homelessness and the threat of losing one's home: the majority of them do not have their own accommodation facilities, cooperation with other communes is rare, and support from the cantons and the federal government is not guaranteed. Furthermore, the communes set access criteria for their support, thereby causing exclusion and displacement processes themselves.

The recommendations drawn from this study are to (1) develop a national orientation framework supported by all relevant actors which clarifies the understandings, tasks, competencies and responsibilities, (2) examine an overall support system that links the individual policy fields at cantonal, regional and commune level, (3) create a strategy for housing provision and measures to support access to housing for people affected by exclusion on the housing market, and (4) improve the data situation and establish a monitoring system for future strategic action at all three levels of government.

## 1. Background, objectives and research design

### 1.1. Background

This study commissioned by the Federal Office for Housing (FOH) investigates how Swiss cantons and communes tackle homelessness, their understanding of the concept, and the measures they have put in place to prevent people from becoming homeless.

The focus on cantons and communes stems from the first Country Report on Homelessness in Switzerland, on which this study is based.<sup>1</sup> The Country Report is intended as an overview and systematically collects findings from various areas at national and international level. The cantonal and commune levels were deliberately not included when drafting the Country Report. The most important findings of the Country Report relevant to this study are as follows:

- The international right to adequate housing obliges Switzerland to take measures to combat homelessness, prevent forced evictions, prevent discrimination in the area of housing and ensure that the housing situation is adequate for all.
- Switzerland recognises the fundamental right to assistance in emergencies (Art. 12 Cst.) and guarantees an unrestricted minimum entitlement to food, clothing, emergency medical assistance and accommodation. However, the Federal Constitution does not provide for a universal and legal right to accommodation.
- Although the social objectives of the federal government define housing as a basic need and stipulate that people seeking housing are to be supported, they do not provide for individual entitlement to housing. Instead, the corresponding Art. 41 of the Federal Constitution emphasises the initiative of those seeking housing.
- Homelessness should be analysed in a cross-sectional manner, linking social policy and housing policy in particular.
- A follow-up study is to focus on the cantons and communes as public bodies.

### 1.2. Objectives

Specifically, this study pursues two main goals. First, it seeks to clarify the understanding of homelessness, the policies derived from this, and the strategies and measures that may serve to combat homelessness at cantonal and commune level. Secondly, the study aims to show how cantonal and commune homelessness assistance is structured, how the various policy areas (housing, social affairs, health, etc.) relate to each other, and how they interact with non-state actors (NGOs, aid organisations, voluntary organisations, etc.).

In this study, homelessness is interpreted as part of the overarching topic of social security. Switzerland's social security system is multi-layered. Components such as personal initiative, fundamental services, national social insurance, cantonal benefits or social and emergency aid are combined in such a way that (minimum) social and economic security is possible for all people living in Switzerland. Many of these components also indirectly strive to ensure that no one has to live without a roof over their head. On the other hand, there are very few specific measures in place to eliminate or prevent

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<sup>1</sup> Drilling et al. 2020.

homelessness. For this study, the 'invisibility' of homelessness raises the challenge of which institutions can be used to address the problem.

The topic of homelessness has links to various other aspects of life and politics. These include, in particular, poverty reduction and social assistance, but also health policy, housing policy, child and adult protection and the asylum system. This breadth of the issue and the fact that only in exceptional cases are public authorities specifically tasked with combating homelessness lead to unclear areas of responsibility at the state level. Furthermore, many regions have private initiatives which have emerged from civil society and are involved in combating homelessness, forming part of the support system. This study also seeks to provide an overview of whether and how these organisations cooperate with government agencies and where they perform tasks that could also be assigned to the state.

This study adopts an expanded understanding of homelessness. The European umbrella organisation FEANTSA distinguishes between 13 (ETHOS typology) and 6 (ETHOS Light typology) living situations (see Annex).<sup>2</sup> We speak of rooflessness when people have to spend the night on the streets or stay in an overnight shelter. The other ETHOS categories describe precarious, unstable and inadequate housing situations and thus sensitise people to the potential precursors of homelessness and the dynamics between different housing situations. Because the various living situations according to FEANTSA are related to exclusion mechanisms on the housing market, the ETHOS typology on homelessness also points to structural problems in the housing market and housing policy.<sup>3</sup> In this way, FEANTSA aims to build a counterargument to those positions that link homelessness primarily to personal characteristics (such as addiction or critical life events).

### 1.3. Research design

Due to the lack of referenced studies, this study is exploratory in nature. It was therefore essential to be flexible in the choice of methodology and iterative in the research process and to reflect on the relevance of the issues identified at the end of each research phase. Three methodological approaches were considered in the design:

- a review of cantonal legislation,
- semi-structured phone interviews with cantonal authorities, and
- an online survey of all Swiss communes.

Review of cantonal legislation: To gain an overview of the political and administrative areas of cantonal assistance for the homeless, cantonal legislation was examined for points of contact. In order to cover as many relevant areas as possible, the first step was to analyse all cantonal collections of laws that allow automated full-text searches. The following strings were searched in the different languages:

- German: Notschlaf\*, obdach\*, wohnungslos, Unterkunft, prekär
- French: sans-abri\*, domicile\*, logement, établissement, habitat\*, précarité, héberg\*
- Italian: dimora, alloggio, abitato\*, senz'abitato, precarietà

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<sup>2</sup> FEANTSA 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Edgar et al. 2004.



The results were analysed for their relevance to homelessness in the context of this study and incorporated into further research, either in the design of the questionnaire for the cantonal authorities or as background information for discussions with the cantons.

Semi-structured interviews at cantonal level: For the data collection at cantonal level, 24 semi-structured expert interviews were conducted. Interviews were held with 17 people from the cantonal administration and 7 people from the local administration of larger communes or relevant third-party organisations. The interviews represent 22 cantons. They were conducted in Italian, French or German and were recorded, excerpted and analysed. Where it was not possible to record the interviews, minutes were drawn up from memory. The selection of interviewees was based on a list of networking partners provided by the FOH. All individuals were informed about the study in writing and asked about their expertise in the area of homelessness in a follow-up telephone call. The persons contacted could decide whether they or another person would participate in the interview. The element of choice was important for this study, as it was not clear from the outset under which political and administrative areas homelessness assistance should fall, and it was important not to limit the study to certain areas too early in the process. The phone interviews were structured into four categories: understanding of homelessness, actors and structure, assistance for the homeless, and the need for action.

Online survey of the communes: An online questionnaire in Italian, French and German was sent to all Swiss communes between April and June 2021. The commune administration was asked to forward the questionnaire to the appropriate person. 618 out of a total of 2,172 communes took part in the survey, which corresponds to a response rate of 28%. The survey was created using EFS Survey from Tivian and analysed with the statistical package SPSS. Four subject areas were surveyed: assessment of homelessness and the threat of losing one's home, understanding of homelessness, concrete support from the commune, and strategies for tackling or preventing the problem, together with forms of cooperation.

Sounding board: A sounding board was set up at the start of the project in consultation with the FOH. The members of the sounding board had to be familiar with the issues of homelessness and precarious housing by virtue of their position or function. As representatives of the relevant authorities, associations or organisations, they were also expected to bring to the project a range of specialist skills from the areas of poverty and poverty reduction, social assistance and (cantonal) social policy as well as housing and spatial development policy. The sounding board comprised representatives of ATD Vierte Welt (All Together for Dignity), the Federal Social Insurance Office (FSIO), the Federal Office for Housing (FOH), the Swiss Conference for Social Welfare (Schweizerische Konferenz für Sozialhilfe, SKOS), the Conference of Cantonal Directors of Social Services (CDSS), the Swiss Union of Cities (SSV), and the Social Policy City Initiative. The four meetings took place online; the research team recorded the meetings and drew up the minutes of the meeting in each case. These were reviewed by all members of the sounding board and could be amended if necessary. The minutes were included in the data corpus of the research project.

## 2. Legislative framework

### 2.1. Background

The legal concept of 'homeless person' does not exist in Swiss legislation. While homelessness is understood as a condition that affects all aspects of a person's life, it is not a characteristic of a person. In reality, it is a situation that can be remedied by providing housing. Nonetheless, homeless people do have subjective rights, including the right to shelter. The Federal Constitution guarantees all people in Switzerland, regardless of their residence status, basic social rights that establish a certain entitlement to state benefits. This also includes the right to assistance in emergencies (Art. 12 Cst.). However, this only guarantees a level of benefits that is essential for a dignified existence and to prevent those affected from falling into an "undignified existence of begging".<sup>4</sup> Anyone who, objectively speaking, is in a position to provide for themselves by their own means does not meet the requirements of Art. 12 of the Federal Constitution and cannot make a claim on this basis. Moreover, Art. 12 does not establish any specific benefits such as a basic income.<sup>5</sup> In practice, Art. 12 of the Federal Constitution is therefore applied primarily in relation to asylum and in the case of foreign nationals who do not have the required authorisation to be in Switzerland.

### 2.2. Switzerland as a welfare state

Welfare state elements in the Federal Constitution include provisions on responsibility in various social areas (Section 8 of the Federal Constitution 'Housing, Employment, Social Security and Health'), but also the preamble, the purpose article, the programmatic social objectives or the public welfare obligation of the economy (Art. 94 para. 2 Federal Constitution).<sup>6</sup> The idea of the welfare state as a guarantor of freedom and equality rights also manifests itself "in the inclusion of standards with a social component in the most diverse areas of law"<sup>7</sup> Such provisions can be found in tenancy law, labour law and victim assistance.<sup>8</sup> Issues relating to housing are usually categorised under the legal field of social security.

Support for persons in need is already the responsibility of the cantons according to the Federal Constitution (Art. 115 Cst.). In this respect, the federal government assumes only the authority to regulate exceptions and responsibilities. The latter is done by the federal government in the Social Responsibility Act (SocRA). This law determines which canton is responsible for supporting a person in need and governs the reimbursement of support costs between the cantons (Art. 1 paras 1 and 2 SocRA).<sup>9</sup> The SocRA defines a person in need as anyone who is unable to provide sufficiently for themselves or in good time from their own resources. Providing for oneself is generally understood to include finding accommodation.

The extent to which a person is in need is assessed according to the regulations and principles applicable at the place of support (Art. 2 paras 1 and 2 SocRA). The place of support, i.e. which canton is responsible for paying social assistance, cannot always be clearly determined. In its information sheet 'Local responsibility in social assistance', SKOS provides tools for determining the place of residence

<sup>4</sup> Decision of the Federal Supreme Court 131 I 166: 172

<sup>5</sup> CDSS 2012: (10)

<sup>6</sup> See more on this under Kieser 2017: (20)

<sup>7</sup> Kieser 2017: 1.

<sup>8</sup> Häfeli 2008: (16)

<sup>9</sup> Rüegg 2008: 326ff.

of a person in need.<sup>10</sup> If persons with Swiss citizenship are in need of immediate assistance outside their canton of residence, the canton of residence must provide it (Art. 13 para. 1 SocRA). In the event of disputes regarding liability for assistance, the canton in which the person in need resides must provide assistance, at least temporarily, until the legal obligation has been clarified. The canton of residence is also responsible for foreign nationals who are not resident in Switzerland (Art. 21 SocRA). They too are entitled to at least emergency aid.<sup>11</sup> The provisions of SocRA therefore establish the principle that a person in need receives assistance in emergencies, even if they are outside their canton of residence, their canton of residence is unknown or they have no place of residence.

### **2.3. Social assistance**

The cantons are responsible for organising social assistance. The cantons' social assistance laws differ in both the organisation of social assistance and the division of responsibilities between the cantons and communes. In some cantons, social assistance is exclusively the canton's responsibility, whereas others have wide-ranging communal autonomy and social assistance bodies at commune level. There is no federal law on social assistance.

One of the benefits of social assistance is to provide the person concerned with adequate housing. Housing costs are a significant part of material social assistance. However, the people receiving support are expected to live as affordably as possible.<sup>12</sup> But not all people living in a precarious housing situation are entitled to social assistance. It also sometimes happens that people in need do not have their rights clarified, are unaware of them or do not claim them. SKOS has noticed that since the tightening of the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act (FNIA), foreign nationals in need are increasingly not receiving social assistance because they fear for their residence rights. Children are also often affected. This failure to receive benefits to which they are entitled leads to their housing situation being jeopardised.<sup>13</sup>

### **2.4. Victim Support Act (VSA)**

In addition to medical, psychological, social, material and legal assistance, the services provided by the cantons under the Victim Support Act also include the provision of emergency accommodation (Art. 14 para. 1 VSA). The Conference of Swiss Liaison Offices under the Victim Support Act (SVK-OHG) set up by the CDSS aims to promote standardised implementation of the Victim Support Act in the cantons and recommends, among other things, that eligible persons be provided with emergency accommodation for 21 days. This recommendation is a minimum standard and is not legally binding.<sup>14</sup> It is up to the cantons to decide how they implement the Victim Support Act.

Emergency accommodation within the meaning of the Victim Support Act is a suitable solution for people currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness as a result of domestic violence. Women's shelters, in particular, are now regarded as a "recognised and professional service for crisis intervention in the area of domestic violence and [are] an integral part of the service landscape in the area of victim and violence protection issues".<sup>15</sup> However, places in women's shelters are limited, cases are

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<sup>10</sup> SKOS 2019.

<sup>11</sup> See under 2.1, explanations on Art. 12 Cst.

<sup>12</sup> SKOS guidelines: Housing. Online at: [https://rl.skos.ch/lexoverview-home/lex-RL\\_A\\_1](https://rl.skos.ch/lexoverview-home/lex-RL_A_1)

<sup>13</sup> SKOS 2020a: 1 ff.

<sup>14</sup> CDSS / FOGE 2015: 13.

<sup>15</sup> CDSS / FOGE 2015: 73.



becoming increasingly complex, and there are very few follow-up solutions. The range of shelters available for women also varies greatly depending on the region. There are a few programmes for men affected by domestic violence, e.g. *Zwüschehalt* with centres in the cities of Bern, Lucerne and Zurich or *Foyer le Pertuis* in Geneva.

## 2.5. Tenant protection

Art. 109 of the Federal Constitution stipulates that the federal government shall legislate against abuses in tenancy matters, in particular against unfair rents and terminated leases. These constitutional principles are set out in the Swiss Code of Obligations. Tenants are protected by these regulations in various ways. For example, landlords are already restricted when it comes to obtaining personal information from prospective tenants, and they are not completely free to terminate tenancy agreements.<sup>16</sup> As long as someone is already in a tenancy, they can defend themselves against violations of tenancy law. However, according to the Service for Combating Racism, tenancy law does not protect against discrimination. In addition to racial discrimination, multiple discrimination based on origin, residence status or religion in conjunction with socio-economic status, gender or disability also has a particularly negative impact on housing allocation.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.6. Civil protection structures

Civil protection structures, in particular collective shelters, are available at all times in the event of emergencies and disasters. In 2016, the Ordinance on the Requisitioning of Shelters and Shelter Sites for the Management of Emergency Situations in the Asylum Sector (VRSL) regulated when and how civil protection structures can be used as emergency shelters. The scope of application is therefore limited to emergency situations in the area of asylum. In a report to Parliament, the cantonal government of Ticino stated that the use of civil protection buildings for the accommodation of homeless people is only suitable to a limited extent in practice. Consequently, the existence of civil protection shelters does not negate the need for housing solutions for the homeless.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.7. Affordable accommodation

The Affordable Accommodation Act (AAA) of 2003 has two objectives: first, to create more living space for low-income households; and secondly, to promote access to owner-occupied residential property. The provisions of the AAA are intended in particular to benefit families, single parents, people with disabilities, elderly people in need, and people in training.

Various studies have been carried out on behalf of or with the assistance of the FOH with regard to specific groups to be supported. As part of the National Programme against Poverty, it was determined that it is households affected by poverty and low-income earners who are particularly affected by exclusion on the housing market.<sup>19</sup> This is also the starting point for the recommended measures, which range from the promotion of affordable housing to subject-specific assistance and cooperation between social services and the property sector.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Wehrmüller 2019: (15)

<sup>17</sup> Service for Combating Racism 2021: 87.

<sup>18</sup> Messaggio numero 7710 of 11.09.2019, from the Department of Health and Social Security (DSS), p.8.

<sup>19</sup> See summary in Beck et al. (2018) and Bochsler et al. (2015).

<sup>20</sup> See also NAP 2018.

The FOH is also conducting a "housing policy dialogue between the federal government, cantons and cities". The tense housing markets have been discussed in this expert group. The interim report from 2013 states that the situation has become more difficult "for people on modest incomes looking for housing", and "particularly in urban regions". Incentives rather than bans or restrictions are favoured to overcome these challenges.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, it mentions transparency on the rental housing market as well as "spatial planning measures that send out housing policy signals and can expand the scope of action of the communes" (this refers to the right of first refusal for communes, the promotion of cooperative housing construction and the use of land owned by the federal government that is no longer needed).

## **2.8. Conclusion**

The understanding of Switzerland as a welfare state calls for all people to be able to exercise their rights to freedom and participation. People who are affected by homelessness or who live in precarious housing conditions cannot do this, or only to a limited extent. This makes them a vulnerable group requiring special attention from the welfare state. However, there is no legal basis in Switzerland to which people affected by homelessness can directly refer. This highlights the issues of roles and responsibilities between the different federal levels. Legislative links exist in the areas of social assistance, victim assistance, tenancy and civil protection and affordable housing.

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<sup>21</sup> FOH 2013: 3.

### 3. Homelessness and the threat of losing one's home from the cantons' perspective

This chapter is based on guided telephone interviews with experts from 22 cantons. Interviews were conducted with 17 people from the cantonal administration and 7 people from the local administration of larger communes or from relevant third-party organisations. The main questions are listed in Annex 2.

#### 3.1. Contextualisation

Knowledge about homelessness varies greatly from canton to canton. While most cantons have research-based knowledge on the causes of homelessness, monitoring structures only exist where the cantons play an active role in the homelessness support system and are in contact with emergency shelters or similar institutions, for example. Therefore, not all cantons are aware of the situation in their own canton.

Concrete situations concerning homelessness or people at risk of becoming homeless tend to be passed on anecdotally by many experts. It is also noticeable that although the cantons mention various policy and administrative areas in which they identify a connection to homelessness (in particular the areas of asylum and health), they have no contact with these areas that is specifically focused on housing issues. The discrepancy between theoretical and practical knowledge as well as the lack of exchange within the administration is particularly noticeable where the cantons have not developed homelessness as a separate service area.

In practically all cases, the experts interviewed attributed homelessness to the individual concerned. Addiction and mental health problems as well as poverty were mentioned most frequently. Respondents also tended to classify people who are already marginalised as potentially at risk of homelessness. In particular, they identified undocumented migrants and people who depend on their ability to work to stay in the canton as being at risk or affected. Overall, it is clear that the existing basic understanding of homelessness should be supported by looking at the issue in context. Homelessness is often addressed at cantonal level as follows:

- Poverty is often cited as an explanation for a lack of or inadequate housing. The influence of the housing market is only noted when there is homelessness or a need to find accommodation.
- Precarious housing and the threat of losing one's home are rarely discussed in the context of poverty.
- Cantonal knowledge of groups potentially at risk of homelessness focuses exclusively on adults. It is rarely reported that children and young people can also be affected by homelessness and require special attention due to their vulnerability.
- Women are mentioned almost exclusively in connection with shelters under the Victim Support Act. Although it is recognised that women can become homeless for reasons other than domestic violence, their specific needs are only partially integrated into the service provision.
- Structural causes of homelessness, such as the situation in the housing market or the exclusion of undocumented migrants from support services, are rarely addressed.



- Issues of housing quality and security, or the threat of losing one's home, are not mentioned. Precarious housing is not mentioned as a precursor to homelessness, nor is it seen as a problem in its own right.
- According to the experts, a homeless person is always immediately recognisable because he or she is living and sleeping in public or publicly accessible spaces. However, if homelessness is only recognised as a problem when it manifests itself in its most precarious form of street homelessness, it becomes more difficult to prevent homelessness and to develop effective strategies.

Table 1: Homelessness from the perspective of the cantons

	Often mentioned	Rarely or not mentioned at all
<b>Areas related to homelessness</b>	Social assistance Child and adult protection Psychiatry Poverty Asylum	Penitentiary system Hospitalisation
<b>Areas with responsibility for homelessness</b>	Asylum system Commune social services	
<b>Invisibility of homelessness</b>	Staying with friends	Sleeping in cars, etc.
<b>Individual reasons</b>	Behavioural issues Addictive disorders Lack of financial resources Irregular residence status Family conflicts Separation	Domestic violence
<b>Structural reasons</b>	Tense housing market	
<b>Quality of living</b>		Housing in poor condition Cramped housing, especially for families
<b>Threat of losing one's home / housing security</b>	Individual reasons	Debt enforcement Debts Poor previous references Housing discrimination
<b>Profiles of those affected</b>	Aggressive behaviour or not Inadequate personal network Single parents	(Young) women Young people Pregnant women

### 3.2. Self-perception and role

When asked about their understanding of their role in preventing and combating homelessness, the experts interviewed responded that they generally see the state as being responsible for ensuring that no one becomes and remains homeless. The role of the cantons is understood to be subsidiary – after the personal responsibility of the individuals themselves, civil society initiatives and the responsibilities of the communes. The state is seen as the last safety net. This is usually understood to mean emergency support in the event of homelessness, but not generally preventive measures or assistance for other, less visible forms or precursors of homelessness.

The role that the cantons ascribe to themselves in contrast to other state actors is usually not formulated very precisely. There is considerable uncertainty in the regulation of competencies, especially

with regard to the communes. The majority of the experts surveyed see their canton as having a less proactive role. This could have the following reasons:

(1) Most cantons do not have an explicit, legally established cantonal responsibility in the area of homelessness. In their understanding of their role with regard to homelessness, the majority of experts therefore refer to the list of social objectives in the Federal Constitution or to their own cantonal constitution, insofar as this also provides for social objectives. In the list of social objectives in the Federal Constitution, the cantons are ascribed a caring responsibility and given responsibility for organisation of this care. It seems that this freedom in the organisation of one's own role leads to a lack of clarity regarding competences between the Confederation, cantons and communes. This can also be seen from the fact that there is very little institutionalised exchange on housing issues within the cantonal administrations. Contacts usually exist in a case-orientated context.

(2) A majority of cantons assign operational responsibility for homelessness assistance to the communes. The experts rarely mention that services in the area of housing provision could also be considered independently of or in addition to social assistance.

(3) The cantonal authorities face conflicting roles in relation to preventing and combating homelessness. Such cases are identified, for example, where the cantonal authorities see it as their responsibility to provide sufficient living space, but where this conflicts with other obligations and laws, such as immigration regulations. The development of structures that provide decent (especially long-term) housing for all people is often hindered where the collection of personal data would be necessary. In the case of people who do not have a regular residence status in Switzerland or who are at risk of losing this status if they ask for state assistance, the authorities report the challenge of providing the necessary support without exposing the people concerned.

(4) For practical reasons, cantons delegate responsibility for helping the homeless to communes or other actors. Cantons without their own coordinating task in the area of housing and without cantonal services to help the homeless legitimise this by claiming that communes can respond more rapidly and that people in an emergency situation can be accommodated more quickly at commune level than the canton could provide. The experts interviewed rated the expertise and experience in social welfare and specifically in helping the homeless as high, especially in urban communes. Cantons in which the cities take on important tasks in the area of housing provision sometimes contribute financially to the cities' services by providing land (e.g. the canton of Geneva) or in other ways. On the other hand, very few cantonal authorities also see coordinating tasks or strategic participation as part of their role. This is only done by cantons that have explicitly defined a separate 'homelessness' service area.

A frequently recognised task that has a direct impact on the structures of homelessness assistance is the promotion of civil society initiatives. While institutionalised cantonal responsibility in the area of homelessness is rare, most cantons see it as their responsibility to examine applications for support from civil society and to secure or expand the network of private organisations that are active in the area of social welfare.

Based on the interviews, the cantons' self-perception with regard to their role in the area of homelessness is largely determined by political processes. Cantonal parliaments and politically active groups from civil society are often seen as driving forces when it comes to identifying the necessary social policy measures. Political and civic engagement has raised awareness of the issue in some cantonal structures. Elsewhere, a lack of political will is blamed for making it difficult to set up a homeless

assistance system. This can go so far as politicians deliberately not providing any impetus because they do not want to motivate homeless people to seek help in their region.

### **3.3. Participation in the assistance system**

The cantons' involvement in the assistance system is diverse. One of the most frequently chosen ways is the financing or co-financing of services provided by non-governmental organisations that target homeless people. Depending on the canton, this is done via service contracts, the financing of specific (pilot) projects or the assumption of case costs if no responsible commune can be identified. Some cantons also have specific support funds that can be used to finance projects in the area of poverty reduction and are sometimes also used for direct payments to those affected. It also happens that canton-owned land is made available for projects such as container villages or other short- to medium-term accommodation. In some cases, the cantons provide a 24-hour telephone service, which is operated by specialists and can be used if third parties need support in an emergency housing situation. The interviewees rarely mentioned developing their own strategies or measures against homelessness. The cantons' services are usually activated by way of enquiries.

The cantons see the promotion of volunteer work as an important contribution. In most cantons, this is accorded central importance in the care of homeless people. It is seen as a relevant, fundamental part of a homelessness support system, especially in those cantons that do not have their own support structures or services. Some cantons question this focus on volunteer work because the possibilities of volunteers in the area of accommodation provision and social counselling quickly reach their limits (in terms of possibilities to organise longer-term accommodation and the low level of professionalisation).

Cooperation with experts and practitioners varies greatly from canton to canton. Those cantons that do not take an active role themselves are in contact with third-party organisations that offer services for people at risk of homelessness or of losing their home, primarily via the communes' social services. In addition to formal contacts, which are usually based on service agreements, direct and regular contacts between individual organisations and cantonal authorities were also mentioned. Where there are no institutionalised channels, these have a strongly informal, personal character. Cantons that are not involved in helping the homeless themselves or through the funding of third-party organisations are occasionally involved in projects, e.g. in the area of combating poverty or supporting young people. These projects can have an indirect impact on the area of homelessness. In the area of residential care, on the other hand, communication with external parties often remains case-orientated and the cantons are only involved in the search for solutions on a selective basis.

Very rarely do the cantons see it as their task to make direct contact with the people concerned. Only one canton states that it constantly scrutinises and develops its own role and existing measures and strategies through direct contact with those affected and with experts from the field.

Most cantons recognise the real estate industry as an important partner in preventing and combating homelessness. A tight situation on the housing market is also regularly seen as a major problem for people with modest financial means or who are in debt when they have to look for accommodation. Multiple discrimination, which can arise in connection with origin, language and family constellation, is seen as aggravating. However, many cantons remain passive when it comes to better understanding the dynamics of the housing market.

Table 2: Services offered by the cantons in the area of homelessness assistance (source: telephone interviews)

	Reference in the cantonal constitution to the right to housing <sup>22</sup>	Monitoring the housing supply	Homelessness as a separate service area	Institutionalised exchange (players)	Coordinative tasks in the area of homelessness	Provision of (financial) services or land
AG	✓	–	–	–	–	(✓) <sup>23</sup>
AI	–	–	–	–	–	(✓)
AR	✓	–	–	–	–	–
BE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BL	✓	–	–	✓	–	–
BS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
GE <sup>24</sup>	✓	✓	–	–	–	✓
GL	–	✓	–	✓	✓	✓
GR	–	(✓)	–	✓	(✓) <sup>25</sup>	✓
JU	✓	–	–	–	✓	–
LU	–	–	–	–	✓	–
NE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
NW	–	–	–	–	–	–
OW <sup>26</sup>	–	–	–	–	–	–
SG	–	–	–	✓	–	✓
SO	✓	–	–	–	–	✓
TI	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
UR	–	–	–	(✓)	–	–
VD	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
VS	– <sup>27</sup>	–	(✓)	–	–	✓
ZG	–	–	–	–	–	✓
ZH	–	–	–	–	–	✓

Key:

✓ = fulfilled/exists; (✓) = partially fulfilled/approaches exist; – = not fulfilled/does not exist; empty cell = no data.

Table 2 summarises the cantons' involvement in the homelessness assistance system as mentioned in the interviews or as known from preliminary research on the individual cantons. 'Participation' means that the cantons provide their own services (these do not have to be financial services). The following information on the categories (table columns):

- *Monitoring the housing supply*: The cantons know how to monitor the current state of housing provision (e.g. through exchanges with emergency accommodation centres).

<sup>22</sup> This does not include those constitutions that only mention housing subsidies. In this study, this is not interpreted as an indication of a right to housing.

<sup>23</sup> A motion passed by the Aargau parliament in December 2020 calls for the funding of the emergency shelter in Baden to be taken over at the end of the pilot phase. See: GR.20.91. The government's decision is still pending.

<sup>24</sup> In the canton of Geneva, assistance for the homeless is fully assigned to the city of Geneva.

<sup>25</sup> The canton of GR can commission Caritas to take on specific cases and support people when they need housing.

<sup>26</sup> Interview was conducted with the commune of Sarnen, which, as the largest commune in the canton, has a more active role in combating homelessness than the cantonal structures.

<sup>27</sup> The constitution of the canton of Valais was being completely revised at the time of the interview.

- *Homelessness as a separate service area*: The cantons have formally or informally defined their own service areas, know clear responsibilities within the administration and can outline the field of activity of these offices.
- *Institutionalised exchange with stakeholders*: The cantons know which actors are involved in helping the homeless and are in an institutionalised exchange with them.
- *Coordinative tasks in the area of homelessness*: The cantonal administration performs tasks in the area of networking or placement, even if no actual service area exists.
- *Provision of (financial) services or land*: The canton participates in the homeless assistance system by providing financial or material benefits. This also includes the provision of premises or land.

Table 3 shows the forms of participation on the part of the cantons that were described in the interviews. Some of these already exist, but some are ideas that were mentioned by the experts as state support worth considering.

Table 3: Forms of cantonal participation (source: telephone interviews)

Form of participation	Services
<b>Triage</b>	Initial counselling for those affected Referring those affected to institutions that can provide further help Contacting accommodation (hotels, guest houses, emergency shelters, hostels, etc.)
<b>Networking</b>	Organising roundtables and networking events Involvement of civil society and politics Recognising and exploiting synergies Networking within the administration
<b>Information</b>	Drafting of expert papers, basic documents or reports Monitoring the situation Awareness-raising among the population Provision of relevant information for persons (potentially) affected Identifying structural hurdles such as the housing market, (insufficient) rent subsidies, social assistance, etc.
<b>Coordination</b>	Coordination of all existing services for the homeless (governmental and non-governmental) Recognising gaps in the supply landscape Coordination of measures within the administration
<b>Out-of-hours services</b>	Round-the-clock placement of beds and care services Crisis intervention
<b>Financial participation</b>	Securing existing offers from non-state actors Expansion of non-governmental offerings Promotion of civil society initiatives
<b>Provision of living space</b>	Renting hotel and guesthouse rooms for emergencies Ensure availability of emergency housing Assumption of accommodation costs for homeless people spending the night in an emergency shelter
<b>Conceptual</b>	Developing strategies Initiating political processes Develop measures to combat discrimination against homeless people
<b>Involvement of those affected</b>	Systematic review of the effectiveness of the measures taken Insight into the reality of life for those affected Needs assessment Clarifying needs and placement of suitable accommodation Support in finding accommodation

### 3.4. Assessment of the supply structure from the cantons' perspective

The services for people who are affected or threatened by homelessness are diverse and range from providing places to sleep to social counselling, assistance in finding permanent accommodation, therapeutic support and day structures.

As far as the assessment of possible measures is concerned, most cantons feel able to judge the advantages and disadvantages of the different offers. It is generally recognised that a certain degree of individuality is essential – even with emergency concepts. There is a need for privacy, which is why emergency shelters that are shared with several people are often only considered suitable to a limited extent. The rental and provision of hotel rooms for people without a home is assessed and utilised differently by the experts interviewed: While some are convinced that living in a hotel room is not humane and have therefore developed a comprehensive range of residential services, others make use of hotel rooms because they can offer people their own space.

Solutions such as shared flats, hostels or emergency shelters are not considered adequate in many cantons. This is not only because of the occupancy rate of these facilities, but also because of the type of regulated accommodation. The profile of the people concerned has changed and more individualised solutions are required. The criteria for admission, e.g. in many emergency shelters, which were actually intended to enable people to live together in an orderly manner, led to the exclusion of individuals without a family. For example, it is often impossible to stay in an emergency shelter with a pet or to stay there for more than a few nights. An emergency shelter is also rarely suitable accommodation for people who need a certain amount of peace and privacy. If the people concerned are not offered alternative solutions, then even the existence of an emergency shelter cannot ensure that no one has to spend the night on the street.

When developing specialised services, such as women's shelters or residential homes for people with increased care needs, many cantons see the risk that these would only be used to a minimal capacity, and also that the anonymity of these people in rural areas could not be protected well enough. Some of the experts who describe this problem therefore work with providers outside their canton. Cantons that do not recognise or identify a need do not indicate how they compensate for the absence of specialised services.

The ideal solution, which guarantees as much individuality and privacy as possible, is considered to be access to one's own apartment. However, this regularly poses a challenge for the cantons because they are faced with property managers who are extremely reluctant to rent apartments to homeless people. Cantons that work with the Housing First approach state that the biggest challenge is finding suitable housing. In addition, the demand for support and advice on housing issues is underestimated. Housing First is successfully implemented in many countries as part of the promotion of social health.<sup>28</sup> The general principle focuses on the benefits of having a stable living situation. Instead of moving individuals through different levels of housing according to certain preconditions, e.g. their ability to live independently, the need for abstinence from addiction, or co-operation with state institutions, housing is arranged as quickly as possible. Moving people into their own home straight away provides immediate relief because it meets certain basic needs such as warmth and rest and offers protection and security. It also brings health benefits. A fixed place of residence makes it easier to treat chronic

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<sup>28</sup> See further details in Pleace (2016).

and social illnesses and for mobile medical, psychological and social work services to reach people. The aim of Housing First is to release people participating in the programme into the primary housing market after an unspecified period of supported housing.

### 3.5. Strategies and concepts

The cantons have little knowledge about formulated policies or strategies to prevent and combat homelessness. Some cantons (TI, BS, BL, GE<sup>29</sup>) have summarised the status of homelessness assistance in response to interpellations from the cantonal parliaments; most have a clear idea of how they would proceed to find immediate accommodation for a person concerned. However, this does not automatically imply the need for a general 'homelessness' strategy, especially one with an interdepartmental approach. This may be due to the fact that the cantons do not have a coordinating role and therefore do not need to have an overview of changes in demand and any gaps that exist. The following starting points for an overall strategy on homelessness can be identified from the expert interviews:

(1) Many cantons are seeking to introduce or intensify *cooperation with the real estate industry* and view the latter as an actor to be considered in the development of an overall 'homelessness' strategy. The aim is not only to promote and create more non-profit housing, but also to generate housing options for people who have difficulty finding their own apartment. The cantonal representatives see the greatest potential in both awareness-raising measures and support from the authorities (e.g. by providing rent guarantees or financing housing assistance). The possibility of preventing homelessness through non-profit housing is seen as a 'good' strategy, but at the same time it faces considerable political hurdles and has limited impact in terms of finding solutions for people with increased care needs.

(2) The experts interviewed see *cooperation with other cantons* as another approach to strategic positioning. Established national aid organisations such as Caritas or HEKS are seen as points of contact, as they are active on an intercantonal basis and have built up expertise in the areas of housing and homelessness and are well networked.

(3) In order to develop effective strategies at cantonal level in the field of homelessness, the *canton-alisation of certain elements of social assistance* is also mentioned. A cantonally supervised outsourcing of housing issues to a third-party organisation could encourage a canton to clearly define its area of responsibility and set a strategic direction.

### 3.6. Addressing socio-spatial mobility

The experts often note that cities, with their wide range of job opportunities and networks, attract people who are affected by poverty in their home regions. When asked whether they knew of any data on this from their cantons, the experts interviewed replied that they were aware of the migration to cities with a greater range of services for homeless people, but could not give any precise figures.

Although the authorities are aware of the need for homeless people to seek help, particularly in cities, the interviews did not reveal any institutionalised intercantonal cooperation at administrative or political level specifically aimed at preventing and combating homelessness. On the other hand, irregular contacts were reported with emergency shelters or organisations operating outside the canton and

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<sup>29</sup> See <https://ge.ch/grandconseil/data/texte/PL12939.pdf>



contacting the authorities to clarify their responsibilities. Some cantons that have urban centres with services for homeless people or people living in poverty have agreements that allow the surrounding cantons to grant cost credits for those affected. The rates for non-residents are generally higher than for people who live or are entitled to live in the canton providing the service.

Most experts from the 'emigration cantons' are neutral about the fact that people experiencing homelessness go to other cantons because they can access more services there. Some point out that the people concerned appreciate the anonymity that comes with leaving their home region. In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, it is also pointed out that services had to be used in nearby towns or urban centres.

### **3.7. Conclusion**

The analysis of the interviews with the cantonal experts shows that the prevention of homelessness and upstream exclusion from the housing market is generally recognised as a state responsibility. However, very few cantons have derived a service area from this that defines tasks, approaches, cooperation and funding. As a result, there is no systematic, planned approach to the issue. This manifests itself in particular in the fact that few cantons are able to provide concrete case figures and are unaware of any instruments that could be used to collect such figures. In addition, there is no overview of the services provided by civil society or of the solutions found by homeless people themselves. Homelessness can therefore only be understood in fragments. In most cases, only those people who have difficulties in finding or keeping an apartment or who have lost their home due to addiction, migration history or family conflicts fall within the scope of the authorities. Much less is known about precarious, insecure or unstable housing, as defined by the FEANTSA typology, and about people at risk of losing their home. This makes it difficult to develop proactive policies to prevent homelessness.

Many state social security functions are seen as the operational responsibility of the communes. Responses to homelessness are primarily expected from the relevant social assistance organisations. However, not all people living in precarious housing conditions or at risk of losing their home are entitled to social assistance. Even for those who are entitled to benefits, it remains difficult to prevent homelessness. Overall, the approach of viewing homelessness as a cross-cutting task is rare.

The extent of cantonal involvement therefore seems to depend directly on the role it sees itself playing in preventing and combating homelessness. Those cantons that see themselves as playing an active role participate in the assistance system in many ways. In particular, they are constantly reviewing, adapting and developing their own strategies (even if they are not formally defined). What is striking about these cantons is that they are in close contact with the implementing agencies and regularly get an idea of the situation of people currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness in their canton through these agencies or even through direct contact with the people concerned.

## 4. Homelessness and the threat of losing one's home from the communes' perspective

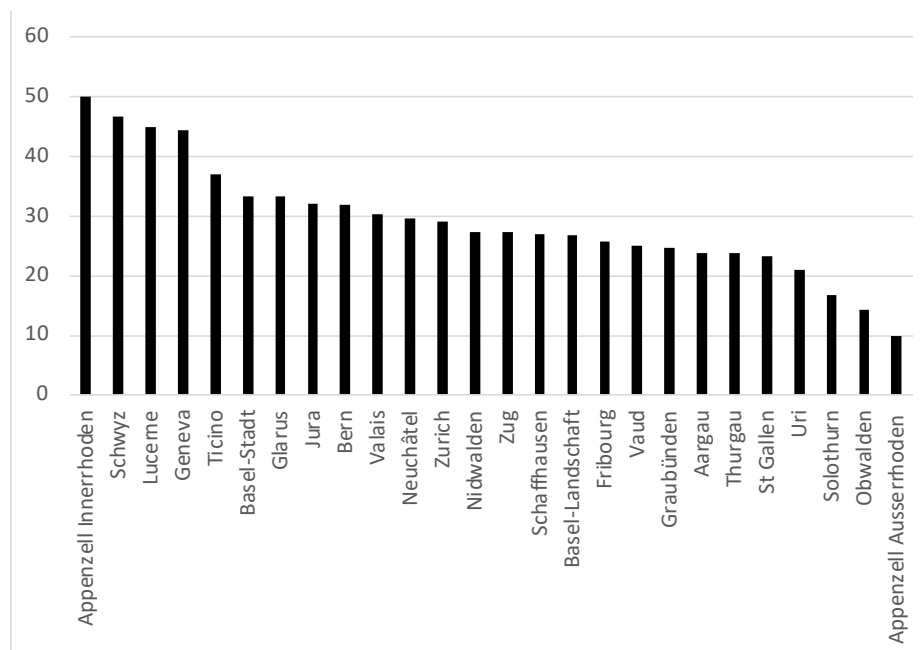
### 4.1. Relevance and profile of the respondents

Of the 2,172 Swiss communes, 616 took part in the survey, which corresponds to a response rate of 28.4%.

With 28.4% return rate, how representative are the results? This question was explored in four directions:

(1) Participation rate by canton (Fig. 1): All Swiss cantons are represented by communes in the survey. The cantons of Appenzell-Innerrhoden, Schwyz, Lucerne and Geneva are represented by over 40% of their communes; in most other cantons, between 20 and 40% of communes took part in the survey; in the cantons of Solothurn (17%), Obwalden (14%) and Appenzell-Ausserrhoden (10%), less than 20% of communes took part in the survey.

Figure 1: Cantonal participation rate grouped by participation rate



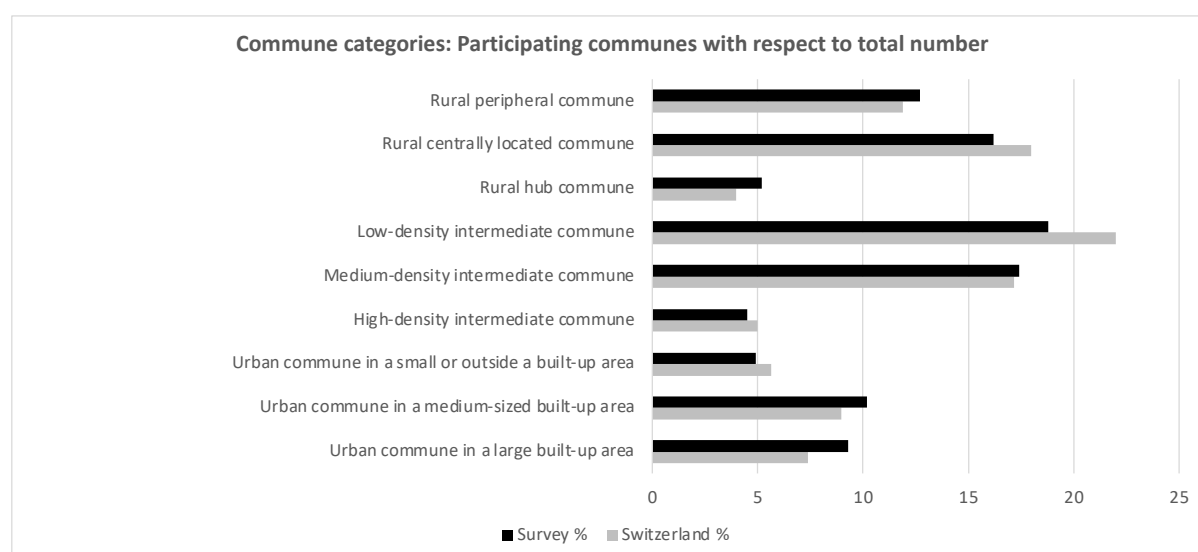
(2) Number of inhabitants: A comparison of the communes that participated in the online survey in terms of population size shows that the majority (470) of the 616 communes that took part have a population of up to 5,000 inhabitants. This survey thus provides a first insight into the situation of small and micro communes in Switzerland with regard to homelessness and the threat of losing one's home. Secondly, all six Swiss communes with more than 100,000 residents took part in the survey (Zurich, Geneva, Basel, Lausanne, Bern, Winterthur). The survey therefore fills a gap in knowledge about homelessness and the threat of losing one's home in Switzerland's urban centres.

Table 3: Participation rate of communes by population size

Number of inhabitants (31.12.2020)	Number of communes that participated	Number of communes as at 31.12.2020	Participation rate
5 000	470	1 783	26.4
5 001 – 10 000	73	226	32.3
10 001 – 15 000	24	77	31.2
15 001 – 100 000	36	80	45.0
> 100 000	6	6	100

(3) Typology of communes of the Federal Statistical Office (9 categories): This 2012 typology categorises Switzerland's communes according to three criteria: density, size and accessibility, and distinguishes between *urban*, *rural* and *intermediate* categories, each with three different functional meanings (e.g. 'large built-up area', 'centrally located'). Some types are slightly over- or under-represented in the online survey (Fig. 2). Overall, the online survey is highly representative in this respect, allowing for empirically sound analyses of homelessness and the threat of losing one's home at the level of spatial commune types. The nine-category typology is therefore used specifically to interpret the results in the remainder of the report.

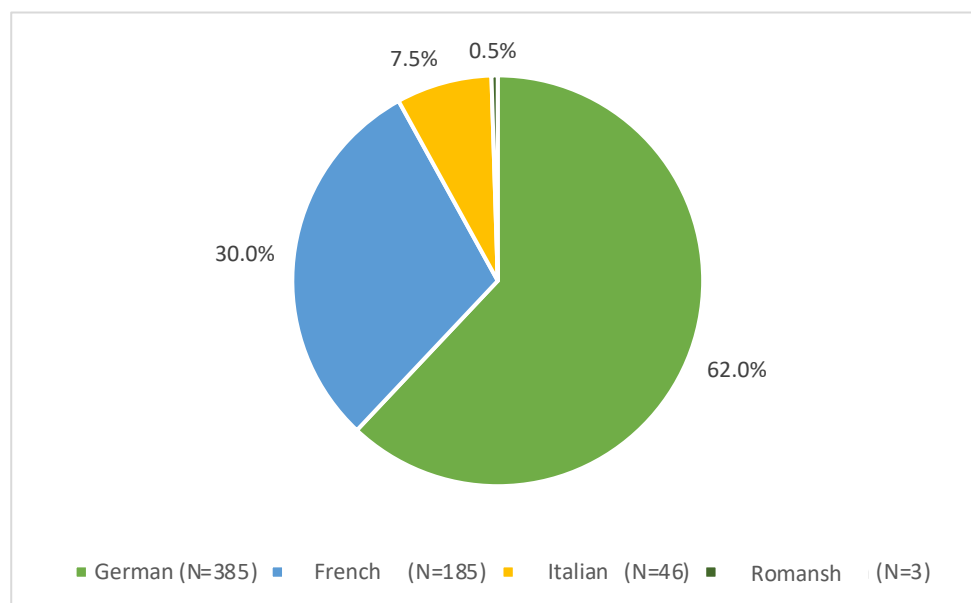
Figure 2: The participating communes according to the FSO's non-category typology (as a % of commune type for Switzerland as a whole)



(4) Language regions: The distribution of the responding communes by language region is as follows (Fig. 3): 62% of the responses came from German-speaking communes, 30% from French-speaking communes, 7.5% from Italian-speaking communes and 0.5% from Romansh-speaking communes. Based on the language regions according to the FSO typology, the participation rates are 27% for German-speaking Switzerland, 30% for French-speaking Switzerland, 37% for Italian-speaking Switzerland and 18% for Romansh-speaking Switzerland. Assuming that the representativeness of the results increases with the response rate, the Italian language region is best represented by the participating communes. The German-speaking and French-speaking regions are also very well represented, with

participation rates of over 25%. With a participation rate of 18% of all communes, the representativeness of the Romansh language region falls slightly behind that of the other parts of the country. In absolute terms, three Romansh-speaking communes took part; this language region is therefore not analysed.

Figure 3: Participating communes by language region, % shares shown



### Representativeness

An examination of the validity of the data concludes that there are no systematic errors, particularly with regard to the characteristics of density, size and accessibility of communes. Against this backdrop, the online survey, with a response rate of 28.4%, achieved a good participation rate compared to nationwide commune surveys with a similar survey design. The survey shows a very good representation for all nine types of commune. Switzerland's largest language regions are also very well represented.

Who responded in the communes? 547 people answered the question about their function in the commune. Almost half of the respondents (49.4%) come from specialised administrative departments, of which almost 36% come from specialised social services (of which almost 86% have management responsibilities) and around 4% from administrative departments in the building and housing sector. Only just under 10% are civil servants working in general services (e.g. residents' registration/population services).

Almost 35% of the responses came from commune clerks and 15.7% from political leaders (e.g. local councillors). The survey thus provides a technically sound assessment that includes voices from both the relevant policy areas and the (social) administration.

Table 4: The specialisms and professional positions of the respondents

Position	Number	%
<b>Social (work) specialists</b>	196	35.8
- of which managers	145	
<b>Building and housing specialists</b>	20	3.7
<b>General administration</b>	54	9.9
<b>Commune clerk</b>	191	34.9
<b>Political leaders</b>	86	15.7
<b>Total</b>	547	100

#### 4.2. Homelessness and the threat of losing one's home: Estimates

Communes were asked to estimate both the number of people experiencing homelessness and those at risk of losing their home in their commune. An estimation question was chosen because there is no monitoring or early warning system at commune level throughout Switzerland that could have been used. Moreover, the majority of communes do not have an office responsible for the issue that keeps its own count statistics. It is therefore not possible to give an exact figure, even for the large cities. Nevertheless, the problem should not be categorised without a quantitative statement. This will allow a first nationwide classification.

##### Estimate of homelessness

576 of the 616 communes submitted an estimate (Tab. 7). 447 of these, i.e. 77.6% of all participating communes, estimate that there are no people experiencing homelessness in their commune. A further 110 communes, i.e. 19.1%, indicated a number between 1 and 10 persons concerned. Only 19 (3.4%) communes estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness in their area to be more than 10, with the highest estimate being 300. Overall, the 130 communes (22.6% of those that responded) which indicated a number greater than '0' estimate that 2,170 people are affected by homelessness.

Table 5: The communes' estimate of homelessness

Homeless people	Number of communes	%
<b>0</b>	447	77.6
<b>1 – 10</b>	110	19.1
<b>11 – 50</b>	12	2.1
<b>&gt; 50</b>	7	1.2
<b>Total</b>	576	100

The differentiation by commune typology (Fig. 4) shows that homelessness is estimated in all commune types, but there is a dichotomy in terms of the number of cases: low case numbers (up to 10 people) are estimated in urban as well as intermediate and rural communes, while higher estimated numbers (from 11 persons) are concentrated in urban communes.

Figure 4: Estimates of homelessness in urban, intermediate and rural communes

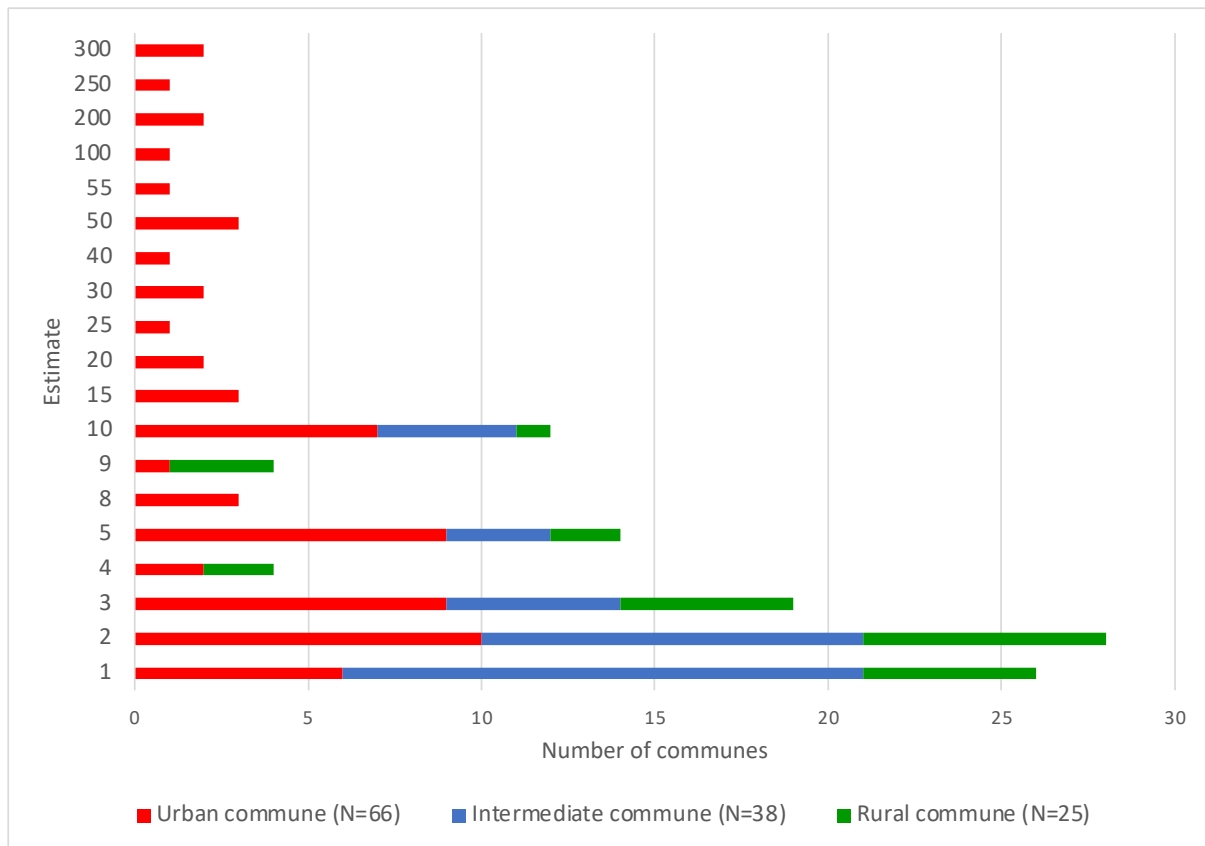


Figure 5: Estimates of homelessness according to the nine-category typology

Estimate (number of people)	Urban commune in...			Intermediate commune			Rural commune			Total
	... large built-up area	... medium-sized built-up area	... small or outside of built-up area	High density	Medium density	Low density	Hub commune	Centrally located	Peripheral	
0	19	28	19	16	84	103	18	83	75	444
1	0	5	1	2	8	5	1	3	1	26
2	3	5	2	2	7	2	3	4	0	28
3	3	4	2	1	3	1	2	2	1	19
4	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	4
5	5	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	14
8	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
9	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	4
10	5	1	1	4	0	0	0	1	0	12
15	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
20	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
25	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
30	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
40	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
50	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
55	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
100	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
200	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
250	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
300	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>573</b>
no cases	39.6	50.0	67.9	61.5	81.6	92.0	62.1	87.4	97.4	77.4
with cases	60.4	50.0	32.1	38.5	18.4	8.0	37.9	12.6	2.6	22.7

When analysing the estimated figure using the FSO's nine-category typology (Fig. 5), the two types 'urban commune of a large built-up area' and 'urban commune of a medium-sized built-up area' stand out. More than half of these two commune types estimate at least one case and, with one exception, all estimated numbers of 15 persons or more are in these two types. However, there are also similarities between the types 'urban communes in a small built-up area or outside a built-up area', 'high-density intermediate commune' and 'rural hub commune'. 30-40% of these types of communes estimate case numbers between 1 and 30.<sup>30</sup>

A look at the language regions shows a higher proportion of communes in the French-speaking (87.4%) and Italian-speaking regions (90.0%) that estimate no homelessness in their commune than in the German-speaking region (70.7%). Conversely, this means that the proportion of communes with homelessness is higher in German-speaking Switzerland.

Table 6: The estimate of homelessness by language region

Homeless people	Language region of Switzerland					
	German	%	French	%	Italian	%
<b>0</b>	249	70.7	153	87.4	40	90.9
<b>1 – 10</b>	87	24.7	19	10.9	4	9.1
<b>11 – 50</b>	10	2.8	2	1.1		
<b>&gt; 50</b>	6	1.7	1	0.6		
<b>Total</b>	352	100.0	175	100.0	44	100.0

One explanation for the higher proportion of communes with homelessness in German-speaking Switzerland is the larger number of urban communes there. The specialist literature has long pointed out that homelessness is more common in urban areas, as the social problems that lead to homelessness (poverty, unemployment, migration, housing shortages) are concentrated in urban areas (Brousse 2016).

#### Estimates of people at risk of losing their home

The estimated figures for people at risk of losing their home in the communes are similar to those for homelessness, albeit at a higher level. A total of 515 out of 616 participating communes responded. Approximately 62% of the communes give a figure of zero, approximately 30% of the communes estimate that up to 10 people are at risk of losing their home, and 41 communes give a figure of between 10 and 3,000 people. Overall, the 196 communes (38% of the responding communes) that indicated a number greater than zero estimate that 7,946 people are at risk of losing their home.

<sup>30</sup> Differing reference figures in the respective analyses are due to the fact that not all questionnaires were completed in full.



Table 7: The communes' estimates of people at risk of losing their home

People at risk of losing their home	Number of communes	%
0	319	61.9
1 – 10	155	30.1
11 – 50	30	5.8
> 50	11	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>515</b>	

Figure 6 shows that higher estimated case numbers come from urban communes, while up to 20 cases are also estimated in intermediate and rural communes. A more detailed analysis based on the commune typology (Fig. 7) shows similarities between the types 'urban commune of a large built-up area', 'urban commune of a medium-sized built-up area', 'high-density intermediate communes' and 'rural centre commune': Here, between 60 and 80% of all communes estimate cases. The threat of losing one's home – as difficult as it was for the respondents to estimate without a basis – appears to be related to the central function of a commune.

Figure 6: Estimates of people at risk of losing their home according to the three-category typology

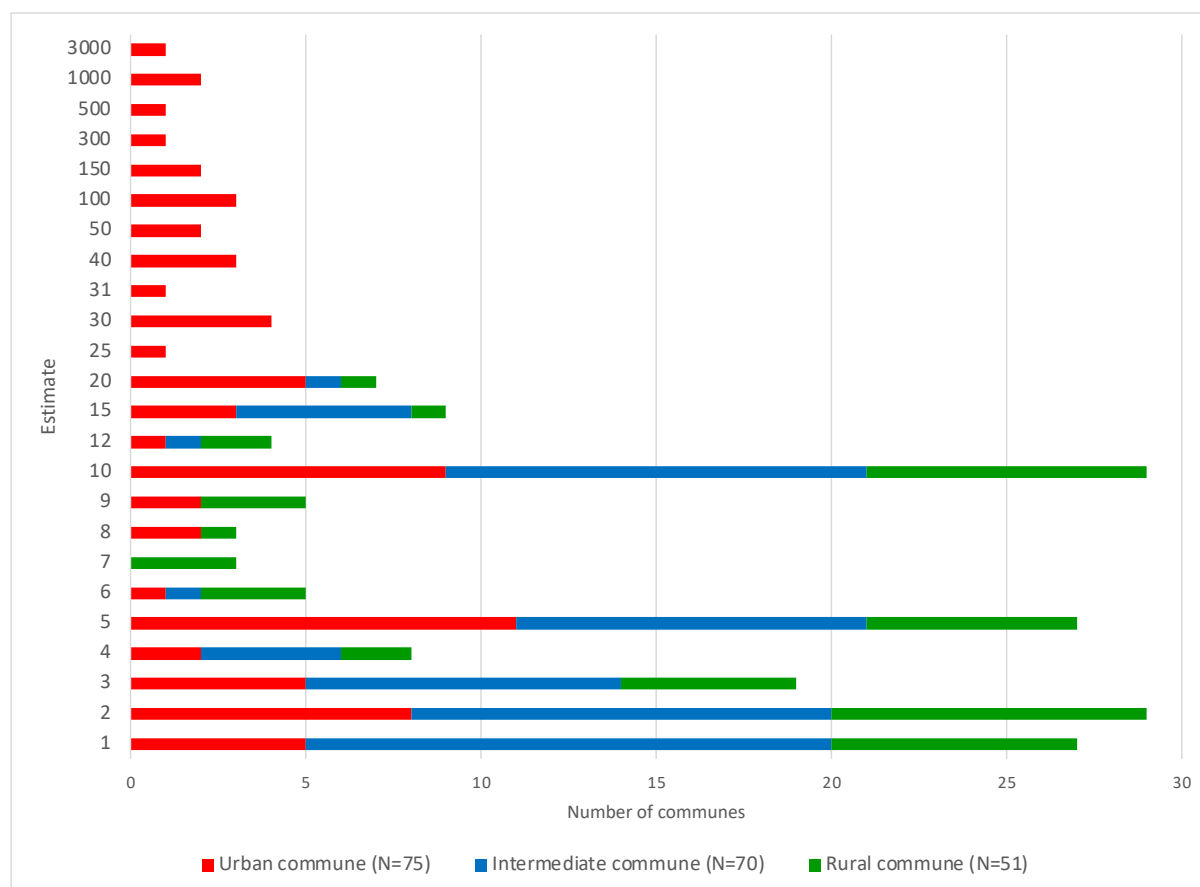


Figure 7: Estimates of people at risk of losing their home according to the nine-category typology

Estimate (number of people)	Urban commune in...			Intermediate commune			Rural commune			Total
	... large built-up area	... medium-sized built-up area	... small or outside of built-up area	High density	Medium density	Low density	Hub commune	Centrally located	Peripheral	
0	9	16	13	5	52	86	11	63	62	317
1	1	2	2	3	9	3	0	5	2	27
2	2	5	1	2	6	4	3	4	2	29
3	3	2	0	1	5	3	2	2	1	19
4	0	1	1	2	1	1	2	0	0	8
5	3	7	1	0	7	3	0	5	1	27
6	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	5
7	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3
8	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
9	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	0	5
10	5	3	1	5	5	2	3	2	3	29
12	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	3
15	1	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	5
20	2	3	0	3	1	1	0	1	0	11
25	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
30	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
31	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
40	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
50	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
100	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4
150	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
300	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
500	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1000	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
3000	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>513</b>
no cases	22.5	32.0	56.5	21.7	59.8	83.5	39.3	71.6	87.3	61.8
with cases	77.5	68.0	43.5	78.3	40.2	16.5	60.7	28.4	12.7	38.2

A look at the language regions shows a higher proportion of communes in the French-speaking (74.5%) and Italian-speaking regions (75.0%) that state that they have no people at risk of losing their home in their commune. In the German-speaking region, on the other hand, the figure is only 54.2%. In other words, just under half of the German-speaking communes that took part in the survey have people in their commune who are at risk of losing their home.

Table 8: Estimates of people at risk of losing their home by language region

People at risk of losing their home	Language region of Switzerland					
	German	%	French	%	Italian	%
<b>0</b>	176	54.2	108	74.5	30	75.0
<b>1 – 10</b>	115	35.4	31	21.4	9	22.5
<b>11 – 50</b>	27	8.3	3	2.1		
<b>&gt; 50</b>	7	2.2	3	2.1	1	2.5
<b>Total</b>	325	100.0	145	100.0	40	100.0

One possible explanation for the higher proportion of communes in German-speaking Switzerland with people at risk of losing their home is the larger populations there. The average number of inhabitants per participating commune in German-speaking Switzerland is 7,299 (13% of communes have more than 10,000 inhabitants); the average number of inhabitants in French-speaking Switzerland is 4,798 (9% of communes have more than 10,000 inhabitants) and the average number of inhabitants in Italian-speaking Switzerland is 4,405 (2% of communes have more than 10,000 inhabitants).

### **4.3. Comparisons of communes' estimates**

The six largest cities that provided information on this, i.e. Zurich, Basel, Lausanne, Bern, Winterthur and Lucerne, together reported 1,275 people sleeping rough, which corresponds to 59% of all homeless people reported in the survey. The city of Geneva, which is also one of the largest cities in Switzerland and took part in the survey, did not provide any information on the extent of homelessness in its city.

Regarding the number of people at risk of losing their home, there is a gap in data for the large cities. Of the cities mentioned above, Basel, Lausanne, Bern and Lucerne were unable to provide estimates, although they attribute a high number of homeless people to their city. Geneva was unable to provide estimates of either homelessness or the number of people at risk of losing their home. Apart from this, the threat of losing one's home occurs more frequently in the larger cities. The six largest cities that provided information on this, i.e. Zurich, Winterthur, St Gallen, Lugano, Biel/Bienne and Thun, together named 4,730 people at risk of losing their home, which corresponds to 60% of all people reported in the survey. These cities also offer a wider range of services and support (see below). This means that large cities are characterised by a higher incidence of problems, but also offer more services and support.

### **4.4. Extrapolation of homelessness and the threat of losing one's home in Switzerland**

What do the figures on the estimated extent of homelessness and people at risk of losing their home in the 616 communes surveyed say for Switzerland as a whole? The following is an extrapolation based on the results of the online survey. According to the assumption and the results of this study, homelessness and the threat of losing one's home are distributed differently depending on the size of the commune. The number of inhabitants is therefore taken into account accordingly in the extrapolation.

The first step in the extrapolation was to divide the communes participating in the survey into 10 population classes, which provided an estimate of the number of homeless people and people at risk of losing their home in their commune. An estimate of the extent of homelessness was provided by 577 communes; 515 communes provided an estimate of those at risk of losing their home. Based on the data from the survey, the total number of people experiencing homelessness and at risk of losing their home was calculated for each resident class in a second step. In addition, the proportion of residents in the surveyed communes in relation to all residents in Switzerland was calculated in the ten population classes. The overall figures from the survey on homelessness and the threat of losing one's home were extrapolated to Switzerland as a whole on the basis of the proportions of the population in the 10 population classes (see Annex for details).

According to the formula (see Annex), the following figures were estimated for Switzerland:

- 3,810 people experiencing homelessness
- 16,355 people at risk of losing their home.

According to the extrapolation model, 1,297 people, i.e. 34% of all homeless people in Switzerland, are in the six communes with more than 100,000 inhabitants. 1,658 homeless people, or 43.5%, live in communes with a population of between 10,001 and 100,000. 855 homeless people, i.e. 22.4%, live in communes with 10,000 or fewer inhabitants.

According to the extrapolation model, 2,550 people in Switzerland, i.e. 16% of all those at risk of losing their home, live in the six communes with more than 100,000 inhabitants. 10,041 people, or 61.4% of those affected, are to be found in communes with a population of 10,001 to 100,000 inhabitants. 23.0% of homeless people live in communes with 10,000 or fewer inhabitants. As the extrapolations for all cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants are based only on the data from the cities of Winterthur and Zurich, there is a greater degree of uncertainty in the validity of the results.

Homelessness is an issue in the majority of communes belonging to a large or medium-sized built-up area in Switzerland. The question as to how many people are at risk of losing their home cannot be answered conclusively due to a lack of information from four of the six cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. On the basis of the analyses, it can be assumed that the number of people at risk of losing their home is more spread out not only in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, but also in communes with between 10,001 and 100,000 inhabitants.

Note: The projections on the extent and distribution of homelessness and the threat of losing one's home in the communes are subject to the following reservations: (1) The information on homelessness in the survey is an estimate by the administration. It may contain errors, for example because not all cases are known; (2) It is not clear whether the non-participation of communes in the survey is related to the fact that there are no or at least fewer homeless people or people at risk of losing their home than the figure calculated for the respective population group.

#### **4.5. The housing market in the communes**

Homelessness and the precursors of precarious and insecure housing are linked to options on the housing market. Communes were therefore asked how they perceived the local housing market. A four-point scale was used, ranging from 'extremely tense' to 'not tense'. Of the 594 communes that responded to this question, the majority (51.8%) rated the local housing market as 'not tense'. Just under 14% found the housing market 'very tense' to 'extremely tense'.

The assessments vary according to the type of commune (Fig. 9). Housing markets in rural communes are perceived as relaxed to slightly tense, while housing markets in intermediate and especially urban communes are perceived as tense. As many as 13% of intermediate communes and 27% of urban communes consider their housing markets to be under severe to very severe pressure. Only one of Switzerland's six largest cities considers the housing market to be slightly tense, another four consider it to be very tense and one city considers it to be extremely tense (one city did not respond).

Figure 8: The housing market from the communes' perspective

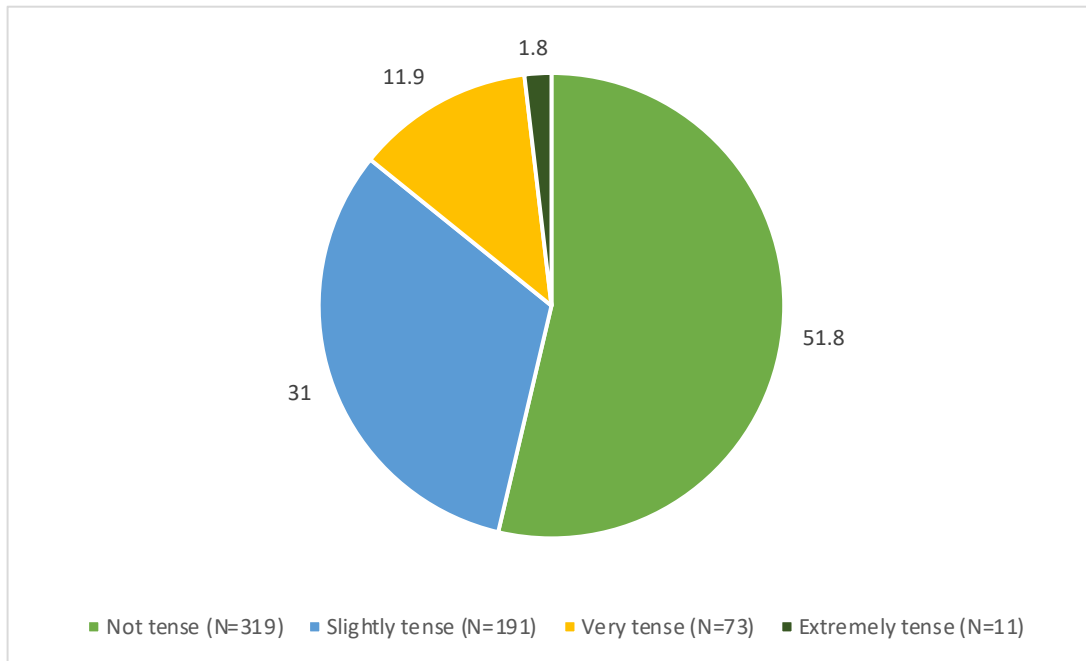
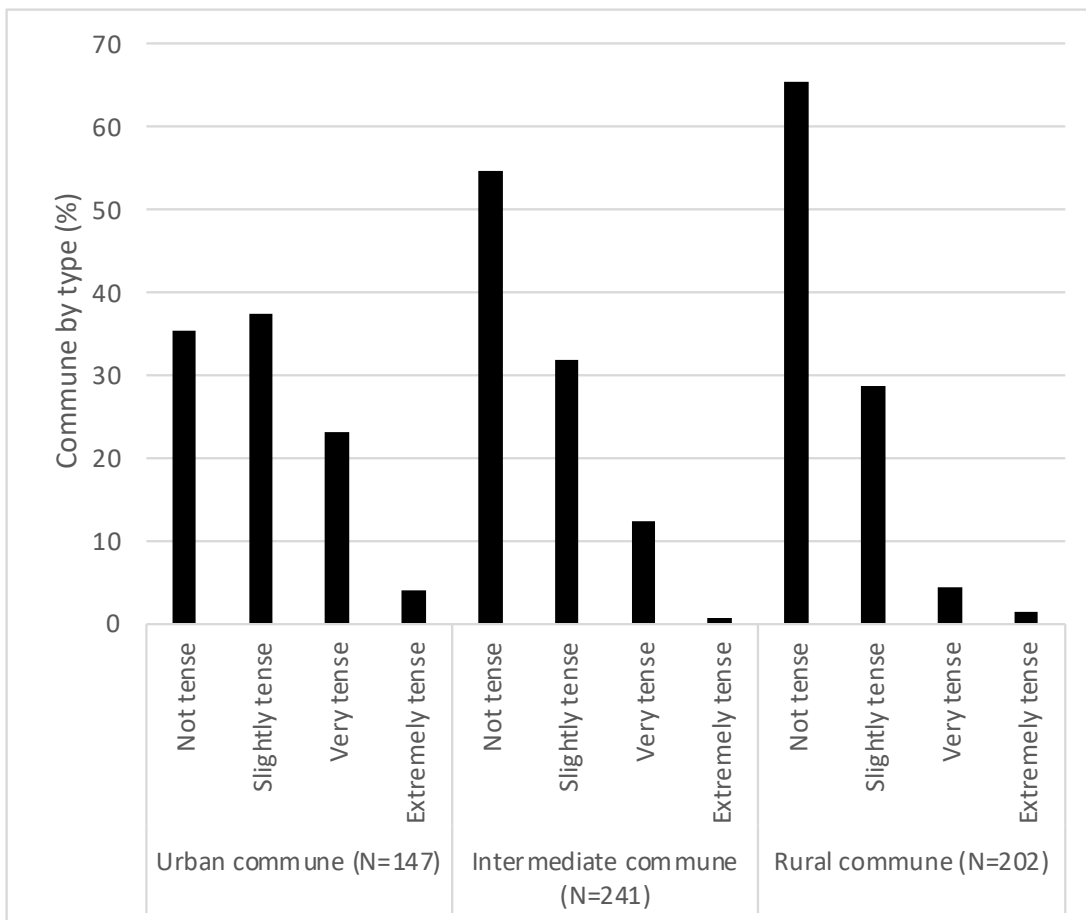


Figure 9: The housing market from the communes' perspective by commune type



Do communes with higher estimates of homeless people or people at risk of losing their home assess the housing markets significantly differently? To test the mean values for the housing market for significant differences, two groups with two characteristics were created: more or less than 10 homeless people in a commune or more or less than 10 people in a commune at risk of losing their home.

It can be seen that those communes with more than 10 homeless people also consider the housing market to be significantly tighter. The group with more than 10 people at risk of losing their home also rate the housing market as significantly tenser.

The more a commune is confronted with the problems of homelessness or the threat of losing one's home, the more strained the housing market is considered to be. The situation in the housing market is therefore also likely to play an important role in local efforts to combat and prevent homelessness and its precursors. The assessment of the housing market does not differ between language regions.

#### **4.6. Reasons for homelessness and the threat of losing one's home**

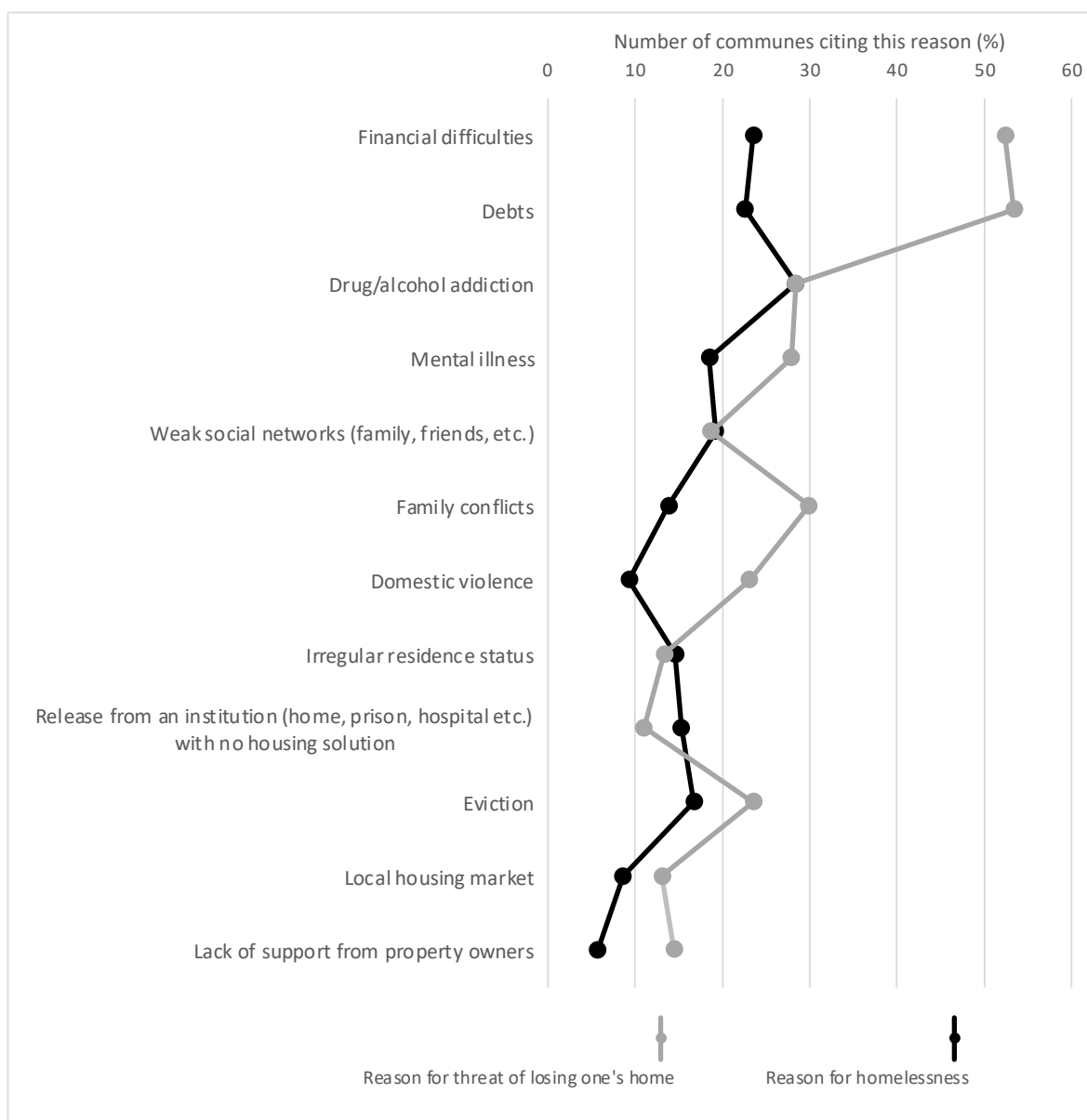
A list was provided to answer the question about the reasons for homelessness and imminent loss of housing. This list includes reasons that can be associated with the individual (e.g. substance abuse, debt, mental illness), the interaction between the commune and the housing market (too few social housing units, insufficient support from landlords) or other aspects of the social and migration situation (residence status, release from a collective facility). All reasons considered relevant by the experts could be ticked for both a) homelessness and b) the threat of losing one's home. Finally, an open category for 'other reasons' was available.

The most striking difference in the reasons for homelessness and the threat of losing one's home lies in the financial situation of those concerned. More than half of the communes find that a lack of financial resources and debt/foreclosure are reasons for becoming at risk of losing one's home. However, only around 23% of communes cite this as a reason for homelessness. Further differences exist with regard to the significance of the family situation or cohabitation: 30% (for family conflicts) and 24% (for domestic violence) of the communes see this as a reason for becoming at risk of losing one's home, but only 14% (for family conflicts) and 10% (for domestic violence) for homelessness itself. Other than that, the reasons are very close to each other.

Fewer different reasons are given for homelessness. It is striking that the social and migration policy reasons, which a commune cannot influence, are only rarely mentioned (residence status: 14.6% for homelessness and 13.3% for the threat of losing one's home; release from an institution: 15.3% and 11% respectively). Housing supply is also seen as a minor reason (too little social housing 8.6% and 13.1% respectively); too little support from property owners 5.7% and 14.4% respectively).

Under 'other reasons', very different topics are mentioned in the case of homelessness and the threat of losing one's home: demolition of a property, rents too high in relation to social assistance payments, the behaviour of the tenant (refusal to pay), lack of capacity to live independently, fire in the dwelling, preference for tourist rentals. In the category 'other reasons', no clusters of reasons can be identified.

Figure 10: Reasons for homelessness and the threat of losing one's home



Overall, the communes describe homelessness primarily as a multiple problem with individual causes, which is also linked to structural problems, but to a much lesser extent. The threat of losing one's home, on the other hand, is mainly due to the financial situation and its consequences as well as other individual problems (addiction, violence, mental illness).

The reasons for homelessness and the threat of losing one's home differ according to the commune typology (Figure 11). This results in a more differentiated profile for urban communes, both in terms of homelessness and the threat of losing one's home.

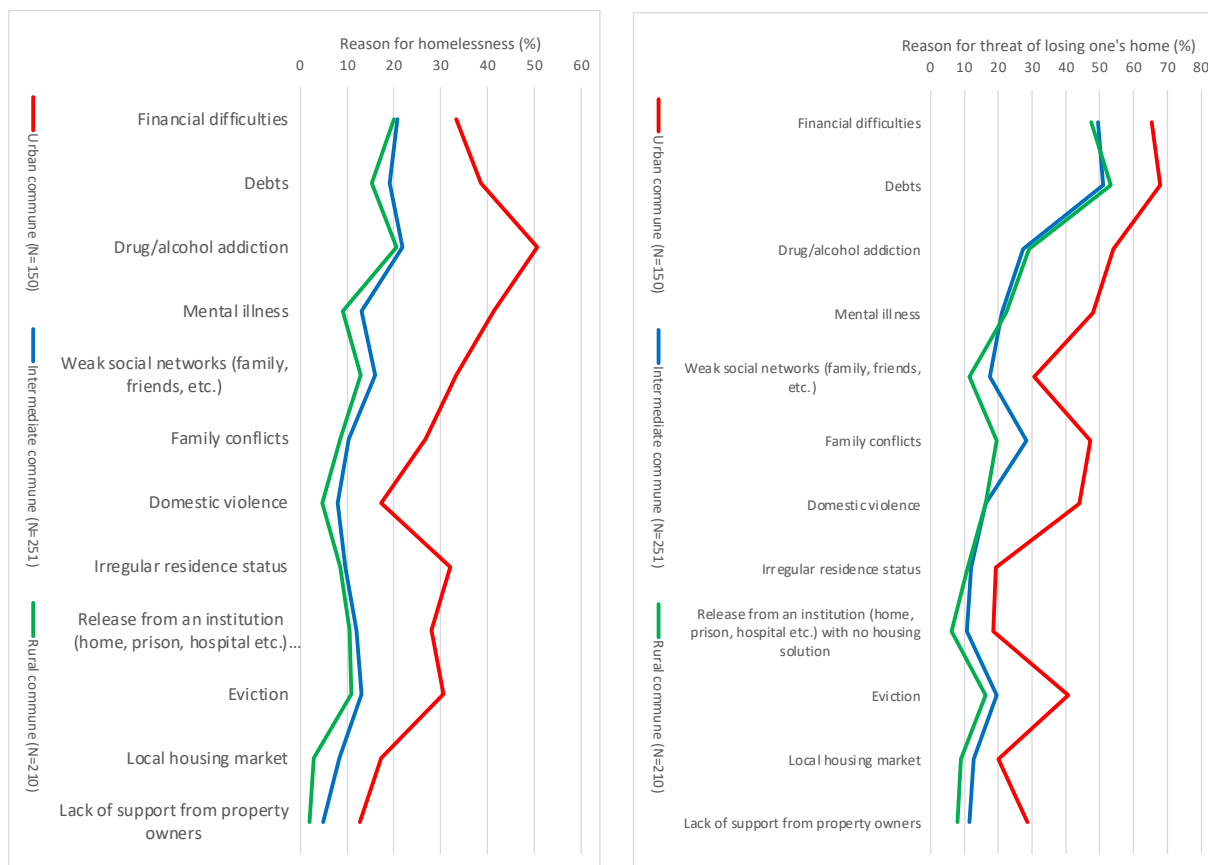
The individual reasons for homelessness in particular differ by up to 30% between the different types of commune. For example, addiction and consumption problems as well as mental illness are much more likely to be cited as reasons for homelessness in urban communes than in rural or intermediate communes. Social and migration policy reasons are also weighted more heavily in urban communes.



The reasons for the threat of losing one's home show interesting contrasts between urban communes and rural or intermediate communes. From the point of view of the urban communes, the threat of losing one's home is due in particular to evictions (40.7% of all urban communes cite this as a reason) and insufficient support from property owners (28.7%). Financial difficulties and debt enforcement (65% and 68% respectively), mental illness/addiction (48% and 54% respectively), domestic violence (44%) and family conflicts (47.3%) are also among the top reasons from the point of view of urban communes.

When comparing the different language regions, there are no significant differences in the explanations for homelessness. The reasons for the threat of losing one's home also show a similar structure between the language regions.

Figure 11: Reasons for homelessness (left) and the threat of losing one's home (right) by type of commune; multiple answers possible



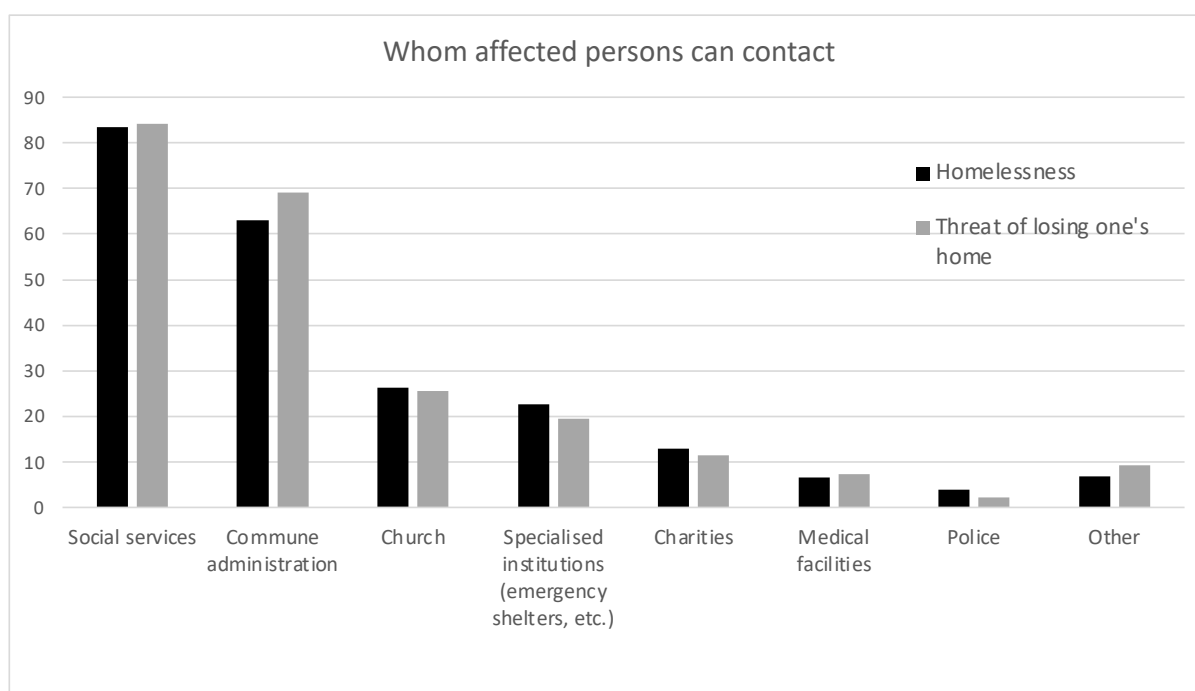
#### 4.7. Organisation of assistance

Another topic area asked about the forms of and access to commune support for people who are homeless or at risk of losing their home. Three topics were of interest: (1) contact points and responsibilities, (2) forms of commune assistance, (3) non-governmental providers and financial participation.

##### Contact points and responsibilities in the communes

People experiencing homelessness or at risk of losing their home have access to social services in the communes (in 83.4% of all communes in the case of homelessness, in 84.1% for those at risk of losing their home) as the central – and often only – point of contact (Fig. 12). In 63.1% of communes (or 69% in the case of people at risk of losing their home), the commune administration is also the point of contact.

Figure 12: Contact points in the communes, multiple answers possible



They are followed at some distance by churches (26.3% / 25.5%) and specialised institutions (e.g. emergency shelters): 22.6% / 19.5%). In just under 13% of communes (or 11.5% for the threat of losing one's home), aid organisations and medical facilities (6.7% / 7.3%) also play a role as a point of contact for the people concerned. Other sources of support (42 and 57 respectively) include associations, foundations, family, neighbours and personal networks.

A differentiation by commune type shows that the more rural a commune is and the less of a central hub it is, the more important the (regional) social services and the commune administration become as a point of contact.

The organisation of assistance differs considerably between the language regions. In the case of homelessness, the commune administration is mentioned less frequently in Italian-speaking Switzerland (43.5% vs. 64.9% in German-speaking Switzerland and 65.0% in French-speaking Switzerland). In

German-speaking Switzerland, the church is mentioned more frequently as a point of contact (34.0% vs. 12.6% in French-speaking Switzerland and 19.6% in Italian-speaking Switzerland). In French-speaking Switzerland, the social services are mentioned less frequently as a contact partner (72.7% vs. 78.3% in Italian-speaking Switzerland and 88.9% in German-speaking Switzerland). The same differences (but with different relative proportions) also apply in relation to the threat of losing one's home.

At what point does a commune start to diversify its contact points for people at risk of losing their home, or at what population size do communes no longer have any contact points for people experiencing or at risk of losing their home? The analysis shows that communes with a population of around 8,000 or more have three contact points, while those with a population of less than 1,200 have none.

### Assistance

The communes were asked what concrete help they offer in the event of homelessness and threat of losing one's home, over and above counselling by social services and financial support in line with material social assistance. Various options were listed, which could be selected or added to.

Of the 616 communes that responded to the survey, 28.6% reported that they had no additional services (Fig. 13). The remaining communes provide financial support, e.g. through rent guarantees or housing cost subsidies (35.6%), offer (legal) advice on housing issues (35.2%) or provide access to short and long-term accommodation (31.5%).

The extent of additional support varies between urban, rural and intermediate communes (Fig. 14). The more rural the commune, the fewer additional services are available: while 54% of urban communes offer legal advice on housing issues, the figure is only 31.9% for intermediate communes and just 25.7% for rural communes. The same applies to financial support: 55.3% of urban, 30.3% of intermediate and 27.6% of rural communes offer such assistance. The six largest cities in Switzerland offer all services and do not refer people to other communes.

Figure 13: Assistance from the communes

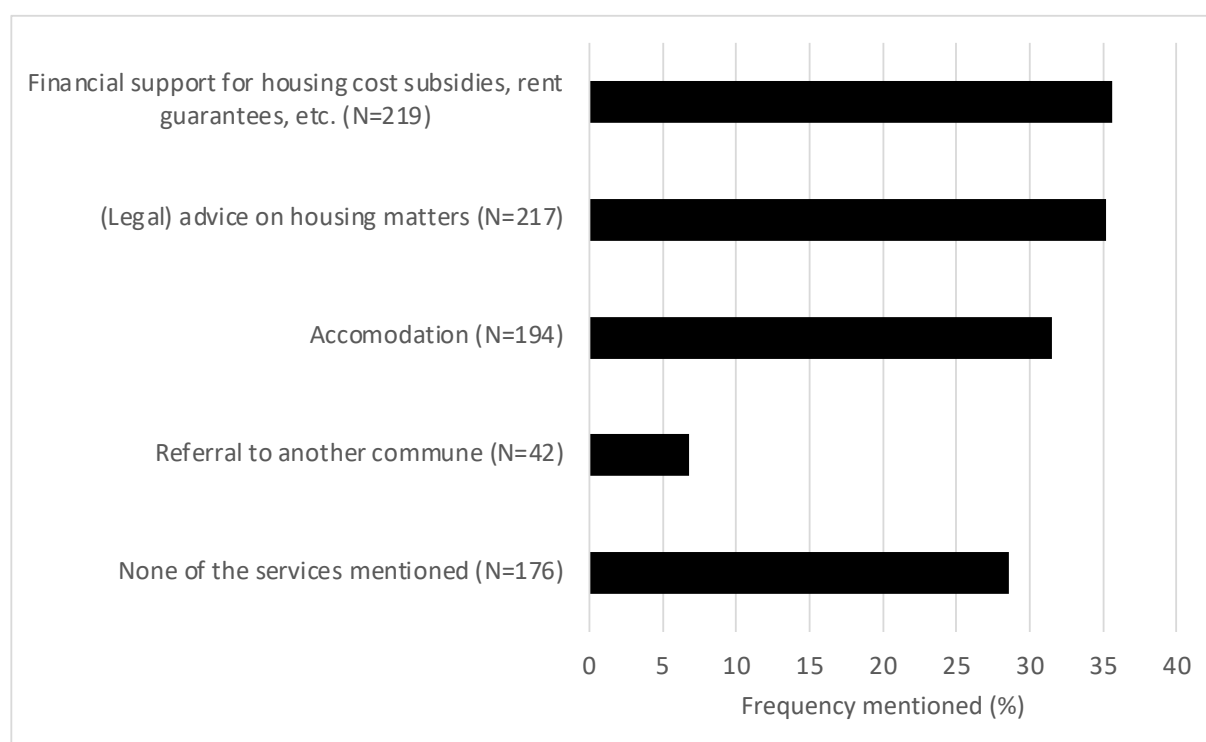
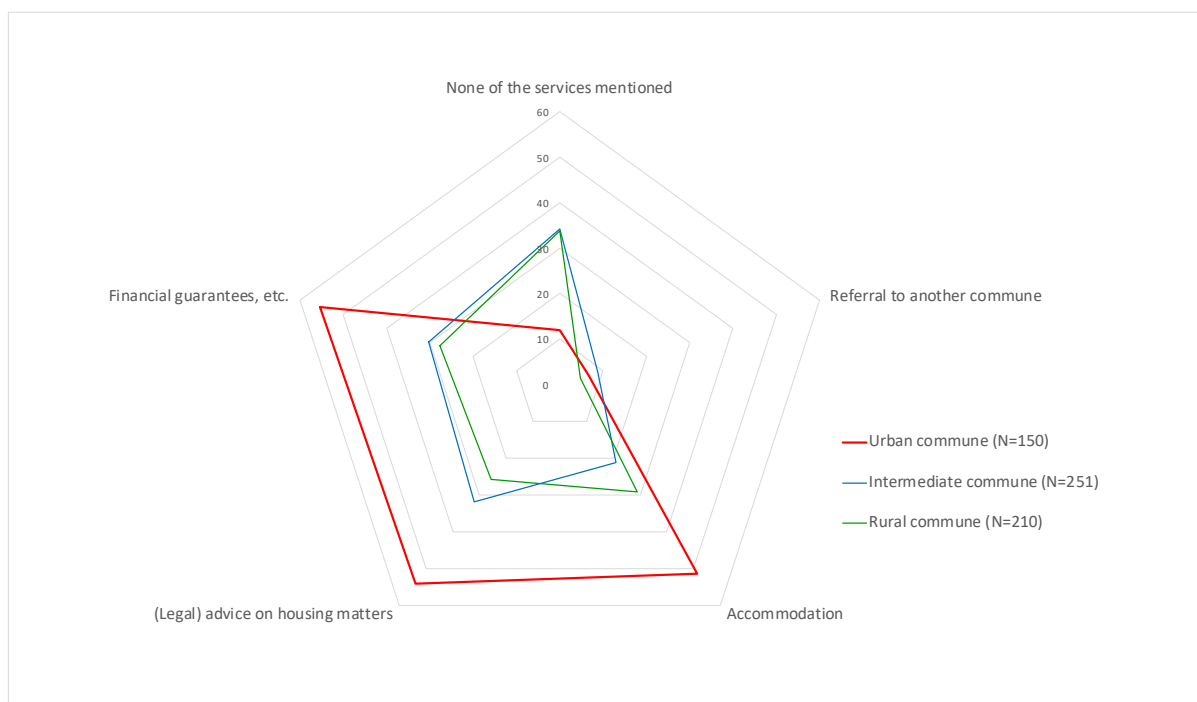


Figure 14: Assistance from the communes by commune type



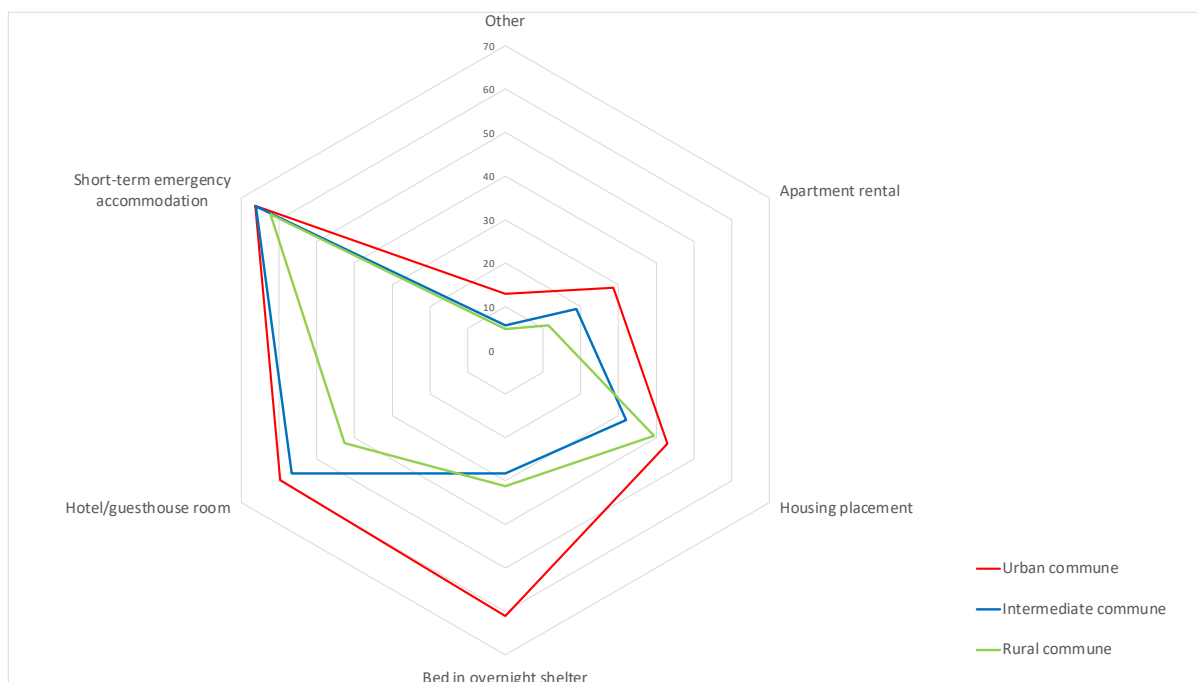
### Accommodation options

Another question was designed to further differentiate the type of accommodation. The answers were differentiated according to whether they were emergency solutions (bed in a shelter, short-term accommodation, room in a guesthouse/hotel) or long-term solutions (renting an apartment or finding accommodation).

Short-term bridging is found in all types of communes, albeit to varying degrees (Fig. 15). In particular, renting rooms in hotels or guesthouses and staying in emergency shelters is done in around 70% of all types of communes. Beds in emergency shelters, on the other hand, are found only in urban communes and in the 'rural centre commune' type. On the other hand, the long-term letting of dwellings and the placement of apartments are not very common in all types of commune, but are most common in urban communes (28.6% of all urban communes let dwellings / 42% provide housing).

Two types of accommodation were covered separately in the open response option: one commune is actively approaching property owners who intend to demolish their buildings and asking if it can use them temporarily; another commune is using free beds in one of its retirement homes.

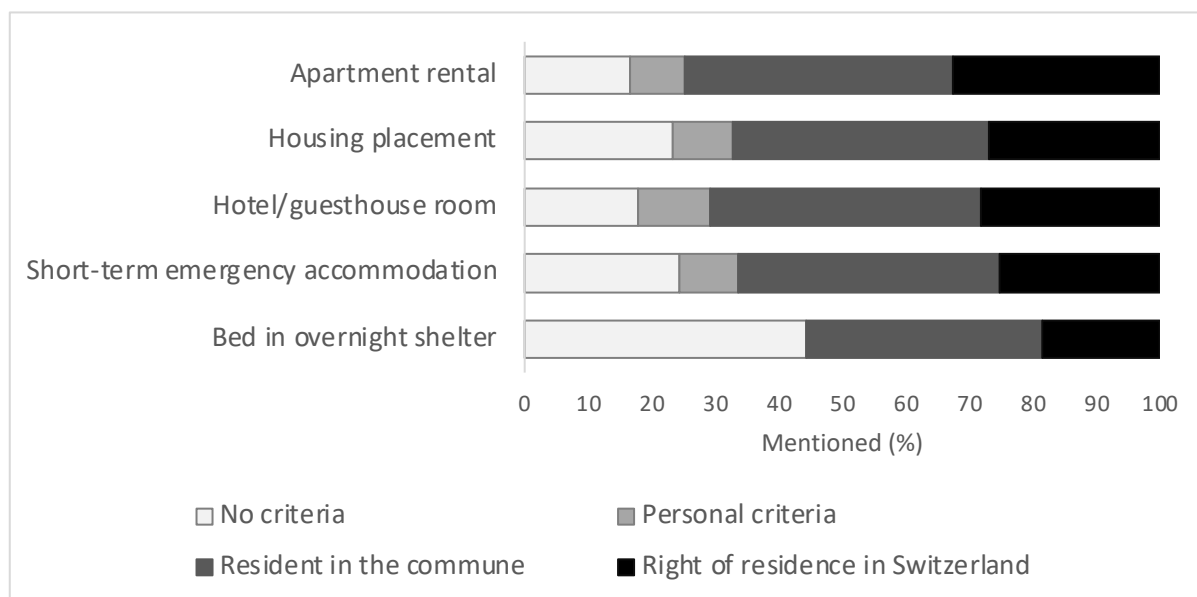
Figure 15: Accommodation in the communes by commune type



### Admission requirements

Even where communes offer other services to homeless people or those at risk of losing their home, these are not accessible to everyone. Instead, they are subject to certain criteria: residence in the commune, personal criteria (e.g. no drug addiction, mental health issues), right of residence. The strictest rules apply to the letting of residential property. According to the respondents, only 16.6% of the communes offer accommodation unconditionally; in 8.6% of communes, personal requirements have to be met; in 37.1% of communes, the person has to have had their (last) residence in the commune and in 18.6% of the communes the right of residence in Switzerland is a prerequisite. The best option for those who do not meet the criteria is a bed in an overnight shelter. However, 55.7% of the communes offering this service also have access criteria.

Figure 16: Access criteria for services from communes



## Number of dwellings

483 communes replied to the question on their own housing stock. Only 20 communes replied that they had their own housing stock, with a total of 3,071 dwellings. These are almost exclusively located in urban communes of large or medium-sized built-up areas, with the six largest cities in Switzerland each having more than 100 dwellings, making a total of around 3,000 dwellings.

Only 28% of communes have access to non-governmental organisations offering overnight accommodation (their own apartments, emergency accommodation, rooms, etc.). 125 communes are aware of non-governmental accommodation in their commune (provided by the church, charitable organisations, regionally organised associations, etc.). As was the case with the previous assistance, the overnight accommodation that is not provided by the commune is for the most part located in the urban communes.

### **4.8. Homelessness and the threat of losing one's home in commune policy**

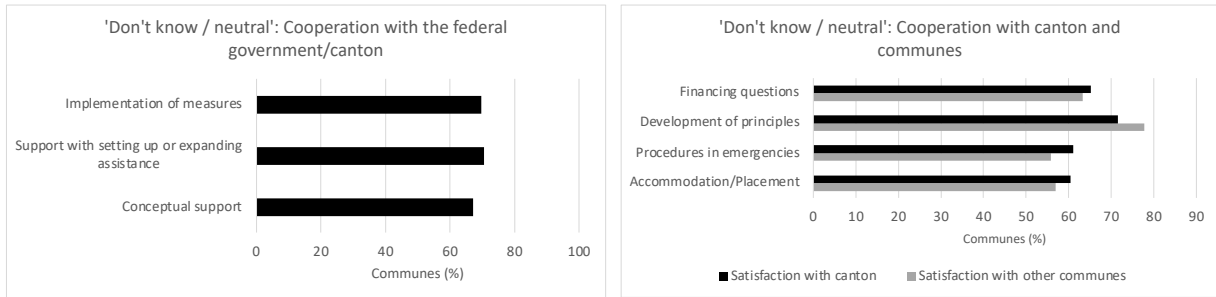
In 19.6% of all urban communes in a large built-up area and in five of the six largest cities in Switzerland, homelessness is frequently an issue in commune policy. Even in the urban centres of medium-sized built-up areas, homelessness is a frequent issue in only 4.8% of communes, and if a commune is not part of a large or small built-up area, the issue is rare or non-existent. There are no significant differences between the language regions.

341 of the 616 communes replied to the question 'Does your commune have a policy, guideline, emergency plan or similar in which you define how to deal with homelessness or the threat of losing one's home?' 192 other communes explicitly replied that they had neither a strategy nor a plan or a specific approach. The remaining 83 communes gave a wide range of responses. In 29 communes an 'emergency process' is referred to, in 26 communes the response is that 'referral is made to other agencies'; A further 18 communes refer to social work casework, 7 communes respond that there is an ad hoc response and 3 communes name the commune's own housing options as a strategy.

### **4.9. Cooperations and their evaluation**

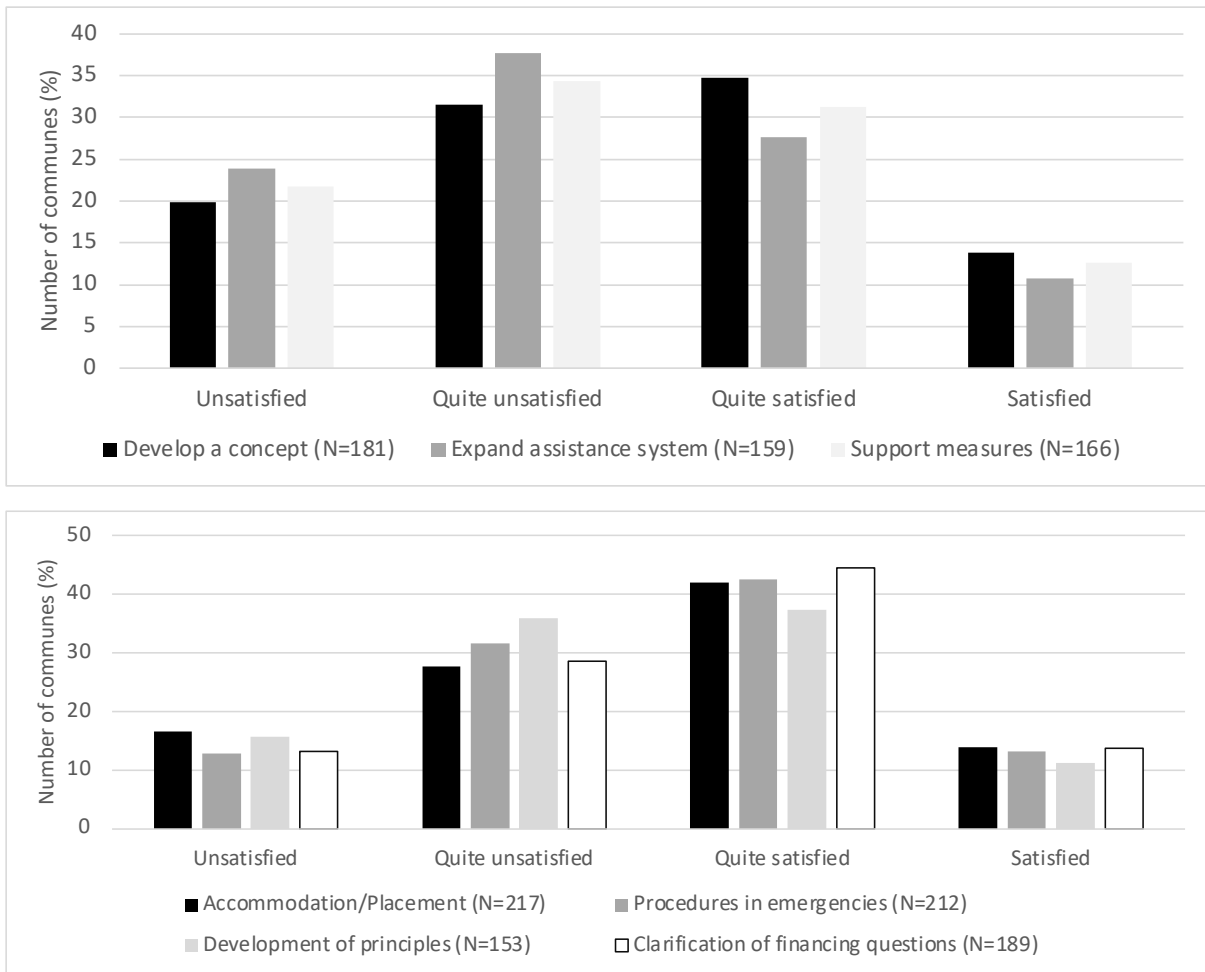
In order to find out how satisfied the communes are with the cooperation structures, questions were asked about the quality of cooperation with the federal government and canton, other communes and property owners/administrations. Various cooperation topics were surveyed, which could be assessed using a five-point scale. The category 'neutral' or 'don't know' was ticked most frequently across all cooperation topics (Fig. 17, hidden for the purposes of presentation in the following figures).

Figure 17: The high proportion of 'neutral/don't know' answers to the questions on cooperation



Those communes that expressed a view are particularly dissatisfied with the support they receive from the federal government and cantons when it comes to setting up a support system. However, the communes would also like to see more cooperation with the federal government and the cantons regarding support for measures. In contrast, the communes are slightly more satisfied with the conceptual support ('develop a concept'). With regard to cooperation in the operational area, the communes are 'quite satisfied' with their canton. Satisfaction is high with regard to the clarification of financing issues.

Figure 18: Satisfaction with cooperation with the federal government and canton on strategic (top) and operational issues (bottom)

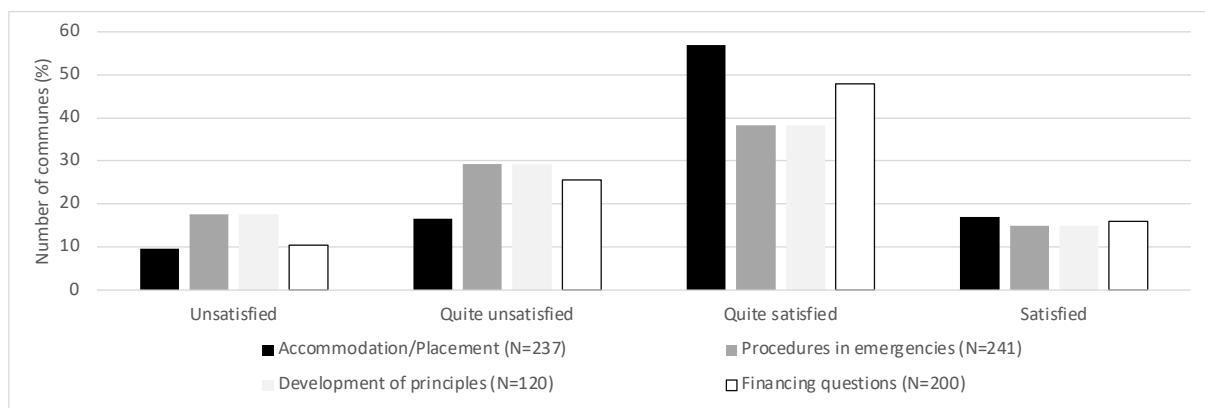




The analysis by commune type (not shown) shows that the highest levels of dissatisfaction come from urban communes. Here, too, only just under 55% of communes answered 'neutral/don't know'. 33% are 'unsatisfied' or 'quite unsatisfied' with the conceptual support provided by the federal government and canton (compared to 11.3% of intermediate and 12.6% of rural communes). In addition, 33.5% of urban communes are 'quite unsatisfied' or 'unsatisfied' with the cooperation in setting up a support system and 29.3% with the support of measures. Similar levels of dissatisfaction also come from the urban communes in relation to the canton in terms of material assistance (accommodation/place-ment, procedures in emergencies, development of principles, financing questions).

Cooperation with other communes is consistently rated as 'quite satisfied' (Fig. 19).

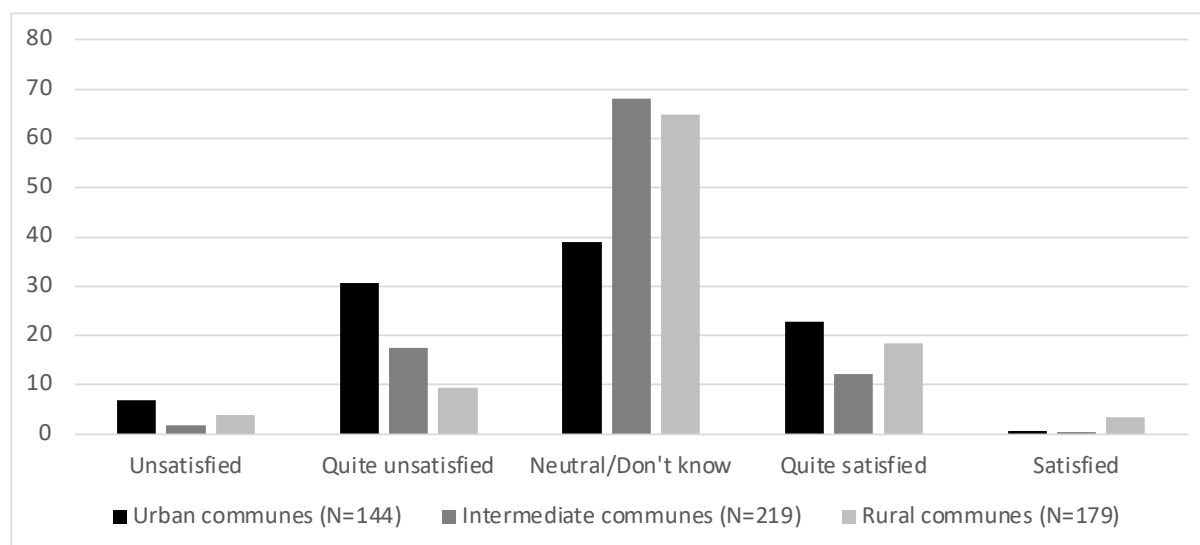
Figure 19: Satisfaction with cooperation with other communes on operational issues



In addition to satisfaction with public authorities, the housing market is also relevant when it comes to homelessness and the threat of losing one's home. One question therefore focused on satisfaction with the communes' cooperation with property owners and property management companies. 546 of the 616 communes answered this question, including many communes that answered 'neutral/don't know' (324 communes = 59.3%).

The 222 communes that responded to this question tended to take a critical view of the cooperation. The urban communes rate the cooperation much more negatively than the rural and intermediate communes (Fig. 20). The French-speaking and Italian-speaking communes view the cooperation more negatively than the German-speaking communes.

Figure 20: Satisfaction with cooperation with property owners/administrations by type of commune



245 communes took the opportunity to answer the open question on their expectations regarding cooperation with property owners and administrations. The answers fall into three groups:

In principle, more *understanding and accommodation* is expected for people who are financially disadvantaged. This is reflected in the fact that more affordable housing should be created; it is often mentioned that property owners should be less profit-oriented. However, more consideration should also be given to the situation of the people concerned.

Greater *cooperation* is sought. This is expressed in particular through earlier information for 'difficult' tenants. Despite data protection requirements, contact with the commune is desired. The expectation of cooperation also means agreements between communes, property owners/administrations and those affected in order to be able to address challenges at an early stage.

The expectation of *flexibility* is combined with a solution orientation. Suggestions are: no evictions, accept rent arrears, allow payment in instalments, temporary security rent (commune rents for 6-12 months, then transfer of the lease to subtenant), reduce rent deposit (not 3 months).

#### 4.10. Future challenges from the communes' perspective

The survey ended with an open-ended question about future challenges in the area of homelessness and the threat of losing one's home. 358 communes did not raise any challenges, while the remaining 258 communes named 456. The open answers were categorised as follows.

*Resources and instruments:* Attention is drawn here to the extensive consultations and support, which practically do not allow any standardisation. Due to the lack of monitoring or 'observation', hardly any information is available or can only be obtained in a 'crisis' situation'. This makes prevention more difficult. Many communes are in favour of dealing with the issue on a regional scale.

*Accommodation offers:* This refers primarily to the housing market; the communes themselves have no or only a few dwellings or emergency beds at their disposal; the housing market offers very few options.

*Housing market:* This topic focuses on an 'overheated' housing market, the low interest of investors in alternatives to yield rents (e.g. cost rents); the lack of access to their own apartments.

*Target group:* Some communes see major challenges concerning those affected by homelessness: they go to the authorities too late, have too high expectations of assistance, or are often unaware of the consequences of evictions or rent arrears.

#### **4.11. Conclusion**

Homelessness and the threat of losing one's home are not a problem for all communes in Switzerland, but they are also not exclusively concentrated in Switzerland's largest cities. The proportion of communes reporting a number of homeless people is higher in German-speaking Switzerland than in French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland.

Zurich, Basel, Lausanne, Bern, Winterthur and Lucerne, the six largest cities that took part in the survey and provided estimates of homelessness, estimate a total of 1,275 people without shelter, which corresponds to 59% of all homeless people estimated in the survey.<sup>31</sup> The six largest cities that provided information on people at risk of losing their home, i.e. Zurich, Winterthur, St Gallen, Lugano, Biel/Bienne and Thun<sup>32</sup>, estimate a total of 4,730 people at risk of losing their home, which corresponds to 60% of all people at risk of losing their home reported by the participating communes. These cities account for 31% of the total population in the survey sample.

There are similarities in the extent to which communes are affected between the 'urban commune of a large or medium-sized built-up area' types. The functional importance of a commune in terms of its economic, social or cultural tasks and its housing supply could therefore be one of the causes of both problems. This is supported by the fact that the higher a commune estimates the number of people living in it who are homeless or at risk of losing their home, the tenser it also assesses the housing market in its commune.

When it comes to the reasons for homelessness and the threat of losing one's home, the answers vary greatly depending on the type of commune. Urban communes see the reasons mainly in the individual financial, health and family situation of the people concerned, as well as problems in the housing market (such as evictions or the role of property owners/managers). In rural and intermediate communes, the reasons are more varied and less pronounced overall, although financial reasons are the most important. It is noticeable that migration policy (residence status) is given little importance by all communes as a reason for homelessness and the threat of losing one's home.

In most communes, preventing and combating homelessness and the threat of losing one's home is the responsibility of the commune's or region's social services and the commune administration. These are the most important points of contact for those affected. Only in larger communes (with a population of around 8,000 or more) are there other contact points in addition to social services. In communes with fewer than 1,200 inhabitants, there is a high probability that there is no contact point within the commune at all.

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<sup>31</sup> The city of Geneva did not provide an estimate of the extent of homelessness in its commune.

<sup>32</sup> The cities of Geneva, Basel, Lausanne and Bern did not provide estimates for people at risk of losing their home.

The majority of communes do not have their own emergency accommodation facilities. If necessary, hotel rooms are rented or short-term emergency accommodation is sought. Here, too, it is the urban communes that are somewhat more diversified – but only in the emergency structure. Only 20 communes state that they are able to rent out their own housing, which means that most communes are also dependent on third-party offers for medium and longer-term solutions. The six largest cities in Switzerland all have their own housing that they rent out to homeless people or those at risk of losing their home. The figures in the survey vary between 180 and over 1,000 apartments. Almost all services outside of material social assistance are subject to access criteria – emergency solutions such as emergency shelters as well as longer-term solutions (renting out living space).

In communes outside of large or medium-sized built-up areas, homelessness and the threat of losing one's home is not a regular topic on the political agenda. Accordingly, strategy papers are only found in the larger urban communes. Emergency plans, on the other hand, are more widespread in the communes. Only larger communes are active in this regard and they also express a greater need for cooperation and support, including from the federal government and the cantons (from the development of basic principles to assistance with accommodation, emergency procedures and financing).

## 5. Best practice examples from the respondents' perspective

As part of the interviews with the cantonal representatives and the online survey of communes, specific examples were sought of successful ways of dealing with homelessness and its precursors. These examples are briefly presented below.

### 5.1. Cantonal homelessness services

Individual cantons are beginning to develop a range of services in the area of homelessness and the threat of losing one's home. This allows them to better recognise needs, define target group-specific offers and network with civil society actors. Preventing and combating homelessness is considered a cross-cutting issue in these cantons.

Best practice examples:

- In the canton of Neuchâtel, the seven existing regional social services have handed over the care of homeless people to a foundation. The [Fondation en faveur des adultes en difficultés sociales FADS](#) coordinates all cantonal assistance for the homeless and is controlled and financed by the canton.
- Several cantons (such as AI, GL, GR, NW, GE) organise individual parts of social assistance at cantonal level. Cantonalisation relieves the burden on communes' social services and provides an overall view.

### 5.2. Cantonal and commune emergency concepts

Some cantons and communes are developing contingency plans that outline how to provide at least temporary accommodation quickly – even in cases where no identity documents are available.

Best practice examples:

- The cantons of Glarus and Neuchâtel operate a [telephone hotline](#) which is available 24 hours a day. Callers can obtain information there if they need accommodation for themselves or a third party.

- In the canton of Glarus, the cantonal police's on-call social service is also available to provide telephone counselling in the event of social escalation in public spaces and at night. The on-call social workers are also available by telephone to provide information and advice to doctors on duty on difficult social issues. If necessary, the social services team will organise emergency accommodation.
- The canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden has produced a document on how to proceed when a homeless person needs to be accommodated.<sup>33</sup>
- In the canton of Geneva, CAMSCO (*Consultation ambulatoire mobile de soins communautaires*) provides access to basic health care for people without health insurance and/or in precarious financial situations.
- The canton of Ticino has issued a press release to draw attention to shelters in the run-up to winter. To this end, it is in contact with the emergency shelters operating in the canton.
- The canton of St Gallen has a [charter](#) which aims to improve cooperation between psychiatry and care institutions.
- The city of Geneva has compiled on a [website](#) all the services available to people who are homeless or at risk of losing their home.

### 5.3. Regional cooperation

In rural and intermediate communes, the estimated number of people affected is much lower. Building a complex structure comparable to that of urban communes is not considered appropriate to the problem. Communes report that they have rather sporadic and irregular contacts with emergency shelters or other organisations operating in the canton. Some authorities are aware that people experiencing homelessness often seek accommodation across cantonal borders and use services in other cantons.

Best practice examples:

- The *Dipartimento della sanità e della socialità* of the Canton of Ticino is in direct contact with all emergency shelters and hostels located in the canton and can thus mediate between the individual organisations at any time.
- The canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden regularly asks property management companies to report vacant apartments. The reports go directly to the social assistance office.
- With regard to volunteer work, the canton of Glarus strives to ensure continuity and therefore supports volunteer organisations. The involvement of volunteers enables a transfer of knowledge in both directions and provides a good basis for the development of comprehensive strategies that reflect more than just the state perspective.
- In its response to a [postulate](#) concerning the securing of long-term funding for the Aargau emergency shelter, the canton of Aargau refers to the need to involve all communes in examining the application.

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<sup>33</sup> This is an internal paper that was referred to in the interview but cannot be discussed further for reasons of confidentiality.

#### 5.4. Social planning procedure

The cantons pursue social planning approaches in the field of housing through a combination of legal mandates, state service provision and civil society support. On this basis, they can derive needs for the prevention and avoidance of homelessness and provide evidence-based justification for the further development of existing assistance.

Best practice examples:

- In its second [social report](#) (2013), the canton of Solothurn collected data on the situation on the housing market and housing supply in the communes. This provides a sound basis for assessing the problem of homelessness and the threat of losing one's home, highlights approaches specific to regions and communes, and underlines the importance of cross-policy understanding. There are further social reports in the cantons of ZH, AG, LU, BE and ZG.
- In its [strategy for combating and preventing poverty](#) the canton of Basel-Landschaft has given housing a special status in the fight against poverty because of its existential importance and has defined housing as a separate field of action. Although homelessness was not considered an urgent problem in the canton of Basel-Landschaft, the social planning approach is useful for organising assistance in the canton and the communes.
- The cantons of Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft have practical coordination bodies, such as an association of social services or a committee of civil society and government organisations active in the field of poverty reduction (e.g. [Basel Social Conference](#) or the Association for the Coordination of Social Work in the Political Communes of Baseland (KoSA)). This simplifies communication for the authorities, while the joint consolidation gives greater weight to the organisations' demands, opinions and statements.

#### 5.5. Cantonal housing supply

The housing market plays an important role in combating and preventing homelessness and its precursors. Individual cantons are seeking to build partnerships with property owners and property management companies, to strengthen building cooperatives or to make their own land available for innovative housing projects.

Best practice examples:

- The canton of Basel-Stadt runs a '[Coordination Centre for Precarious Housing](#)', which is tasked with identifying precarious housing conditions and preventing them in cooperation with other cantonal departments, the owner and tenant community and relevant third parties. This is a cross-departmental project that is part of social assistance.
- The cantons of Basel-Stadt, Solothurn, Vaud and Ticino are trialling the [Housing First](#) or comparable project ideas. In the canton of Basel-Stadt, the first [results](#) on Housing First are available.
- Many cantons in Switzerland promote cooperative housing construction and thus enable low-income groups to have access to affordable housing. In doing so, they are helping to prevent exclusion from the housing market. Information platforms such as [Swiss Housing Cooperatives](#) or specific advice centres such as the [competence centre for non-profit housing construction](#) are available to the cantons.
- In the canton of Bern, the Biel/Bienne project [Gurzelen.plus](#) is an example of a housing assistance association that is also a member of the umbrella association and therefore also aims to provide housing for homeless people in the canton.

- The Fondation [Carrefour-Rue](#) in Geneva receives free land from the canton of Geneva for its own projects.
- The canton of Basel-Stadt has long had a housing promotion strategy which also promotes affordable housing. This has been supplemented since 2013 by a Housing Promotion Act (WRFG) as framework legislation and anchoring of the cantonal promotion measures at legislative level. The cantonal government is currently establishing a [public-law housing foundation](#) to acquire or build affordable housing. The FOH refers to other cantonal programmes on its [website](#).

## 6. Recommendations

The following recommendations have been derived from individual analysis of the surveys and research carried out in this study. They are grouped into four key overarching recommendations, based on the authors' knowledge of the subject. The general nature of the recommendations reflects the exploratory nature of this study, being the first of its kind; rather than formulate detailed recommendations, it outlines four directions that warrant further clarification.

### 6.1. Define homelessness and provide a national orientation framework

The surveys of both the cantons and the communes revealed considerable differences in the understanding of homelessness and its precursors, and in distinguishing between different housing, or non-housing, situations. The (estimated) number of people affected is an important factor. So is the development of an administrative structure based on shared work. On the other hand, cantons and communes with low estimates report that they consider homelessness, and even more so the threat of people losing their home, to be a challenge. Overall, homelessness, its precursors and dynamics in Switzerland appear to be a rather diffuse phenomenon that has not been clarified in the context of national reporting, such as in the National Programme for Preventing and Combating Poverty. Consequently, there is still no harmonised data, no pool of good practice and little structured debate to develop a sustainable understanding of homelessness.

Clarifying the terminology should therefore be the first step. This would help communes and cantons to categorise the phenomenon (if necessary), regardless of how they are affected. The existing ETHOS typology should be used for this purpose: it categorises homelessness and the processes of exclusion from the housing market and, on this basis, can be used to allocate responsibilities and develop skills. The ETHOS typology is widely recognised in European policy, research and practice and is based on evidence-based principles:

*Homelessness should be defined as people living on the street, in public places or in accommodation not intended for residential purposes (ETHOS typology, categories 1 and 2). These 'housing situations' are accompanied by a lack of legal title, a lack of exclusive rights of ownership and use, and a lack of protection of privacy (Edgar 2012). 'Houseless' people as defined by the ETHOS typology are people who live in institutions for a limited period of time, such as emergency accommodation. In addition, women and men in a shelter or refugees and other immigrants in reception centres are also counted as houseless. People who are not released from prisons, medical facilities or youth centres because of a lack of housing are also considered houseless. 'Insecure housing' includes people who do not have regular housing for themselves and therefore have to seek temporary shelter or people who are threatened with eviction. 'Inadequate housing' refers to living situations that are not intended for conventional housing. This includes garages, cellars, attics and tents. In addition, unsuitable rooms fall into*

*the category of inadequate housing if, for example, these rooms are about to be demolished or because they are overcrowded or fall below the minimum size.*

**Recommendations to the cantons:** The problem of a lack of orientation should not be left to the communes alone. A cantonal understanding with appropriate responsibilities is needed to ensure a minimum of professional action and humanitarian care, to plan funding of measures and possible reintegration programmes, and to support communes.

**Recommendations to the communes:** Knowing which specific housing situation needs to be addressed is the basis for making a professional decision. This includes being able to differentiate between the dynamics of different forms of homelessness, precarious and insecure housing and thus being able to deal with the homelessness situation in an appropriately complex way, and knowing which other areas need to be addressed in the commune and cantonal administration.

**Recommendation to the federal government:** This study can strengthen the professional network with the specialised agencies at cantonal and national level as well as with aid organisations and foundations dealing with homelessness. It will also give new impetus to the first survey. It is particularly important to develop a common understanding based on the ETHOS typology. This will require further studies to examine new issues, conferences to disseminate the results, platforms for exchange and discussion, opportunities to present best practice, etc., or even a short information sheet on homelessness and exclusion from the housing market to raise awareness among those responsible in the communes and cantons.

## **6.2. Examine overall support systems and strengthen regional cooperation**

Cantons and their communes should consider developing a dedicated homelessness service in those areas where homelessness and its precursors are a particular issue, based on the estimates of the number of people affected. Cantons with large and medium-sized built-up areas but low estimates should also consider doing so, as projections show they may also face these challenges in the medium term. In such a service area, cantons can identify needs, develop services and exploit synergies in collaboration with communes, civil society organisations and people affected by homelessness or at risk of losing their home. Defining a service area would also mean defining the service providers and service recipients. This would require clarification of the legal basis on which entitlements to services can be derived. Such projects are already being trialled or planned in some Swiss cities (Geneva, Zurich, Bern, Basel). The cantons, which play an active role in the fight against homelessness, are already involved in the assistance system. In particular, they are constantly reviewing and adapting their own strategies. The cantons therefore already have experience in developing a service area that could be adapted.

In rural and intermediate communes, on the other hand, the estimated number of people affected is much lower, which in many places also explains the reluctance of the cantons to take responsibility. It would be inappropriate to create a complex structure comparable to that of the urban communes. Regional cooperation makes much more sense. The communes concerned report that they have rather sporadic and irregular contacts with emergency shelters or other organisations active in the canton. There is also a need to clarify funding and responsibilities. Moreover, some authorities are aware that people experiencing homelessness often go outside of their commune or canton to seek accommodation and services. Existing regional cooperation structures should therefore be used, in particular regional social services. These should be supported by their cantons to develop into specialist centres



for the homeless, precarious and inadequate housing – or it should be examined whether such a specialist centre should be set up at cantonal or inter-cantonal level. Communes with a low number of cases and which have had only occasional contact with homelessness and people at risk of losing their home should find a contact point in the regional social services (or in a cantonal/intra-cantonal specialist centre, see above) which can advise them and, if necessary, provide them with a network.

**Recommendation to the cantons:** The development of a service area should be considered. In the process of clarification, the main focus should be on preventive measures, inter-agency coordination and the bundling of tasks, as well as the associated security of responsibility for the people concerned. Such a service field should also take into account the possibilities of reintegration into the world of work and the 'normal living space', which have been rather marginal in the past. In order to prevent housing emergencies, the cantons should find ways of passing on information to prevention centres as soon as landlords give notice, in compliance with data protection legislation. In cantons without large and medium-sized built-up areas, support for regional social services in terms of expertise and appropriate equipment for housing/non-housing issues should be examined.

**Recommendation to the communes:** As a general rule, inter-agency structures for case-related and cross-case cooperation should be set up. These should also involve people affected by homelessness and at risk of losing their home as people with practical experience and real-life knowledge. Depending on the commune and geographical location, these structures can also be organised regionally, including the creation of joint specialist units. Standardised procedures, access to (preventive) help and concrete services should be established as far as possible in the regions and communes (e.g. admission criteria for accommodation). As many people experiencing homelessness or at risk of losing their home are unaware of the support available, local and regional services should be easily accessible. Data protection issues also need to be addressed and ways found with local property providers to obtain early information about impending housing crises.

**Recommendations to the federal government:** Homelessness should be linked to other policy areas. It was clear from the interviews that it is mostly the cantonal social affairs departments and the communal social services that are in charge of the dossier. This means that relevant social policy, housing market and spatial planning issues are not automatically linked, even in cantons and communes with higher problem pressure. Concrete starting points for FOH initiatives could be the following topics:

- Models of housing provision (especially affordable rented housing) and their links to health, social and educational issues and fields of action,
- Social institutions in the housing market (housing cooperatives, housing groups, self-organisations, etc.),
- Preventive structuring of tenancy law (e.g. options for assuming rent owed, taking on rent deposits),
- Options for securing accommodation: taking over rent in cases of imprisonment/release, admission to or discharge from medical or psychiatric institutions, and housing issues (e.g. for destitute people from the Schengen area, homeless people without a permanent residence).
- Drawing on the knowledge and experience of people experiencing homelessness and at risk of losing their home in developing potential solutions.

### 6.3. Improve housing provision and remove barriers to permanent housing for homeless people

Both the cantonal and commune surveys agreed that there was a shortage of affordable housing. However, the challenge of keeping or finding housing was also mentioned, and barriers such as origin, family size and composition, debts and debt enforcement were identified. Although the threat of losing one's home does not always lead to actual homelessness, it can be seen as a precursor. Regardless, a lack of housing security places a heavy burden on those affected.

Communes assess the situation on the housing market as a direct function of the number of people experiencing homelessness and at risk of losing their home. The housing market therefore plays a significant role in combating and preventing homelessness and its precursors. The cantons recognise the real estate industry as an important partner in preventing and combating homelessness and strive for cooperation with regard to the target groups affected by exclusion processes on the housing market.

#### **Recommendation to the cantons and communes:**

- Targeted support should be given to organisations and investors who create permanent housing for people excluded from the housing market, without expecting a return on their investment. Incentives should be created for such promoters and investors. They should be networked with other housing developers and landlords in order to facilitate social mix situations.
- Buildings and land that are no longer needed should be made available for new approaches to homelessness or sold at reasonable prices. Self-help organisations should be supported to become promoters of these projects themselves.
- Pilot projects for the targeted provision of housing for homeless people, e.g. as part of Housing First, Tiny Houses or container settlements, family garden houses in winter, should be promoted.
- Housing should also be made available to people with limited capacity for independent living, and low-threshold sheltered housing should be expanded. To this end, a network of such facilities should be established at commune and cantonal level to support integration into the primary housing market.
- Promote self-help: Poverty research has long recognised that the reintegration of people affected by exclusion processes can be supported primarily through the peer approach. Accordingly, a drop-in centre could be set up and run by people who have themselves experienced homelessness or the threat of losing their home. Self-help projects should benefit from easier access to financial resources.
- The criteria for access to public shelters (especially emergency shelters, but also emergency rooms, short-term accommodation, etc.) should be standardised so that there is no mobility between communes and cantons on the basis of emergency structures.

**Recommendation to the federal government:** The FOH should use the 'Federal / Cantonal / Commune Housing Policy Dialogue' to reflect on and disseminate the results obtained so far, communicate more actively with the various actors in the cantons and communes and to include the issue of homelessness in the dialogue. The discussion on homelessness should also be conducted through other channels (Federal Commission for Housing EKW, housing networks), particularly in order to reach the various actors in the cantons and communes. In addition, networking with supporting organisations (including self-help organisations) outside the public administration should be promoted.

#### **6.4. Improve data situation and establish monitoring**

Empirical data on the extent and structure of homelessness in Switzerland are unsatisfactory. The existing information base is too incomplete and the blind spot on homelessness, i.e. the 'hidden' homelessness that is not officially recognised by the authorities or institutions, is too large. Building a solid database requires efforts at all levels and the support of practitioners and researchers. The first national study (Dittmann et al. 2021), which is currently being carried out, can serve as an important indicator in this respect.

The need to improve the data situation applies to the national, cantonal and commune levels. If the extent and changes in the number of homeless people and the reasons for their homelessness are not analysed, estimates of increases, decreases, needs and assistance models to be developed are largely hypothetical. Not only statements on the extent of the problem but also the needs assessments and the development of social planning assistance are then subject to a high degree of uncertainty.

Larger communes and cantons already include the issue of housing shortages in their social reporting or turn to academia to produce statements in this regard (Drilling et al. 2019; Bonvin/Waltz 2021). However, monitoring still needs to be expanded to provide a more in-depth assessment of changes in homelessness at a regional or national level. In particular, people experiencing homelessness or at risk of losing their home should also be involved, bringing their experience to bear.

##### **Recommendations to the cantons, communes and federal government:**

- Set up a national monitoring system: This structure could be put in place relatively quickly for some areas of homelessness and produce rapid results. It could start by harmonising the users of commune and cantonal emergency shelters, as well as non-governmental overnight shelters for the homeless, and, for example, registering them all on the same reference date. The user figures are reported to a central permanent monitoring centre, ideally located at federal level. It should be examined whether the Federal Statistical Office, with its expertise, could offer its services as a federal agency for the organisation, recording, processing and reporting of the data collection (e.g. also as part of the national poverty monitoring which has been submitted to the Council of States and which is called for in the motion<sup>34</sup> now adopted).
- The development of a database on homelessness and its precursors requires extensive networking between communes, cantons, the federal government, the research community and organisations representing the people concerned.

##### **Recommendations to the cantons:**

- The extent to which statistics on emergency accommodation and shelters can be better coordinated for comparison between communes (or even cantons) should be explored. The statistics on housing assistance can also be improved by identifying people who do not have a home of their own or who use housing assistance services because they do not have a home. Residential institutions, especially psychiatric institutions and prisons, should record the housing situation of people before and after their stay.

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<sup>34</sup> Motion – Committee for Science, Education and Culture, Council of States; 19.3953 Regular monitoring of the poverty situation in Switzerland

**Recommendations to the communes:**

- For smaller communes, it is generally a good idea to regionalise monitoring and pool resources accordingly.
- For street homelessness, which is more difficult to measure, there are now a number of approaches that have been proposed in international professional discourse to generate data on homelessness in cities (e.g. street censuses, setting up local reporting systems, surveying day centre users) (Drilling, Dittmann et al. 2020).

**Recommendations to the federal government:**

- Recommend the structure for monitoring. This includes a commitment at federal level to consider the federal government's responsibility for national reporting.
- Support the willingness of statistical organisations to cooperate at all levels and to involve aid organisations and foundations that deal with the issue of homelessness and combat homelessness and its consequences.
- Raise awareness within the Federal Administration that issues of homelessness, loss of housing and precarious housing situations can be integrated, for example, into existing and regular population surveys conducted by the federal government (SHP, SILC) and also by the cantons and cities (population survey, family survey, neighbourhood survey). This provides information on how many households have helped other people with housing. It is also possible to determine whether the households surveyed here have ever been in a housing crisis situation due to a lack of housing. Both of these pieces of information would shed at least some light on the blind spot, which is believed to be quite significant.

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## 8. Attachments

### 8.1. ETHOS-Typology



#### What is ETHOS?

ETHOS is the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion. It was developed by FEANTSA as a transnational framework definition for policy and practice purposes. It provides a shared language for transnational exchange. It does not attempt to harmonise national definitions of homelessness in Europe.

ETHOS classifies living situations that constitute homelessness or housing exclusion. ETHOS identifies 4 main categories of living situation: Rooflessness, Houselessness, Insecure Housing and Inadequate Housing. These conceptual categories are divided into 13 operational categories that can be used for different policy purposes, such as mapping the problem of homelessness, as well as developing, monitoring and evaluating policies.

	OPERATIONAL CATEGORY	LIVING SITUATION	GENERIC DEFINITION	
Conceptual Category	ROOFLESS	1 People Living Rough	1.1 Public space or external space Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters	
		2 People in emergency accommodation	2.1 Night shelter People with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter	
	HOUSELESS	3 People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1 Homeless hostel	Where the period of stay is intended to be short term
			3.2 Temporary accommodation	
			3.3 Transitional supported accommodation	
		4 People in Women's Shelter	4.1 Women's shelter accommodation Women accommodated to experience of domestic violence and where the period of stay is intended to be short term	
		5 People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1 Temporary accommodation/reception centres Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation due to their immigrant status	
	5.2 Migrant workers accommodation			
	6 People due to be released from institutions	6.1 Penal institutions	No housing available prior to release	
		6.2 Medical institutions (*)	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing	
		6.3 Children's institutions/homes	No housing identified (e.g. by 18th birthday)	
	INSECURE	7 People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1 Residential care for older homeless people	Long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)
			7.2 Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people	
8 People living in insecure accommodation			8.1 Temporarily with family/friends Living in conventional housing but not the usual place of residence due to lack of housing	
9 People living under threat of eviction		8.2 No legal (sub)tenancy Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy illegal occupation of a dwelling		
		8.3 Illegal occupation of land Occupation of land with no legal rights		
		10 People living under threat of violence	9.1 Legal orders enforced (rented) Where orders for eviction are operative	
			9.2 Re-possession orders (owned) Where mortgagee has legal order to re-possess	
INADEQUATE	11 People living in temporary/non-conventional structures	10.1 Police recorded incidents Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence		
		11.1 Mobile homes Not intended as place of usual residence		
		11.2 Non-conventional building Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty		
	12 People living in unfit housing	11.3 Temporary structure Semi-permanent structure hut or cabin		
		12.1 Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation Defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation or building regulations		
13 People living in extreme over-crowding	13.1 Highest national norm of overcrowding Defined as exceeding national density standard for floor-space or useable rooms			

Note: Short stay is defined as normally less than one year; Long stay is defined as more than one year.

(\*) Includes drug rehabilitation institutions, psychiatric hospitals etc.

## 8.2. Guiding Questions Cantonal Survey

	Leitfragen	Stichworte
Verständnis Obdachlosigkeit	Welche Umstände führen im Kanton XY zu Obdachlosigkeit? Wer ist davon betroffen?	Zugänge: Spitäler, Kliniken, Polizei, Jugendarbeit, Sucht und Gesundheit, Asyl, Strafvollzug; Demografisches: Alter, Mann, Frau; Region: rural, urban, Agglomeration; Armut, Konflikte, fehlendes Netzwerk
	In welchen Politikfeldern gibt es Berührungspunkte mit dem Thema Obdachlosigkeit?	Gesundheit, Justiz, Strafvollzug, Jugendarbeit, KESD
	Ist Obdachlosigkeit ein Thema im Kanton XY?	Wo hört man davon? Wer hört davon?
	Wie steht es allgemein um den kantonalen Wohnraum?	Mietzins, Veränderungen, Druck auf Mietende
Akteure und Struktur	Welche staatlichen und nichtstaatlichen Akteur/innen sind im Kanton XY in die Obdachlosenhilfe involviert? Welche Leistungen erbringt dabei der Kanton?	Struktur und Funktionalität der Sozialhilfe; Regionale Verbände; Involvierte Organisationen, Leistungsverträge, politische Projekte
	Wie sieht die Auftragskoordination und Zusammenarbeit zwischen diesen Akteur/innen aus?	Rollenverteilung, Finanzierung, Organisation, Koordination; Institutionen: Kirche, NGOs, Polizei, Private, kommunale Organisationen
	Wie hat sich die Struktur der Obdachlosenhilfe in den letzten Jahren verändert? Welche Entwicklungen stehen bevor?	Abgeschlossene oder aufgegebenen Projekte; Pilotversuche
Obdachlosenhilfe	Welche Massnahmen gibt es zur Prävention und Linderung von Obdachlosigkeit?	
	Worauf basiert die Obdachlosenhilfe? Gibt es einen offiziellen Ablauf, eine Strategie oder ein Konzept dahinter?	Ablauf, Strategie, Konzept, Berichte, Studien, Analysen Sozialberichte; Interpellationen
	Wo erhalten diese Menschen Hilfe?	Institutionen: Kirche, Sozialhilfe, Staat
	Welche Rolle hat der Kanton? Welche Leistungen erbringt der Kanton?	Selbstverständnis; Sozialstaatliche Verpflichtungen
Handlungsbedarf	Was funktioniert in der beschriebenen Struktur der Obdachlosenhilfe gut? Was funktioniert weniger gut?	Kommt Hilfe an? Hemmungen für Personen, sich zu melden? Leistungen von Gemeinden, Zusammenarbeit, Kompetenzen, vorausschauende Planung; Meldungen über Schwierigkeiten, Unterstützungsbedarf seitens Kanton
	Welche Herausforderungen und Handlungsspielräume sehen Sie im Umgang mit Obdachlosigkeit im Kanton XY?	Politischer Wille, liberalisierter Wohnungsmarkt, knapper Wohnraum, kein Bedarf, Blockaden



## Online Questionnaire Municipalities

<b>1 Platzhalter Sprachauswahl</b>									
<b>Bitte wählen Sie Ihre Sprache. Veuillez choisir votre langue. Si prega di selezionare la sua lingua.</b>	<table border="1"> <tr><td>Deutsch</td></tr> <tr><td>Français</td></tr> <tr><td>Italiano</td></tr> </table>	Deutsch	Français	Italiano					
Deutsch									
Français									
Italiano									
<b>2 Willkommen</b>	<p><b>Schweizweite Gemeindebefragung zum Thema Obdachlosigkeit und drohendem Wohnungsverlust</b></p> <p>Im Auftrag des Bundesamtes für Wohnungswesen BWO führt die Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit FHNW eine Umfrage in allen Schweizer Gemeinden durch. Ziel ist es, zu erfahren, welche Rolle das Thema Obdachlosigkeit und drohender Wohnungsverlust in den Gemeinden spielt und wie sie damit umgehen.</p> <p>Aus den Resultaten sollen Vorschläge für Strategieentwicklungen und effiziente Zusammenarbeit aller involvierten Stellen erarbeitet werden. Ihre Teilnahme an unserer Studie ist daher äusserst wichtig.</p> <p><b>Die Umfrage dauert maximal 30 Minuten. Herzlichen Dank, dass Sie sich Zeit nehmen, um unsere Fragen zu beantworten.</b> Bei inhaltlichen oder technischen Fragen können Sie sich gerne an *** wenden.</p> <p>Wenn Sie an weiterführenden Informationen zu unserem Forschungsschwerpunkt «Obdachlosigkeit» interessiert sind, empfehlen wir Ihnen gerne einen Blick auf unsere Website <a href="http://www.obdachlosigkeit.ch">www.obdachlosigkeit.ch</a>.</p> <p>Sie können die Befragung jederzeit unterbrechen. Bereits ausgefüllte Antworten werden gespeichert. Sie können zudem jederzeit auf eine Frage zurückblättern, solange Sie nicht den Absendebutton auf der letzten Seite bestätigt haben.</p>								
<b>3 Allgemeine Infos Gemeinde</b>	<p><b>Für unsere Analyse ist es wichtig, einige Angaben zu Ihrer Gemeinde zu haben. Es werden aber keine gemeindebezogenen Details veröffentlicht. Alle aus dieser Umfrage entstehenden Publikationen werden anonymisiert. Sollten wir Ihre Gemeinde in einer Publikation namentlich erwähnen wollen, werden wir vorher um Ihre Einwilligung bitten.</b></p> <p><b>Bitte geben Sie uns folgende Informationen zu Ihrer Gemeinde an:</b></p> <table border="1"> <tr><td>Name der Gemeinde</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Kanton der Gemeinde</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Anzahl EinwohnerInnen am 31.12.2020</td><td></td></tr> </table>	Name der Gemeinde		Kanton der Gemeinde		Anzahl EinwohnerInnen am 31.12.2020			
Name der Gemeinde									
Kanton der Gemeinde									
Anzahl EinwohnerInnen am 31.12.2020									
<b>4 Einschätzung Problem</b>	<p>In der Schweiz gibt es keine offizielle Definition von Obdachlosigkeit und drohendem Wohnungsverlust. Das führt dazu, dass unterschiedliche Phänomene darunter verstanden werden. Wir verwenden für diese Studie folgende Definition:</p> <p><b>Obdachlosigkeit oder drohender Wohnungsverlust betrifft Menschen, die</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• auf der Strasse, im öffentlichen Raum oder in der Natur leben</li> <li>• keinen festen Wohnsitz haben und zwischen verschiedenen Unterkünten (bspw. Notschlafstellen) wechseln</li> <li>• in Unterkünten leben, wo der Aufenthalt zeitlich begrenzt ist (bspw. Obdachlosenwohnheime, Frauen- und Männerhäuser, Notunterkünfte)</li> <li>• länger als notwendig in einer Institution (Einrichtungen des Kindes- und Jugendschutzes, Justizvollzug, Klinik etc.) bleiben, weil sie keine Anschlusslösung finden</li> <li>• unfreiwillig bei Freunden und Bekannten unterkommen müssen</li> <li>• in unsicheren, ungeeigneten Wohnverhältnissen leben</li> </ul> <p><b>Wichtig: Auch im Asylbereich stellen sich Fragen zu Obdachlosigkeit. In unserer Studie klammern wir diesen Bereich aus. Die Wohnmöglichkeiten von Personen im oder nach dem Asylverfahren sind bei unseren Fragen nie gemeint.</b></p> <p><b>Mit dieser Definition von Obdachlosigkeit oder drohendem Wohnungsverlust im Hinterkopf: Wie präsent ist das Thema in Ihrer Gemeinde?</b></p> <p>Obdachlosigkeit oder drohender Wohnungsverlust ist in unserer Gemeinde...</p> <table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>nie ein Thema</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>selten ein Thema</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>gelegentlich ein Thema</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>häufig ein Thema</td></tr> </table>		nie ein Thema		selten ein Thema		gelegentlich ein Thema		häufig ein Thema
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	gelegentlich ein Thema								
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**Obdachlosigkeit oder drohender Wohnungsverlust hat auch mit der Situation auf dem Wohnungsmarkt zu tun.**  
 Wie schätzen Sie den Wohnungsmarkt in Ihrer Gemeinde gegenwärtig ein?

Nicht angespannt
Leicht angespannt
Stark angespannt
Extrem angespannt

**Bitte versuchen Sie, uns zu den folgenden Fragen eine Einschätzung zu geben.**

Wie viele Menschen sind in Ihrer Gemeinde ungefähr von Obdachlosigkeit betroffen?

Wie viele Menschen sind in Ihrer Gemeinde ungefähr von Wohnungsverlust bedroht?

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**5 Verständnis Obdachlosigkeit**

**Die Gründe für Obdachlosigkeit oder drohenden Wohnungsverlust können vielfältig sein. Bitte geben Sie an, welche der folgenden Gründe Sie aus Ihrer eigenen Gemeinde kennen.**

Gründe für	Obdachlosigkeit	drohenden Wohnungsverlust
Fehlende finanzielle Mittel		
Verschuldung, Betreibungen		
Sucht- und Konsumproblematiken		
Psychische Erkrankungen		
Fehlende soziale Netzwerke (Familie, Freunde, Bekannte, etc.)		
Familiäre Konflikte		
Häusliche Gewalt		
Ungeregelter Aufenthaltsstatus		
Entlassung aus einer Einrichtung (Wohnheim, Justizvollzug, Klinik etc.) ohne Anschlusslösung		
Zwangsräumungen		
Zu wenig gemeindeeigener Wohnraum		
Zu geringe Unterstützung von LiegenschaftsbesitzerInnen		
Anderes, nämlich (Präzisierung nächste Frage)		

**6.1 Gründe\_Obdachlosigkeit\_andere**

**Welche anderen Gründe kennen Sie, die für Menschen in Ihrer Gemeinde zu Obdachlosigkeit oder drohendem Wohnungsverlust geführt haben?**

Bitte geben Sie in Stichworten an.

---

**7 Angebote\_Gemeinde**

**In den nächsten Fragen möchten wir erfahren, welche Hilfsangebote Ihre Gemeinde für Menschen, die obdachlos oder von Wohnungsverlust bedroht sind, anbietet.**

Dabei geht es sowohl um Angebote, die von der Gemeinde selbst angeboten werden, als auch um nicht-staatliche Angebote.

**8 Angebote\_Gemeinde\_Erstkontakt**

**An wen würde sich eine Person, die von Wohnungsverlust bedroht ist, in Ihrer Gemeinde wenden, um Hilfe zu erhalten?**

Bitte kreuzen Sie die drei wichtigsten Möglichkeiten an.

Gemeindeverwaltung
Medizinische Einrichtung (Hausärztin oder Hausarzt, Spital, Klinik, etc.)
Kirche
Hilfswerk
Sozialdienst
Polizei
Spezialisierte Institution (Notrufstelle etc.)
Anderes, und zwar:



**13.1 Gemeinde\_ keine Lösung**

**Wenn Ihre Gemeinde keine Hilfeleistungen anbietet: Wie gehen Sie vor, wenn eine Person obdachlos oder von Wohnungsverlust betroffen ist?**

Bitte beschreiben Sie stichwortartig.

**14 Gemeinde\_Angebote\_nicht-staatlich**

**Gibt es nicht-staatliche Organisationen in Ihrer Gemeinde, die Unterkünfte für obdachlose Menschen anbieten?**

	Ja, Hilfswerke (Caritas, HEKS, Winterhilfe, etc.)
	Ja, kirchliche Organisationen
	Ja, zivilgesellschaftliche Einrichtungen
	Nein, gibt es nicht
	Weiss nicht
	Ja, andere, und zwar:

**Beteiligen Sie sich finanziell an diesen Angeboten?**

Falls es keine nicht-staatlichen Organisationen in Ihrer Gemeinde gibt, lassen Sie diese Frage bitte aus.

Hilfswerke	Ja, in Form einer Kostenübernahme bei konkreten Fällen	Ja, in Form einer regelmässigen Zuwendung
Kirchliche Organisationen		
Zivilgesellschaftliche Einrichtungen		
Andere Einrichtungen		

**15 Angebote\_ergänzend**

**Gibt es in Ihrer Gemeinde ergänzende Unterstützungsangebote für obdachlose oder von Wohnungsverlust bedrohte Personen? Und beteiligt sich Ihre Gemeinde finanziell daran?**

Wird in unserer Gemeinde nicht angeboten	Wird mit finanzieller Beteiligung der Gemeinde angeboten	Wird ohne finanzielle Beteiligung der Gemeinde angeboten
--	--	--

Verteilung von Gutscheinen (Einkaufsläden, Essen etc.)

Verteilung von Lebensmitteln

Gratis/günstige Mahlzeiten vor Ort (Cassensküchen etc.)

Tagesaufenthaltsräume

Aufsuchende/mobile Sozialberatung

Anderes, und zwar (Präzisierung nächste Frage)

**16.1 Ergänzende Angebote\_Anderes**

**Welche anderen Unterstützungsmöglichkeiten existieren in Ihrer Gemeinde, auf die obdachlose oder von Wohnungsverlust bedrohte Menschen zurückgreifen können?**

Bitte beschreiben Sie stichwortartig.

**17 Strategien**

**Hat Ihre Gemeinde ein Konzept, einen Leitfaden, einen Notfallplan oder Ähnliches, in dem Sie den Umgang mit Obdachlosigkeit oder drohendem Wohnungsverlust definieren?**

Falls ja, beschreiben Sie diese bitte stichwortartig, um was für ein Dokument (Titel, Inhalte, Zielpublikum etc.) es sich dabei handelt.



<p><b>18 Einschätzung Funktionalität System</b></p> <p><b>Wie schätzen Sie folgende Aspekte hinsichtlich Angebote (Schlafplätze und ergänzende Unterstützungsangebote) für obdachlose oder von Wohnungsverlust bedrohte Menschen in Ihrer Gemeinde ein?</b></p> <p>Bitte ziehen Sie den Schieberegler auf die entsprechende Stelle auf der jeweiligen Linie.</p> <p>Die Angebote sind bei den Betroffenen bekannt</p> <p>Die Angebote sind für die Betroffenen unkompliziert erreichbar</p> <p>Die Angebote sind ausreichend</p>	<p><b>Wie zufrieden sind Sie in der Zusammenarbeit mit dem Kanton?</b></p> <p>Bitte ziehen Sie den Schieberegler auf die entsprechende Stelle auf der jeweiligen Linie.</p> <p>Unterbringung/Vermittlung von betroffenen Personen</p> <p>Konkretes Vorgehen in Notfällen</p> <p>Erarbeitung von konzeptionellen Grundlagen</p> <p>Klärung von Finanzierungsfragen</p>										
<p><b>19 Zufriedenheit_Unterstützung</b></p> <p><b>Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit den folgenden Unterstützungen, die Sie vonseiten des Bundes oder Ihrem Kanton in Sachen Erkennen, Vorbeugen und Bekämpfen von Obdachlosigkeit erhalten?</b></p> <p>Bitte ziehen Sie den Schieberegler auf die entsprechende Stelle auf der jeweiligen Linie.</p> <p>Konzeptionelle Unterstützung (Bereitstellen von Infomaterial, Grundlagenpapiere zu Obdachlosigkeit etc.)</p> <p>Unterstützung beim Aufbau oder der Erweiterung eines Hilfesystems für betroffene Personen (Bedarfsabklärung, Strategiewicklung, Vermittlung guter Beispiele etc.)</p> <p>Unterstützung bei der Umsetzung von Massnahmen (Finanzielles, Beratung, Monitoring etc.)</p>	<p><b>21 Zufriedenheit Immobilienfirmen</b></p> <p><b>Wie zufrieden sind Sie bei der Prävention und Bekämpfung von Obdachlosigkeit oder drohendem Wohnungsverlust in der Zusammenarbeit mit LiegenschaftsbesitzerInnen und Liegenschaftsverwaltungen?</b></p> <p>Bitte ziehen Sie den Schieberegler auf die entsprechende Stelle auf der jeweiligen Linie.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="799 199 1015 1081"> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>Nicht zufrieden</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Eher unzufrieden</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Neutral/weiss nicht</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Eher zufrieden</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Sehr zufrieden</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Nicht zufrieden		Eher unzufrieden		Neutral/weiss nicht		Eher zufrieden		Sehr zufrieden
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	Eher unzufrieden										
	Neutral/weiss nicht										
	Eher zufrieden										
	Sehr zufrieden										
<p><b>20 Zufriedenheit_Zusammenarbeit</b></p> <p><b>Wie zufrieden sind Sie in der Zusammenarbeit mit anderen Gemeinden in folgenden Bereichen?</b></p> <p>Bitte ziehen Sie den Schieberegler auf die entsprechende Stelle auf der jeweiligen Linie.</p> <p>Unterbringung/Vermittlung von betroffenen Personen</p> <p>Konkretes Vorgehen in Notfällen</p> <p>Erarbeitung von konzeptionellen Grundlagen</p> <p>Klärung von Finanzierungsfragen</p>	<p><b>Was erwarten Sie von LiegenschaftsbesitzerInnen und Liegenschaftsverwaltungen, um die Prävention und Bekämpfung von Obdachlosigkeit oder drohendem Wohnungsverlust verbessern zu können?</b></p> <p>Bitte beschreiben Sie stichwortartig.</p> <p><b>22 Allgemeine Einschätzung</b></p> <p><b>Was sind aus Ihrer Sicht die grössten Herausforderungen für Ihre Gemeinde im Umgang mit Obdachlosigkeit und drohendem Wohnungsverlust?</b></p>										

## 8.4. Hochrechnung Obdachlosigkeit und drohender Wohnungsverlust Schweiz

Formel	Erläuterung
$\sum_{i=1}^{10} \frac{\bar{s}_i}{n_{Gi}} * 100$	10 = 10 Einwohnerklassen im Index
	$\sum_{i=1}^{10}$ = Summe aus dem Index 1 (i= Einwohnerklasse 1 bis 10)
	$\hat{S}_i$ Anzahl Obdachlose (bzw. von Wohnungslosigkeit Bedrohte) des Index 1 (i= Einwohnerklassen 1 bis 10)
	— Division
	$n_{Gi}$ %-Anteil Einwohner/innen in den Gemeinden in BWO [n] an allen Einwohner/innen CH [G] im Index (i= Einwohner/innenklassen 1 bis 10)

Tabelle: Überblick über die extrapolierten Obdachlosenzahlen gruppiert nach Einwohnerklassen

EINWOHNER/INNEN- KLASSE	EINWOHNER/INNEN- ZAHL SCHWEIZ	EINWOHNER/INNEN- ZAHLENZAHL BEFRAGTE GE- MEINDEN	SUMME OBDA- CHLOSE BEFRA- GUNG	HOCHRECH- NUNG ANZAHL OBDACHLOSE, CH	%-ANTEIL AN ALLEN OBDA- CHLOSEN
1 BIS 1'000	392'525	103'180	9	34.2	0.9
1'001 BIS 5'000	2'465'323	667'343	121	447.0	11.7
5'001 BIS 10'000	1'664'714	508'138	114	373.5	9.8
10'001 BIS 20'000	1'563'682	508'314	198	609.1	16.0
20'001 BIS 30'000	604'622	294'259	210	431.5	11.3
30'001 BIS 40'000	382'750	213'033	210	377.3	9.9
40'001 BIS 50'000	129'192	43'455	5	14.9	0.4
50'001 BIS 75'000	117'289	117'289	5	5.0	0.1
75'001 BIS 100'000	158'781	158'781	220	220.0	5.8
> 100'000	1'188'210	984'474	1'075	1'297.5	34.1
<b>GESAMT</b>	<b>8'667'088</b>	<b>3'598'266</b>	<b>2'167</b>	<b>3'809.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Tabelle: Überblick über die extrapolierten Zahlen zu den vom Wohnungsverlust Bedrohten gruppiert nach Einwohnerklassen

EINWOHNER/INNEN- KLASSE	EINWOHNER/INNEN- ZAHL SCHWEIZ	EINWOHNER/INNEN- ZAHLENZAHL, BE- FRAGTE GE- MEINDEN (N=515)	SUMME VOM WOHNUNGS- VERLUST BE- DROHTE, BE- FRAGUNG	HOCHRECHNUNG ANZAHL VOM WOHNUNGSVER- LUSTE BEDROHTE, CH	%-ANTEIL AN ALLEN VON WOHNUNGS- LOSIGKEIT BE- DROHTEN
1 BIS 1'000	392'525	92'025	48	204.7	1.3
1'001 BIS 5'000	2'465'323	541'758	426	1'938.6	11.9
5'001 BIS 10'000	1'664'714	401'650	391	1'620.6	9.9
10'001 BIS 20'000	1'563'682	327'382	451	2'154.1	13.2
20'001 BIS 30'000	604'622	272'185	1'361	3'023.3	18.5
30'001 BIS 40'000	382'750	175'000	531	1'161.4	7.1
40'001 BIS 50'000	129'192	43'455	40	118.9	0.7
50'001 BIS 75'000	117'289	117'289	3'500	3'500.0	21.4
75'001 BIS 100'000	158'781	76'183	40	83.4	0.5
> 100'000	1'188'210	535'923	1'150	2'549.7	15.6
<b>GESAMT</b>	<b>8'667'088</b>	<b>2'582'850</b>	<b>7'938</b>	<b>16'354.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>