



# **Peculiarities Of Social Work Practice with Young Women Experiencing Homelessness**

Author: Maily Vintan

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Justinas Sadauskas, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius Lithuania

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# **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the specifics of social work practice with young women experiencing homelessness in Lithuania and Portugal. The study using a qualitative approach, conducting semi-structured interviews with social workers actively supporting young women in different institutions in both countries. The findings indicate that young women's homelessness situation is understood as complex, gendered, and often hidden, frequently linked to domestic and family violence, poverty, unstable family relationships, and challenging transitions from care or institutions. Social workers combine emotional support, relationship-building, advocacy, and case management. However, services are mostly available to the general population and are not aware of the different needs of young people and women. Participants reported significant structural and emotional challenges, yet many aspects of the social work practice already reflect poverty-aware and PARTH principles. The thesis concludes that more sustainable and gender- and youth-sensitive responses are needed, including stronger prevention, better integrated and multilevel support, safer and more suitable housing options for young women, and continuous professional development and support for social workers. By centering social workers' perspectives, the study contributes to understanding how practice with young women experiencing homelessness is shaped, constrained, and sustained in two European contexts.

Keywords: homelessness, young women, social work practice, resilience, PARTH model, Lithuania, Portugal

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Finally, I dedicate this study to women around the world, particularly those experiencing homelessness. May your lives be surrounded by support, dignity, and the recognition you deserve and may you continue to stay strong forever.

# INTRODUCTION

## Background

Homelessness is an international issue impacting individuals from a wide array of economic, social, and cultural backgrounds across both developed and developing nations (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2019). Given that homelessness affects numerous countries and a diverse population, it constitutes a critical issue warranting comprehensive global attention.

In addition, homelessness is one of the social exclusions that affects individual quality of life, particularly among youth (Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness, 2021). There are various impacts that can be felt by individuals experiencing homelessness such as health impacts and instability in life (Chikwava et al., 2022; Gultekin et al., 2020; Parpouchi et al., 2021; Sadauskas & Kewoh-Vainio, 2024; Sample & Ferguson, 2020; Wendt et al., 2024). Then, homelessness can also affect the growth and development of individuals, especially for children and young people (Murran & Brady, 2023). Moreover, young people who experience homelessness also experience other impacts such as difficulty accessing education or accessing employment (Axe et al., 2020; Bakken, 2023; DiGuseppi et al., 2021; Gultekin et al., 2020; Kahlmeter, 2021; Murran & Brady, 2023).

Young people is one of the vulnerable groups that tend to face more challenges compared to the general population in obtaining adequate and affordable housing (Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024). In addition, young women have different impacts when they become homeless, such as increased vulnerability to sexual assault and domestic family violence (DFV), or those DFV could be their main factor to become homeless (Wendt et al., 2024).

Given these challenges, particular care is essential for young women who are facing homelessness, specifically in the social work practice. This particular care includes understanding the nature of homelessness, knowing the challenges faced when working with young women who experience homelessness, and learning the professional practices that might help them overcome homelessness. Therefore, there is a lack focused research that addresses young people, specifically young women. This gap in the literature limits the development of social work practice as the frontline workers in the homelessness field.

## Problem Area

Homelessness remains a pervasive social problem in Europe. According to Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA (2024), approximately 1,287,000 people in Europe are experiencing homelessness. Then, in their newest report, Tenth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe (2025), it mentions that 4,9% of the European population in the survey stated that they experienced homelessness situation in their lives at least once.

Moreover, the same report also highlights that among people who experience homelessness across Europe, 76% of them were temporarily staying with their friends or family because they lack housing (Tenth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe, 2025). Then, young people are one of the vulnerable groups, and young people who are experiencing homelessness are one of FEANTSA's main concerns. They recommend that governments across Europe should prioritize affordable housing for young people in their 5-year strategies from 2024 to 2028.

Among those affected, young women represent a particularly vulnerable group. According to OECD, women who experience homelessness in Lithuania and Portugal is minority with approximately 20 to 30% from total population who experiencing homelessness (OECD, 2024b, 2024c). Therefore, many women, specifically young women, who live in insecure or inadequate housing situations may not be statistically captured. One example from this situation is Lithuanian country report on homelessness data, which captures data only from people who enter emergency and temporary services, without counting women who are living in insecure places such as living on the street or living temporary with friend (*OECD, 2024b*). In addition, another data by Eoin et al. (2023), which shows that from 2016 to 2022, the female-headed households consistently outnumbered male-headed households in social housing needs assessments, and this means that more women are prone to experiencing homelessness compared to men. Wendt et al. (2024) noted in their research that young women tend to leave their homes and ended up experience homelessness because they try to escape from domestic and family violence (DFV). The flight behavior in young women aligns with Jackson (2012) research on mobility among young people, which mentions that young people use mobilization as a tactic to stay safe.

In response to this challenge, youth support has been prioritized within recent policy frameworks in Europe (Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024). For instance, FEANTSA's recommendation for addressing homelessness and housing exclusion across the EU for the period 2024-2028 emphasizes affordable housing access for young people as a key objective. Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA (2024) also suggested three recommendations to include promoting measures to facilitate youth access to housing, encouraging Member States to implement basic income for youth ages 18 to 25, and encouraging the development of housing support programs. These policy initiatives, however, frequently lack a gender-specific lens that addresses the vulnerabilities and drivers that young women face, such as DFV.

With an understanding of the scope and scale of young women who experiencing homelessness, it is critical to examine the perspective of social workers who are directly involved in the response to this complex issue. Therefore, existing research remains limited, especially studies that are focus on social workers' practice in assisting young women experiencing homelessness. Several current studies, such as Wendt et al. (2024), Ondoš et al. (2025), or Branco et al. (2025a), did not represent a social worker perspective, as Wendt et al. focus on

the women experience in all ages, while Branco et al. Ondoš et al. are only discussing about the socio demographic situation of the general population that is experiencing homelessness. The unique experience of young women would be different compared to young men who experience homelessness. Various factors and impacts make these young women even more vulnerable. This gap is the basis for this study to explore the specific experiences of homelessness from the social workers' perspective as the frontline providers of services for young women who experience homelessness.

## **Objective of Study**

### **General Objectives**

To explore the peculiarities of social work practice with young women experiencing homelessness by examining social workers' perspectives on their homelessness situation, practices, and challenges of providing support in Lithuania and Portugal.

### **Specific objectives**

1. To identify and describe the homelessness condition experienced by young women in Portugal and Lithuania in social worker's perspective
2. To examine the available support and professional roles used by social workers when working with young women experiencing homelessness
3. To identify the challenges encountered by social workers when assisting young women in homelessness setting, and to explore the coping strategies and motivational sources that sustain their practice.
4. To identify possible improvements in social work practices and service delivery for young women experiencing homelessness.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do social workers perceive the homelessness situation experienced by young women in Portugal and Lithuania?
2. What kind of support that available for young women experiencing homelessness in Portugal and Lithuania and what are the roles of social workers in the settings?
3. What are the challenges that social workers face during their practice and what coping strategies and motivational sources sustain their practice?
4. What are possible improvements in social work practice or in the service that might help young women experiencing homelessness to exit from the homelessness situations?

## **Operational Definition**

Peculiarities refer to the unusual characteristic that emerge in social workers account of (a) how experience of young women in homelessness situation, and (b) how social worker respond to young women experiencing homelessness through their practices and roles.

Social Work Practice refer to any activities or interaction between social workers and young women experiencing homelessness using the positive youth development framework that includes positive and sustained relationship with competent and caring adults, development of life skills, and opportunities for youth engagement and empowerment (Sanders, Munford and Liebenberg in Munford et al., 2019)

Young individual or youth: transition period between childhood and adulthood for women, and the age range is between 15 to 29 (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017)

Women: any individual who are identify themselves as women regardless of the sex assigned at birth, the gender roles, the sexual identity or sexual orientation (Byers & Blair, 2020).

Homelessness: an individual who are living in the different kind of situation explained by ETHOS light typology including living rough, living in emergency accommodation, living in accommodation or institution for people experiencing homelessness, people living in non-conventional or inadequate housing, or living temporarily with family or friends due to the lack of housing (FEANTSA, 2017b)

# 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

## 1.1 Concept of Youth Homelessness

### 1.1.1 Youth Homelessness Definition

FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homelessness) is the only NGO who focus to end homelessness situation in Europe (*About FEANTSA*, n.d.). FEANTSA developed a unified definition of homelessness, encompassing various living situations that may occur in young women's lives. FEANTSA (2020) define youth homelessness as situation where individual age 13 to 26 experience in four different living situations including rooflessness, houselessness, living in insecure or inadequate housing without parent, family member or legal guardian. However, FEANTSA suggested that instead of discontinuing the service at age 26, support should transition to adult services before reaching 26, allowing some individuals to continue receiving services from institutions that focus to assist people in homelessness situation in Europe until the young person turn 30 (FEANTSA, 2020).

Then, FEANTSA created typology called ETHOS (European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion) to provide a common language for European countries to exchange information on the topic of homelessness (FEANTSA, 2017a). Afterwards, in 2017, FEANTSA redesigned the definition of homelessness and creating two version of typology to capture the homelessness definition including ETHOS for more generic purposes and ETHOS Light for the statistical purposes (FEANTSA, 2017a).

FEANTSA (2017a) divided ETHOS into four main categories aim to encompass all living conditions that constitute homelessness in Europe including:

- a. rooflessness (living without any shelter or other kind, or sleeping rough)
- b. houselessness (having a temporary place to sleep such as in institutions or shelter)
- c. living in insecure housing (faced with extreme exclusion caused by eviction, domestic abuse, or unstable tenancies)
- d. living in inadequate housing (such as caravan or any illegal campsite, in overcrowding place or in unfit housing)

Furthermore, FEANTSA (2017a) describing four different main categories into 13 living situations and the definition mainly used for policy purposes and used as a detailed framework for professionals and scholars ([See Appendix 4](#)). On the other hand, FEANTSA also created ETHOS Light, that has six operational categories and defines the homeless in twelve different living situations (Table 1). These operational categories are employed to classify various conditions based on the type of accommodation or living situation of an individual.

**Table 1. ETHOS Light Categories**

| Operational Categories |                                                                                                           | Living Situation |                                                                     | Definition                                                                                                |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                      | People living rough                                                                                       | 1                | Public spaces / external spaces                                     | Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters           |
| 2                      | People in emergency accommodation                                                                         | 2                | Overnight shelters                                                  | People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation        |
| 3                      | People living in accommodation for the homeless                                                           | 3                | Homeless hostels                                                    | Where the period of stay is time-limited and no long-term housing is provided                             |
|                        |                                                                                                           | 4                | Temporary accommodation                                             |                                                                                                           |
|                        |                                                                                                           | 5                | Transitional supported accommodation                                |                                                                                                           |
|                        |                                                                                                           | 6                | Women's shelters or refugee accommodation                           |                                                                                                           |
| 4                      | People living in institutions                                                                             | 7                | Healthcare institutions                                             | Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing.<br>No housing available prior to Release                  |
|                        |                                                                                                           | 8                | Penal institutions                                                  |                                                                                                           |
| 5                      | People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing                                        | 9                | Mobile homes                                                        | Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence |
|                        |                                                                                                           | 10               | Non-conventional buildings                                          |                                                                                                           |
|                        |                                                                                                           | 11               | Temporary structures                                                |                                                                                                           |
| 6                      | Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends due to lack of housing | 12               | Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence | Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence |

Source: FEANTSA (2017b)

Several countries including Lithuania and Portugal have adopted the ETHOS Light categories when reporting on homelessness within their respective national contexts. According to the report from Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA (2024), 18 of 23 recorded European nations use the ETHOS Light categories 2 and 3 in their statistical reports. However, substantial variations related to the definition of homelessness exist among countries due to differences in data collection methodologies and varying levels of political focus on homelessness issues (Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024). Then, some countries may underreport figures owing to limited enumeration efforts or restrictive definitional frameworks. For instance, Lithuania only counted people who accessing the shelter for their statistical data of homelessness, and it is only covered 2 out of 6 categories of homelessness in ETHOS Light (OECD, 2024b, 2024a). By this situation, it means that women who are living in public places or living temporarily with friends are not counted in their statistical report. Therefore, this underreporting has led to the term *hidden homelessness*, referring to people experiencing homelessness who are not captured in official statistics (OECD, 2025b). In OECD (2025b) document, hidden homelessness refers to individuals whose living conditions align with the ETHOS Light typology, yet who

remain uncounted within official homelessness statistics. Hidden homelessness may include people who are not in contact with any support services or did not register in any service database, people living in inadequate places (similar to ETHOS Light category 6), or people who are not eligible to get any support services. In addition, OECD (2025b) mention that women are one often missed in the official homelessness statistic or indirectly classified as living in hidden homelessness situation.

In summary, the statistical reports in different countries such as in Lithuania and Portugal are unable to capture the full range of living conditions due to the different definitions and counting approaches in each country. In addition, recent explanation of homelessness did not capture the complexity of homelessness women live (Shier et al., 2016).

### **1.1.2 Homelessness Definition and Youth Age Range in Lithuania and Portugal**

According to OECD (2024b), Lithuania defines homelessness situation in three different conditions including individual living without any accommodation and does not have any right to use any accommodation, or someone who reside in either temporary accommodation or living in public places.

In Portugal, there is a national institution that focus to understand the homelessness situation, called ENIPSSA (The National Strategy for the Integration of Homeless People) and the local branch institutions is called NPISA (Planning and Intervention Units for the Homeless) (NPISA - Enipssa, n.d.). According to ENIPSSA, homelessness is divided into two categories called “*sem teto*” and “*sem casa*” (ENIPSSA, 2018). *Sem teto* means that people living in public spaces, staying in emergency shelters or living in precarious conditions. Then, *sem casa* situation related as staying in temporary accommodation. From these two definitions, Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA (2024) includes *sem teto* in ETHOS Light as people living rough (category 1) and people living in emergency accommodation (category 2) while *sem casa* is included in category 3, which is people living in accommodation for homeless. However, the temporary accommodation did not include other institution, such as people infected with HIV/AIDS, people with addictive behaviours and people who are victim of domestic violence who stay in Shelter Home (Concept of Homeless Person - Enipssa 2017-2023, n.d.). Although ENIPSSA mentions that the concept applies to statistical data from 2017 to 2023, there is no update or latest concept definition of homelessness within Portuguese context that are available on the ENIPSSA website as of 2026.

Moreover, the age range for youth is not defined in the documents produced by both countries. However, European Commission (2023) provides information on the age range for youth in each country. in Lithuania, The Law of Youth Policy Framework (2021) define that a young person is an individual aged 14 to 29 years old. Then, The Law on Youth Associations in Portugal using age range 12-30 for youth aged (European Commission, 2023). However, several other programs related to homelessness in Portugal using different age

range. For instance, the “*Porta 65*”, a program that offers housing support to young individuals aged between 18 and 35 (Portal da Habitacao, 2024). In addition, Garantia Jovem (n.d.) or Youth Guarantee Initiative program include age 15-29 in their program to support employment for youth.

A notable gap across all nations is the limited operationalisation of homelessness situations specifically designed for young women or even youth. Both Lithuania and Portugal adopted definitions of homelessness from ETHOS, but not all ETHOS categories are included in each country's definition. For example, in the Lithuanian report, people living on the street are not counted, and the report did not publish age groups. Although each country establishes its own legal age ranges for youth, these definitions differ: 12 to 30 years in Portugal and 14 to 29 years in Lithuania.

### **1.1.3 Characteristic of Young Women Experiencing Homelessness**

Youth homelessness is a complex phenomenon, and the gender dynamic of young people who are experiencing homelessness are still under-research (Bretherton et al., 2021). However, women who experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable than men with greater risk of violence and abuse (Žilinskaitė, 2024). Women experiencing homelessness are also significantly more likely than men to experience suicidal thoughts and to be diagnosed with mental health issues (Milaney et al., 2020). In addition, women experiencing homelessness have higher level of adverse childhood experience such as sexual abuse and verbal abuse compared to men (Duke & Searby, 2019; Milaney et al., 2020).

When experiencing homelessness, women have a great feeling of homesickness, fear and helplessness but women also exhibit hope, resilience, and self-empowerment (Žilinskaitė, 2024). Among young women in particular, this strong sense of hope is associated with aspirations to secure a job, receive state support, and regain or purchase their own homes (Žilinskaitė, 2024).

Bretherton (2017) also stated that women are more likely to experience the hidden homelessness such as living with friend or relative because they have nowhere else to go. Hidden implies that youth experiencing homelessness often oscillate between residing on the street, squatting, staying with friends, or inhabiting temporary accommodations. Mayock and Parker (in Eoin et al, 2023) also agreed with the statement by mentioned that youth homeless are usually moving back and forth between home and other places.

Furthermore, one of the key factors that contribute to hidden homelessness situation specifically among youth is their mobility Jackson (2012). This argument is further supported by the statement from Golubić et al., which stated that mobility is major component of homeless individuals' lives (Golubić et al., 2023). Jackson (2012) highlight mobility in youth experiencing homelessness in several points:

1. Mobility can be used as a tactic to stay safe, gain new knowledge, or avoid overstaying in other places.

2. Mobility is an individual's response to finding resources, loss, or managing their livelihood.
3. Mobility is neither random nor free. Mobility itself can be an anchor for young people experiencing homelessness. Places that are typically used for mobility are hostels, parks, or community or service centres.
4. Mobility can produce transferable skills. When moving, young people gain new experiences and try to adapt to new environments, thus gaining highly adaptable skills that may benefit them in the future.

Furthermore, Jackson (2012) also highlighted a trend called fixed mobility. Fixed mobility means that young individuals facing homelessness may be trapped in endless movement, portraying the state of mobility not as freedom but as trapped in a cycle of displacement (Jackson, 2012). Jackson's concept related to mobility provides an important knowledge related to the experiences of the vulnerable youth populations categorized by FEANTSA. FEANTSA (2007) mentioned about unaccompanied homeless adolescents or youth experiencing homelessness as a trend in many EU countries. This trend divided into four interrelated categories including homeless adolescent, youth who runaway or abandoned, children who leaving institutions and unaccompanied minor (FEANTSA, 2007).

Specifically for women, study from Mikene (2018) mention that women have different strategies to survive living on the street such as having a male partner, creating image based on the situation, and using invisibility tactic in public spaces. Castaños-Cervantes & Vélez-Agosto (2018) also highlighting couple as important social network for young women experiencing homelessness as source of protection and friendship. However, intimate relationships sometimes become sources of violence, insecurity, and abuse, which in turn negatively affect the well-being and health of young women (Castaños-Cervantes & Vélez-Agosto, 2018).

#### **1.1.4 Factors Causing Young Women Experiencing Homelessness**

While youth homelessness is influenced by three different factors and interrelated factors, the pathway for young women that led them experiencing homelessness are shaped by gender and systemic inequalities. Factors such as domestic and family violence are intensified by structural failures like the lack of affordable housing, overcrowding and institutional gaps in support services. There are three factors that commonly lead individual to experience homelessness including structural factors, institutional factors and individual factors. Furthermore, these three factors (structural, institutional, and individual) can be interrelated and cause a person to live in homelessness situation. For instance, Bretherton et al. (2021) explain that a young woman who have educational difficulties and grow up in poverty are at high risk of becoming homeless. Then, Shier et al. (2016) explain some women experiencing homelessness compounded by gendered violence and stressful life event such as living in foster care during childhood, psychiatric hospitalization or sexual violence. In addition,

another challenge faced by women are lack of affordable and appropriate housing and landlord discrimination (Wendt et al., 2024)

### **Structural Factor Leading to Homelessness**

Structural factor that leads to homelessness is related to socio-economic condition (Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024). It includes housing market conditions, changes of labour market, poverty, and migration (OECD, 2025). Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA (2024) stated that the economic condition also refers to persistent income gaps and unstable employment, along with soaring property costs and limited affordable homes, foster conditions that lead to greater housing exclusion. In addition, a study by Chiarantoni (2025) in Italy reveals that overcrowding is a symptom of this structural failure, where available housing fails to meet the needs and financial capabilities of society. Overcrowding is also one of the factors contributing to homelessness across Europe. In 2023, a study reveal that one of five children aged under 6 are living in overcrowded condition and young people are significantly affected by this condition (Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024). In 2023, 26.0% of individuals aged 15-29 in the EU resided in overcrowded housing, which is 9.2 percentage points higher than the overall population percentage (Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024). Furthermore, Eoin et al. (2023) mention that the general factor of youth homelessness is related to economic and housing market. In summary, while youth homelessness is influenced by three different factors and interrelated factors, the pathway for young women that led them experiencing homelessness are shaped by gender and systemic inequalities. Factors such as domestic and family violence are intensified by structural failures like the lack of affordable housing, overcrowding and institutional gaps in support services.

### **Institutional Factor Leading to Homelessness**

The institutional and systemic failure factors are involving shortcomings in public policies and legal frameworks that might lead someone to experience homelessness (OECD, 2025b). For instance, lack of support services, care gaps, and mismanagement can worsen homelessness or housing exclusion (OECD, 2025b). The institutional and systemic failure increase the risk of housing instability and other study find the link of homelessness influenced by several factors including racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia (OECD, 2025b). Sample & Ferguson (2020) mention in their study that some young adults choose to live on the street because they live in unsafe situation or facing discrimination inside the shelter. Discrimination within shelters is part of a systemic failure that may trap individuals in a cycle of homelessness. In addition, Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA (2024) also mentions that specific legal measures, such as eviction, can cause significant harm if implemented without adequate mediation or assistance.

## **Individual Factor Leading to Homelessness**

The individual factors consist of family or personal experience that shape individual's life. It covers personal life event such as eviction or job lose, health issues such as illnesses, disabilities, mental health issues, addiction (OECD, 2025). In addition, personal life event, behaviour and individual skill also include in these factors. Mayock and Parker (in Eoin et al., 2023) also added that homelessness among youth associated with LGBTQ+ identification, substance use, family conflict or abusive family, and racial discrimination.

Busch-Geertsema et al. (2010) explain that experience of care during childhood is a significant factor that led young people to homelessness. Data from their study also stated that one of three individual who experience living in care are become homeless (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010). Meanwhile, another study from Sadauskas & Kewoh-Vainio (2024) reveal other factors that lead youth to experiencing homelessness. The factors are including substance abuse, financial illiteracy, displacement, careless behaviour or attitude, insufficient house management skill, antisocial behaviour and struggling with commitment about honesty. These results underscore that youth homelessness is also closely linked to individual factor related to personal, behavioural, and developmental issues. Moreover, Busch-Geertsema et al. (2010) also mention that personal factor such as low education level and drug use could be a pathway to youth experiencing homelessness.

On the other hand, Sample & Ferguson (2020) wrote several reasons why young people experiencing homelessness in his research such as lifestyle choice, decision of the young adults, and their home environment. Indeed, there is one young adult in Sample & Ferguson (2020) study mention that the person doesn't want to live in the stable housing and it is that person decision to live in homelessness situations. Then, the home environment reason is characterised by abuse, family disfunction or neglect that may happen in their house (Sample & Ferguson, 2020). The negative experience at home may cause a person to run away, which can be another pathway to homelessness. Specifically for young women, a study by Wendt et al. (2024) explain that one of the factors causing young women experiencing homelessness is that running away is their survival strategy from domestic and family violence (DFV). In Duke & Searby (2019) study, many women experiencing homelessness have been subjected to domestic violence, which arises from stressful life events, broader societal issues, and a lack of social support.

Wendt research is also aligned with Broll & Huey (2020) highlighting that women who are targets of multiple forms of victimisation during their lives also tend to experience more than one episode of homelessness. Then, Mikene (2018) studies about women homelessness also mention that causing factor of women experiencing homelessness is commonly violence and abuse.

Based on these studies, it can be concluded that young women mobilise to protect themselves or as a response to their search for resources. The mobilisation is not random because they experience adverse personal circumstances that encourage them to leave home, in line with Jackson's (2012) research on mobility among

young people. As an example, study from Wendt et al. (2024) explains that young women wanted to run away from the violent environment quickly, so they had limited time and assets to secure future housing and ended up experiencing homelessness. It was also explained that young women experience direct or indirect violence as part of domestic and family violence (DFV), such as financial abuse, isolation, physical and mental violence, which can cause young women to experience a lack of financial resources and became their pathway into homelessness.

### **1.1.5 Impact on Young Women Experiencing Homelessness**

Busch-Geertsema et al. (2010) describe that individual experience of homelessness are varied and the potential effect of homelessness also different. However, individual experiencing homeless might have multiple impact. Homelessness can negatively affect individuals' physical and mental health, overall well-being, life expectancy, and access to jobs and various economic and social services (Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024). Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA (2024) also affirmed that housing difficulties affect significant number of European citizens and young people are one of the groups that struggle more than general population.

In this part, there are four different categories of homelessness impact including social exclusion and stigma, physical and mental health issues, difficulties in employment and education, and increased vulnerability. Vizgirdė & Malinauskas (2023) explains that individuals experiencing homelessness often face significant challenges in recovery due to the pervasive sense of defeat and hopelessness they experience. Furthermore, Poškaitė & Petružytė (n.d.) also mention that individual experiencing homelessness has low or normal self-esteem and never have a high level of self-esteem. This situation is also related to sense of defeat due to poverty and repeated failures that they experience (Poškaitė & Petružytė, n.d.). In addition, Vizgirdė & Malinauskas (2023) highlighted the “*cycle of insecurity*” that happens to individuals experiencing homelessness that are described with the passivity, lack of motivation, distrust of people and support system, losing control of themselves and cycle of debt.

#### **Social exclusion and stigma**

Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (2021) define that homelessness is considered one of the primary forms of social exclusion, significantly impacts people's quality of life and hinders their access to social and economic opportunities.

Then, the most common impact for every individual experience homeless is economically excluded (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010). Another report from UNICEF (in Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024) stated that stigma also happened in school system in France because homelessness related to poor economic condition that led to insecurity for young people and weakened their relationship in school. From that report, it appears

that stigma is a multiple impact that affect people who experiencing homelessness. Another example related to multiple impact coming from Busch-Geertsema et al. (2010) report who explain that individual who live in homeless situation don't have fixed address so it's difficult for them to maintain relationship with family or friend, and they don't have any access to private services such as banks and telephone and this could lead to social exclusion (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010). Moreover, another study from Sadauskas & Kewoh-Vainio (2024) mention that in Finland, youth experiencing homelessness can lead to unstable individual's life, lack of self-control, difficulties in accessing education, employment and network, decreasing the rental credit, safety issues and social issues such as discrimination, trust issue and abusive relationship. Daugininkaitė (2024) study also highlighting that stigma happened around women experiencing homelessness. The stigma is related to negative assessment such as giving homeless label as a drug user, weak, people who are unable to manage their live, unmotivated or even as sick person (Daugininkaitė, 2024). Stereotype also sometimes coming from worker inside public institutions such as from hospital staff (Daugininkaitė, 2024).

However, Daugininkaitė (2024) also mention three strategies that women use to avoid or recover from stigma including concealment of hiding the fact, resisting by showing that the stigma or stereotype is false, and overcoming the emotion by being patient, building commitment, and constructing positive identity.

### **Physical and Mental Health**

Homelessness can affect health status, mental health and the development of child and youth. Living on the streets can impact sleep, nutrition and hygiene and essential to the critical period of cognitive and emotional development in childhood (Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024). Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA (2024) describe that children who stays in temporary accommodation for more than one year are three times likely to experience depression and anxiety.

Furthermore, Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA (2024) also mention related health impact that affecting homeless. Then, children and young people facing homelessness have different health needs, which include a heightened risk of mental health issues and the impact of poor nutrition while dealing with obstacles that hinder their access to essential healthcare services (Lucy Hocking & Emma Leenders, 2021)

Then, homeless people have no place to store their food then they will not have any source of sufficient nutritious food (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010). Food insufficient also reported in Baggett et al. (2011) study and it mentioned that one of four homeless adults are not getting enough food to eat. This limited access to food create a health disparity that would lead people to health problems (Wetherill et al., 2023). In their study, Wetherill et al. (2023) report that approximately fifty percent of the participants in his research having a cardiovascular disease and experiencing a depressive disorder. Gultekin et al. (2020) mention that dental health problem emerge in children experiencing homelessness, such as untreated dental caries. Similar with Gultekin

research, Wetherill et al. (2023) mention that 40 percent of participants in their research were avoiding food due to mouth, teeth or gum problem.

A strong relationship exists between homelessness and mental health (Chikwava et al., 2022). In their research, Chikwava et al. (2022) mention that 63% of young people who experience homelessness have a mental disorder. The highest risk of experiencing homelessness was found among young people who had dual diagnoses, such as with substance use, self-harm, anxiety, and psychosis.

Besides physical and mental health problem, young people also facing barriers in accessing the healthcare services (Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024). This situation could worsen the physical and mental health of people experiencing homelessness.

### **Difficulty in employment and education**

Homelessness serves as an obstacle to both educational and employment opportunities (Axe et al., 2020). One study in Canada mention that 75% from 35.000 to 40.000 young people experiencing homelessness are unemployed (Bakken, 2023). The statement also in line with Axe et al. (2020) research which explain that youth experiencing homelessness have higher rates of unemployment, but sometimes rely on the informal economy, both legal and illegal. Then, young people who have difficulties in accessing employment are more likely engage in high-risk income generation and will further the cycle of homelessness (Axe et al., 2020).

Besides employment, people experiencing homelessness also facing other difficulties related to education. DiGuseppi et al. (2021) stated that available research reported that youth experiencing homelessness tend to have a lower education quality such as low reading and math proficiency compared to low-income youth. Kahlmeter (2021) mention that types of moves will negatively impact educational attainment, and the risk will be higher if the relocation happen repeatedly or if the relocation is forced.

### **Increased Vulnerability**

Busch-Geertsema et al. (2010) describe that homeless people lack shelter which force people to not have any safe place and lead to high risk of experiencing theft, violence and crime. Specifically, to young women, homelessness can also further increase women vulnerability to sexual assault and domestic and family violence (Wendt et al., 2024). Moreover, there are several risks for young women experiencing homelessness such as untreated mental illness, health risk such as pregnancy, sexual transmitted infection risk, or survival sex as part of the increased vulnerability (Castaños-Cervantes & Vélez-Agosto, 2018; Gultekin et al., 2020). In addition, (Parpouchi et al., 2021) stated that the history of homelessness in early development (in children or young age) is significant risk factor that lower the success rate of Housing First program, with 47% lower odds than older age group. The study shows that experiencing homelessness at a younger age has long-term effects that may become a barrier for young people to exit homelessness.

In conclusion, homelessness causes a series of interrelated adverse effects, especially for young women. The impacts included social exclusion, health, and mental deterioration, and homelessness also became a barrier to education and employment. These impacts could also be related to increased vulnerability in young people. This analysis reveals a complexity in homelessness that the same conditions could function simultaneously as both causes and consequences. For instance, mental health challenges can cause someone to lose their house, while the trauma of homelessness intensifies these same conditions. Similarly, educational disadvantages contribute to housing insecurity, yet homelessness itself creates barriers to education. The recursive relationship between factors and the impact of homelessness creates an inescapable cycle of homelessness.

## **1.2 Youth Homelessness Situations in Lithuania and Portugal**

### **1.2.1 Institution for Collecting Data, How Data Collected and The Data**

Recent report related to total population experiencing homelessness in Lithuania and Portugal are compiled by FEANTSA in their annual report (Tenth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe, 2025). OECD (2025) stated there are two methods in counting homelessness data divided by point in time (PIT) and flow count. PIT is conducted through surveys or street counts, while flow is conducted by recording the number of support recipients during a certain period of time (OECD, 2025). In Lithuania, data related to the homelessness situation is taken from the number of people staying in shelters for people experiencing homelessness based on the Law on Social Services (OECD, 2024b). The data collection is carried out using the flow method with a period of one year. However, Portugal uses the PIT method (OECD, 2024c).

In Lithuania, according to VDA in Poverty Watch report, the number of people living in temporary accommodation has increased, with 4,009 people living in temporary accommodation in 2021, 4,317 in 2022, and 4,318 in 2023 (Poverty Watch, 2024). In Portugal, the institution responsible for statistical data related to homelessness is ENIPSSA. The oldest report from their website is report from 2018, and the latest data from ENIPSSA is from 2023 which was published in October 2024. From this recent data, there are 13,128 people experiencing homelessness and 32% of the total homeless population are individuals under the age of 18 and individuals aged 18-30 (ENIPSSA, 2023). Furthermore, ENIPSSA (2023) report mention that the three main reasons for someone experiencing homelessness are unemployment, alcohol dependence or addiction, and lack of family support. Furthermore, data from ENIPSSA shows a significant increase in the population experiencing homelessness in Portugal from 2018 to 2023, both in the under-18 and 18-to-30 age groups. In addition, there has been an increase in all categories, including *sem abrigo*, *sem casa* and *sem teto*. The table represents a 78% increase since 2018, with FEANTSA explaining that this increase is partly due to improvements in data collection by municipalities (Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024).

In summary, the data collected from OECD and national sources reveal important variations in homelessness across four European countries, with Portugal experiencing the higher homelessness rate compared to Lithuania, partly due to the broader coverage of ETHOS. Each country uses different methods for data collection, with Lithuania using the flow count method, while Portugal relies on point-in-time (PIT) counts.

**Table 2. Statistical Data about People Experiencing Homelessness in Lithuania and Portugal**

|                                                                 | 2021     | 2022     | 2023     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Individuals experiencing homelessness in Lithuania              | 4009     | 4317     | 6194     |
| Individuals experiencing homelessness in Portugal               | 9604     | 10773    | 13128    |
| Lithuania total population                                      | 2810761  | 2805998  | 2857279  |
| Portugal total population                                       | 10421117 | 10516621 | 10639726 |
| Homeless population per 1000 total population in Lithuania      | 1.43     | 1.54     | 2.17     |
| Homeless population per 1000 total population in Portugal       | 0.92     | 1.02     | 1.23     |
| Total population growth in Lithuania (%)                        |          | -0.17%   | 1.83%    |
| Total population growth in Portugal (%)                         |          | 0.92%    | 1.17%    |
| Growth of population in homelessness situation in Lithuania (%) |          | 7.68%    | 43.48%   |
| Growth of population in homelessness situation in Portugal (%)  |          | 12.17%   | 21.86%   |

*Source: Author compilation from ENIPPSA data, OECD report, Statistics Portugal, Official Statistic Portal Lithuania, and calculation by author (ENIPSSA, 2021, 2022, 2023; OECD, 2024c, 2024b; OSP, 2022; Statistics Portugal, 2023)*

Table 2 illustrates that the number of individuals experiencing homelessness is increasing every year, and it is greater than the population growth in both countries. Over the year, the percentage of the population that is experiencing homelessness doubled in Portugal between 2022 and 2023, while it is almost 7 times higher in Lithuania. However, FEANTSA noted that the increasing trend observed in both countries' statistical data may also indicate that they are improving at counting the population experiencing homelessness (Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA, 2024).

### 1.2.2 National Strategies in Lithuania and Portugal

Related to homelessness in general, Portugal and Slovakia provide a national strategy to prevent and ending homelessness. However, according to Fondation Abbé Pierre & FEANTSA (2024), Lithuania did not have any national strategies until 2023. No recent update from other sources such as OECD data (OECD, 2024b, 2024a). However, Portugal has a national strategy for eradicating homelessness named *Nacional para a Integração das Pessoas em Situação de Sem-Abrigo* or National Strategy Integration for Homeless People. The organizational framework comprises an Interministerial Commission and an Advisory Commission and features the Strategy Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation Group (GIMAE), which houses an

Executive Nucleus, alongside local units known as Homeless Planning (*About ENIPSSA - Enipssa*, n.d.). The recent strategy, ENIPSSA 2025-2030 was approved in April 2024 with four strategic axes including:

1. Axis 1 – promote knowledge information, awareness and education on homelessness
2. Axis 2 – implement an integrated early warning and prevention system
3. Axis 3- strengthen interventions that support the social inclusion of people at risk or experiencing homelessness
4. Axis 4 – ensure effective coordination, monitoring and evaluation of ENIPSSA 2025-2030.

At the local level, the strategy is delivered through municipal *Núcleos de Planeamento e Intervenção Sem-Abrigo* (NPISA) or Homeless Planning and Intervention Unit, which coordinate local action and planning. There are 32 NPISAs operating across municipalities in Portugal.

Portugal also applying the Hosing First program. The initial Housing First program was established in 2009 in Lisbon (Duarte & Almas, 2020). As part of Portugal's national strategy to reduce homelessness, the city of Porto has implemented a Housing First approach with promising results. In 2022, the program supported 56 people in 45 apartments, with a focus on the chronically homeless population and the evaluations showed that 94% of participants managed to maintain their housing, reflecting the success of this model in providing long-term stability (Baptista & Perista, 2024).

Portugal and Slovakia both have separate reports on homelessness that show that young people are a vulnerable group. However, neither country has any specific strategies, policies, or programs to help young people who are homeless. The annual report in Portugal clearly states that young people are a top priority because of the significant portion of the homeless population (ENIPSSA, 2023).

### **1.2.3 Service Providers in Lithuania and Portugal**

In Lithuania and Portugal, several organisations are members of FEANTSA. The support is varied, including short-term and long-term support, as well as integration support. Many programs exist for the general homeless population, yet fewer programs are specifically designed for young people.

In Lithuania, according to the Law on Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania (*Lietuvos Respublikos Socialinių Paslaugų Įstatymas*) municipalities responsible for the provision of services such as providing temporary accommodation for people experiencing homelessness (Snieškienė & Dulinskienė, 2014). Then, Caritas Lithuania is the only organization as member of FEANTSA. To support people experiencing homelessness, there are several main activities carried out by Caritas Lithuania including providing clothing assistance, food aid and operating day center in Vilnius and Kaunas (*Lithuania Caritas*, n.d.).

In Portugal, *The Instituto da Segurança Social* (IPSS), functioning under the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, acts as the main funder for NGOs dedicated to addressing homelessness and delivering social support. Notably, the IPSS is also a member of FEANTSA, highlighting Portugal's institutional engagement in European-level efforts to address homelessness.

Portugal has several actors that actively support to reduce homelessness through different approach. In total, there are 7 organization as FEANTSA member. Then, Organization like CAIS have program that focus on youth intervention. CAIS using innovative strategies such as *Futebol de Rua* program, integrating sport to foster social inclusion among youth (CAIS, 2024). Selain itu, CAIS provide another program such as vocational training and art project. Then, another organisation named Ares do Pinhal (ADP) provide emergency shelter and additional treatment for people with addiction (WHO WE ARE - Ares Do Pinhal, n.d.). Other organisation (see Annex 1) also provides emergency shelter and several organisations has a street work program to outreach people experiencing homelessness and provide several integration and social support such as vocational or training program, laundry hall, dining centre and other support services (see Annex 1).

### **1.3 Social Work Practice within Homelessness Situations**

#### **1.3.1 Social Work Practice and Intervention**

Study from (Cvilikiene et al., 2024) highlight several practices in homelessness setting specifically in temporary housing are related to reintegration of the person experiencing homelessness. Several practices are included giving information, mediation and representation, organizing transportation and personal hygiene care service, organizing socio cultural services and developing social skills of individuals experiencing homelessness (Cvilikiene et al., 2024).

Study from Munford & Sanders (2021) wrote three key social work transformative practice when working with vulnerable young people including trust-based relationship, listening and understanding, working with multiple level support and advocacy. Another study from Petruik (2018) mention three key themes of social work practice in palliative and end of life experiencing homelessness divided by practices including trusting relationships, collaboration and partnership, and education, training and knowledge. Then, study from de Pass et al. (2023) stated that for youth experiencing homelessness, three interventions for housing stabilization are multidisciplinary and outreach interventions, housing intervention, and transitional, supportive and independent living programs. Another study is from Rambaldini-Gooding et al. (2024) about systematic review of youth homelessness interventions include the youth perspective mention five key approaches including youth centered approach, centrality of relationship, integrated and multidisciplinary service, housing approach and strength-based model or intervention.

Trust-based relationship means that the relationship is built upon kindness, respect and consistent support for young people so they will be feeling valued (Munford & Sanders, 2021). Petruik (2018) mention that trusting relationships are necessary for practitioners, but it is crucial for social workers who are working in homelessness settings. Therefore, Yamada (2022) in his study related to homelessness in veteran settings, he mentioned that many veterans have limited communication with other people and even sometimes have no contact with family or others. With that situation, the shelter worker believes that interacting and listening to the veteran's opinion and story are the most important practice for the workers (Yamada, 2022).

Building a trusting relationship is also mentioned in Keevers & Rambaldini-Gooding (2020) study. Their study is about an organization that focus on supporting young people who experience homelessness in Australia. In their study, one of the practices to enhance a trusting relationship is done by letting young people choose their own case manager in the organization (Keevers & Rambaldini-Gooding, 2020). Then, study from Peters et al. (2022) mentioned that a quality relationship can be built by showing openness. Munford & Sanders (2021) also explains that young people will appreciate when social workers are honest about the challenges they may experience when trying to overcome the issues. In relation to women in domestic violence sector, Chung (2018) stated that the key practice is to support the women by believe the women without any judgement and working on the safe options. In addition, responding to perpetrators and being transparent related to information sharing is critical in helping women in DFV situation (Chung, 2018).

Closely linked to trust-based relationships, the second practice is related to listening and understanding. Professional such as social workers should take time to listen, suspending assumptions and judgements towards young people, and showing respect for young people's experience and value their belief, culture and coping capacities (Munford & Sanders, 2021) as part of listening and understanding. Fogel et al. (2025) mention that communication is the most used skill for working in homelessness setting. These communication skills are including active listening, building trusted relationship by remaining patient to learn nonjudgmental and empathy (Daugininkaitė, 2024; Fogel et al., 2025). Nonjudgmental attitude examples for social workers are communicating in pleasant way and did not get angry and explain everything in a way that client can understand (Daugininkaitė, 2024). In addition, Fogel et al. (2025) also mention about being empathetic, which means that social worker acknowledging the difficulties that client faced during the situation. The communication skill mentioned by Fogel et al. is related to the listening and understanding practice by Munford & Sanders. Furthermore, Healy (2018) highlights that one of the key responsibilities of social workers when working with young people is to establish effective communication to build meaningful working relationships. This involves dedicating time and attention to understanding their needs, communicating in ways that recognize and promotes the human rights of youth, and demonstrating confidence and competence in engaging with young people (Healy, 2018).

The last one is working with multiple level support. de Pass et al. (2023) mention that multidisciplinary means that case management, outreach intervention, peer support, mental health services and housing support are available in the intervention. Then, Munford & Sanders (2021) stated that multiple level support means that provision for both emotional and practical support are available. For instance, for young people experiencing homelessness, they sometimes need other support such as for substance abuse or support for their mental health condition (Munford & Sanders, 2021). Cvilikiene et al. (2024) also mention about the importance of cooperating with health officer to help individual develop the health literacy.

An example of the multidisciplinary intervention is described by Kahan et al. (2020) through Peer Education and Connection through Empowerment (PEACE), a peer supported and trauma informed group intervention to support young women who experienced gender-based violence and homelessness. Another example is from Hawaii, a program called Wahine Talk (Kuo et al., 2023). In this program, social worker, community health and medical providers working together to support young women experiencing homelessness on integration between culture and sexual reproductive health (Kuo et al., 2023).

### **1.3.2 Roles of Social Workers in Homelessness Situation**

The primary role of social workers in homelessness settings is to support individuals in reintegrating into society (Žilinskaitė, 2024). These roles involve assisting them in securing stable housing, motivating them to seek suitable treatment, encouraging their participation in the labor market, and helping them rebuild relationships with their loved ones (Žilinskaitė, 2024).

Social worker plays different roles related in homelessness setting including offering services, providing emotional and practical needs for client, being a case manager, advocating and mediating (Cobb, 2020; Krumer-Nevo, 2016; Lane et al., 2017; Machová & Špiláčková, 2025; Munford & Sanders, 2021).

Social worker key roles in homelessness settings are offering relevant services and providing relevant research (Lane et al., 2017). According to Wang et al. (2019) there are four main services applied for youth experiencing homelessness including individual and family therapies, skill building program, case management and structural intervention. The information of services can be provided by social worker.

Munford & Sanders (2021) explain that young people struggle to obtain appropriate emotional support, and social workers have an important role in helping with this situation. Social worker can be work as enabler to provide their emotional and practical need for specific issue such as mental challenges or substance abuse besides the housing (Munford & Sanders, 2021).

Besides providing services, social workers in homelessness setting could act as a case manager and working to coordinate the multidisciplinary team (Machová & Špiláčková, 2025). Furthermore, case manager also working directly with client and work to understand the homelessness situation that happened to client or

service user and help find housing (Cobb, 2020). In addition, Krumer-Nevo (2016) adds social worker role is to advocate and do mediation. Advocate and mediation mean that worker should be informed about client's right and do an active accompaniment (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Advocacy also means as giving voice to individual experiencing homelessness and promoting support for them rather than stigmatizing from others (Peters et al., 2022).

### **1.3.3 Daily Experiences of Social Workers in Homelessness Situations**

Wirth, Mette, Prill, et al. (2019) found that working in homelessness settings involves job demands such as high caseload, exposure to client's suffering, limited experience of success, and facing a bureaucratic system. Furthermore, social worker realizing that the emotional demands are emerging due to hearing client personal stories (Wirth, Mette, Nienhaus, et al., 2019). Then, client sometimes had high expectations such as demanding for different kinds of service immediately and it led to feeling of frustration especially when the resources are limited and it did not meet the client expectation (Wirth, Mette, Nienhaus, et al., 2019). In addition, when working with women experiencing homelessness, sometime the frontline workers experience anger or bitterness from client (Salem et al., 2018).

Considering the job demands and emotional difficulties in working, workers in homelessness settings require coping strategies to handle stress and emotional strain related to their work. Mette et al. (2020) divided coping strategies into two different classification such as problem oriented and emotion-oriented strategies.

The problem-oriented strategies are include increasing knowledge, reducing work tasks by focusing on the main task, having a good time management such as scheduling enough break between appointment and having enough time to prepare the daily plan before going on appointment, and having a social relation (Mette et al., 2020). The social relation strategies including setting a boundary between client and social workers by showing the limit for support and pointing out client responsibilities and encouraging client to reflecting their expectation (Mette et al., 2020). In addition, seeking support such as asking help to workers colleagues, requesting additional supervision and do an open discussion with team members is also part of the social relation strategies (Mette et al., 2020). Rogers et al. (2020) also mention that having experienced manager who offered regular supervision and were available daily as sounding board is a highly valued support.

In relation to the emotional coping strategies, (Mette et al., 2020) also highlighting on social relation by seeking emotional support from colleagues, friend or family. Furthermore, leisure activities can also act as emotional coping strategies. For example, spending time outside in nature, engaging in creative hobbies, travel or doing sport activities (Mette et al., 2020; Rogers et al., 2020).

Furthermore, acceptance and focus also included in emotional coping strategies. Mette et al. (2020) stated that acceptance and focus can withstanding negative feelings at work. The argument also in line with Salem et al.,

(2018) study explaining that accepting the situation and recognizing that workers sometimes don't understand what the client have gone through can be a strategy when client showing their aggression or bitterness to social workers. In addition, workers can also focus on the positive sides of work and remind client about their positive side or experience as part of the acceptance and focus (Mette et al., 2020).

Both research from Mette et al. (2020) and Rogers et al. (2020) highlighting that reflection is an important process. the reflection process can be held formally during supervision or informally such as doing self-reflection or discussing with colleagues (Rogers et al., 2020). Reflection can be an useful learning process, dan help to improve the daily activities of workers in homelessness setting (Rogers et al., 2020).

#### **1.3.4 Social Workers Motivation in Homelessness Situation**

Working in homelessness settings present several difficulties. Fogel et al. (2025) identified key challenges faced by the frontline workers in homelessness settings, including difficulties in working with clients, limited resources, time constraints caused by administrative burden, and challenges in managing complex cases with limited resources. Another study from Lemieux-Cumberlege & Taylor (2019) also mention that workers in homelessness setting experience higher stress and depression level compared to general population. Despite these challenges, many workers continue to remain working in homelessness setting.

Several factors contribute to frontline workers decision to retain the positions in homelessness setting. These include the alignment of work with personal career goal, opportunity to witness and hear about client's success, and the supportive institution that they value (Fogel et al., 2025). The alignment of work and personal career goal also in line with Petersén (2024) study that explaining about altruistic motives, or desire to contribute for change, is one of the personal reasons of student to learn and work as social workers. In addition, Petersén (2024) also mention that student wanted to work as social workers due to personal characteristic, such as being a good listener, empathetic and protective as fit personal qualities to work as social workers.

Aligned with Fogel et al. statement related to opportunity of witnessing client success, a study by Wirth, Mette, Nienhaus, et al. (2019) on social workers in refugee and homeless aid organization also highlight that observing positive outcome in client's live can be a rewarding experience for the workers. For instance, witnessing client's achievement such as in school, in their job or securing independent housing provides a sense of success for the workers themselves (Wirth, Mette, Nienhaus, et al., 2019). This rewarding feeling when helping others called compassion satisfaction and it functioned as protective agent from burnout, stress and depression for social workers when doing their job in homelessness setting (Lemieux-Cumberlege & Taylor, 2019; Yamada, 2022)

Supportive institution also motivates worker to retain working in homelessness setting and one of the most important job resources of social workers (Fogel et al., 2025; Wirth, Mette, Prill, et al., 2019). For example,

emphasizing on self-care and work life balance, providing training opportunities, offering direct and supportive supervision, creating a supportive leadership in workplace can exhibit that the institution care about the wellbeing of its workers (Fogel et al., 2025). In addition, enabling and open environment where workers can discuss concern or receive feedback and guidance from the leader can further reinforce the supportive organisational culture (Fogel et al., 2025).

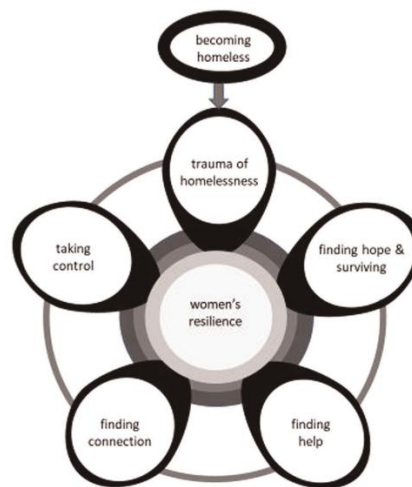
In addition, Salem et al. (2018) add other motivation to work in homelessness setting with women is the ability to help. In addition, Sadauskas & Kewoh-Vainio (2024) also mention that the opportunity to help is one of the motivation sources for social workers practice with youth in the homelessness services. Workers are mentioned that they are happy to help women in the service institutions and hoping that workers can help women to exit the homelessness situation (Salem et al., 2018).

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Resilience Theory

Resilience is a concept that becomes more familiar in social work but also developed in another field. Resilience is linked to adversity since a person demonstrates resilience when confronted with a particular adversity (Turner, 2017). Moreover, Stainton et al. (2019) explained that there are two keys related to resilience which are experiencing significant adversity and responding with positive adaptation. Adversity rarely takes a single form, but it can arise from a singular event (Turner, 2017). For instance, experiencing natural disasters or unexpected grief, or it may result from chronic conditions, including poverty, traumatic events or prolong unemployment (Turner, 2017). In their study, Szeintuch et al. (2023) mention that young women who experience homelessness adversity are defined by chaos that might happen during developmental periods. For example, during childhood, chaotic experience is related to violence, abuse, oppressive community, immigration, poverty, and humiliation (Szeintuch et al., 2023). Then, during adolescence, chaos manifested as alienation, constant movement, crime, prostitution, poverty, disease and violence (Szeintuch et al., 2023). Kidd and Davidson (in Turner, 2017) mention that resilience is also relevant in the care of young homeless people. Specifically with women, Phipps et al. (2021) finding about the stages of resilience transition in homelessness as shown in the figure below.

**Picture 1. Stages of Women Resilience in Homelessness**



“The trauma of homelessness is when women feel hopeless and traumatized because of homelessness. Finding hope and surviving is the stage when women begin to survive from homelessness with hope for the future. The third one is finding help; it describes the women attempt to engage with services. Then, finding connection is underscore the social bonds to others to overcome homelessness. The last one is taking control, and it describes as the women decision to attempt any action to resolve their situation” (Phipps et al., 2021 p.1215).

In their study, (Phipps et al., 2021) also mention that the stages are interlinked and not linear and women can move between stages when they are experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, Turner also explained that resilience could emerge from many sources (Francis J Turner, 2017). For instance, positive experience in recreation, education or work, relationship and positive activities, emerge from spirituality or faith, even inconsequential items or experience. Additionally, resilience theory posits that minor actions or events can lead to significant and positive outcomes for individuals or even on a larger scale. For young women experiencing homelessness, some source of resilience is including optimism, doing hobbies and a longing for normalcy (Szeintuch et al., 2023).

To support the development of resilience in youth, Masten (in Manoni-Millar et al., 2025) stated that human and social capital is a necessary support. Human capital includes individual skill and personal productive knowledge such as problem-solving skill, then the social capital include connection between community, friendship, community service or any extended resources that can help an individual. (Manoni-Millar et al., 2025). In addition, Milburn et al. (2025) mention that the relationship with formal institution, service provider, family or peers can promote resilience among youth experiencing homelessness.

In the context of social work, social workers must be aware of both the nature and intensity of adversity faced by their clients (Bonnano and Diminich 2013 in Turner, 2017). The concept of resilience serves as a reminder that potential for change remains open, as seemingly small events or fragments of life can have a significant impact on an individual's transformation (Turner, 2017). In addition, maintaining hope in difficult situations is applicable to social work practice because creating systemic change requires a strong belief in people's capacity to change and sustained motivation to keep going and persevere despite seemingly overwhelming barriers (Stoeffler, 2019).

## **2.2 Poverty Aware Social Work Paradigm (PAP)**

Poverty-aware social work paradigm (PAP) is a full theoretical framework that address theory, ethic and practice using three theoretical premises: ontology, epistemology and axiology (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Then, Krumer-Nevo (2016) also explaining three paradigms presented that related to poverty: the conservative, structural and the poverty-aware paradigm or PAP (See Table 3). In the conservative paradigm, poverty is addressed by transforming attitudes or behaviour of the poor because poverty is shaped by the hardship (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). While structural paradigm sees poverty as the result of inequalities, and redistribution of power is how to resolve it. Different with structural and conservative's paradigm, PAP based on critical analysis to forge interpersonal relationships between social workers and service user as a tool of social change with strong focus on solidarity (Krumer-Nevo, 2016).

**Table 3. Three Paradigm of Poverty**

|              | The conservative paradigm                                                                                                          | The structural paradigm                                                  | The poverty-aware paradigm                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ontology     | Poverty is a culture which is manifested in the psychological, familial and communal characteristics of poor people                | Poverty is the consequence of unequal social structures and institutions | Poverty is a violation of human rights. Poor people are agents who resist poverty under conditions of severe lack of economic and symbolic capital                              |
| Epistemology | Positivist, professional knowledge as objective truth                                                                              | Positivist, professional knowledge as objective truth                    | Critical-constructivist, obtained through relationship with service users                                                                                                       |
| Axiology     | The poor exhibit a serious deviation from social and moral norms and live off the productivity of the normative members of society | Poverty is incompatible with a just society. Ethics of redistribution    | Ethics of solidarity, minimising otherness, extending the group of 'we'                                                                                                         |
| Practice     | Surveillance, re-education                                                                                                         | Community empowerment, policy change                                     | Relationship as the basis for knowledge and intervention, standing by service users, identifying and tackling micro aggressions, using privilege, active mediation and advocacy |

Source: (Krumer-Nevo, 2016)

The ontology will give information of knowledge related to the nature of poverty and the characteristics of people in poverty (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Using conservative paradigm, poverty are seen as the sum between poor people pathologies, weakness and deficit, characterised by problematic behaviour in personal, family or community level, and in society (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). While the structural paradigm perceived that poverty is causing from social inequalities, it is characterized by limited opportunities or lack of support system (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). However, PAP have a different perspective about poverty, and it seen as violation of human rights through limited opportunities for honour and respect (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). PAP seeing poor people as active agents and the leading principle of PAP is importance of partnership (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Epistemology address the knowledge production and resources (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). The conservative paradigm believes that the knowledge is used to understand the reality, and to be neutral and objective (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). The structural paradigm is similar with conservative paradigm, but in practice, it differs from the emphasis of pathological evaluation to evaluating client strength (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). However, the epistemic PAP focus on reality as construction of relationship and interactions with additional focus in power relationship (Krumer-Nevo, 2016).

The axiology aspect related to ethical determination of 'bad' or 'good' (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). In the conservative paradigm, poverty is viewed as a result of individuals perceived weak attitudes or morals (Krumer-Nevo, 2016) Therefore, addressing poverty focuses on changing the attitudes of the poor to become

more independent, industrious, and competitive, while social workers are tasked with undermining these values while maintaining professional distance (Krumer-Nevo, 2016).

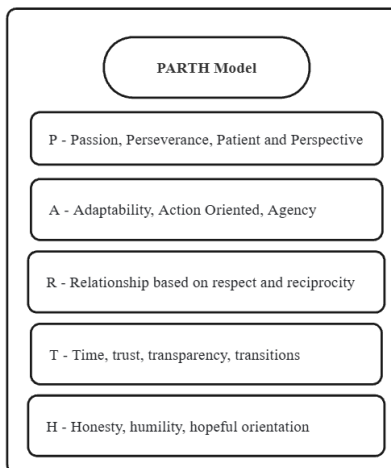
On the other hand, the structural paradigm perceives equality and justice as good. Since poverty are based on inequalities, everyone is worthy to receive support through politic of redistribution and the aim is to change structural barrier that push people into poverty (Krumer-Nevo, 2016).

The PAP paradigm highlighting the ethics of solidarity (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). The solidarity is necessary to overcome the imbalanced power relation among social worker and service user, and it means that that in social work practice the social worker behave as partner of the service user in their struggle against poverty (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). Krumer-Nevo (2022) also highlighting that solidarity means that social worker stands together with the service user in their hardship.

## 2.3 PARTH Model

PARTH Model is an approach for social work practice that specifically made for vulnerable youth as the target group (Sanders & Munford, 2019). This model is grounded from ecological theory, resilience theory and strength-based approach that highlights the importance of relationship between social workers and vulnerable youth (Sanders & Munford, 2019). This model divided into five key principles of effective practice by building a meaningful interaction with vulnerable youth to achieve a better outcome (Sanders & Munford, 2019).

**Picture 2. PARTH Model**



Source: (Munford et al., 2019)

Sanders & Munford (2019) stated that intervention is more effective when social workers understand the logic behind young person's behaviour, even if the action may appear maladaptive. Building on this, Sanders & Munford (2019) highlight that working with vulnerable youth needs a strong commitment and willingness to seek for solutions in difficult situations. For example, Sanders & Munford (2019) explains P as passion,

perseverance, patience and perspective in a case study related to a social worker that define young people behaviour as adaptation to the challenging environment that they faced. Being patience and trying to understand different perspective is important to build a new positive relationship with vulnerable youth (Sanders & Munford, 2019). Patience can be practiced by continuously reminding ourselves that we might have similar reaction if we were in their situation (Sanders & Munford, 2019). In short, social workers should be aware of the emotional engagement in their relationship with vulnerable youth (Sanders & Munford, 2019). The effective support will be happened if social workers recognize and value the youth life stories and their skill, they developed during managing the challenging situations.

The second principles are A, including adaptive, action oriented and agency. Adaptive means that social worker are able to seek for solutions in a nontraditional way and it might include collaboration with other disciplines (Sanders & Munford, 2019). For example, the case studies in Sanders & Munford (2019) explains that in order to help vulnerable youth maintaining their education, social workers are trying to advocate the youth strength and also to trying to support both the teacher and the young person needs. Furthermore, building the personal agency of youth is important and can be done by involving them in decision making (Sanders & Munford, 2019). However, if young people cannot choose the decisions, their agency can be promoted by ensuring that their voices are heard and their perspectives are respected by the social worker (Sanders & Munford, 2019).

The third principles is R, and it is related to respectful and reciprocal relationships as the central focus of PARTH (Sanders & Munford, 2019). The relationship is feature with genuine care between social workers and the youth, recognizing the relationship across young people and building a positive presence (Sanders & Munford, 2019). In addition, creating a safe space for young people to feel welcomed a emerge the sense of belonging is one of the examples of creating a respect-based relationship between social worker and vulnerable youth (Sanders & Munford, 2019).

The fourth principles are T, including time, trust, transparency and transitions. Time refers to both quality and quantity of time including having sufficient time to establish the relationships between social workers and vulnerable youth (Sanders & Munford, 2019). Then, to build a trusted relationship, transparency is also essential. Transparency in PARTH model means that social worker is clearly explaining how and why decisions are made (Sanders & Munford, 2019). In vulnerable youth context, transitions also occur either between different services or when exiting services (Sanders & Munford, 2019). During this transitions, careful planning is necessary to ensure the best possible outcomes for the youth (Sanders & Munford, 2019).

The last principles are H, and it is related to honesty, humility and hopeful orientation. Sanders et al. (2016) study highlight that young people are more likely to appreciate honest practitioners who provide clear information about what will occur, even when the decisions made are not in young person's favour. Then, humility is recognizing the expertise and knowledge of young people for sustainable change (Sanders &

Munford, 2019). For the effective practice, social workers should engage with young people's story by hearing what is said and emotionally connected to the experience of youth (Sanders & Munford, 2019). In relation to hopeful orientation, Sanders & Munford (2019) stated that the social worker task is to support youth to be confident to talk about their dream. Then, social workers supporting them by providing access to the resources and skill that youth needed to fulfil the dream (Sanders & Munford, 2019).

There are several when implementing the PARTH model. High caseload pressures and limited time allocation can hinder the effective application (Sanders & Munford, 2019). Furthermore, Sanders & Munford (2019) the model needs strong collaboration among professional since PARTH model require collaborative and community effort.

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework

This study uses integration conceptual framework that combines resilience theory, the poverty aware social work paradigm and the PARTH model. The PAP paradigm will help to understand about how social workers perceive the homelessness situation among young women, alongside with resilience theory that explains the adversity that happens to the target group. Then, the PARTH model will explain the practices between social workers and young women as the target group in the homelessness setting.

**Table 4. Conceptual Framework**

| <b>Research Question</b>                                                                                                                                                      | <b>Primary Framework(s)</b> | <b>How Frameworks Contribute</b>                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RQ1: How do social workers perceive the homelessness situation experienced by young women in Portugal and Lithuania?                                                          | Resilience Theory<br>PAP    | Resilience theory explains young women adversity when experiencing homelessness and PAP provides lens about how social worker perceive the homelessness situation.                                 |
| RQ2: What kind of support that available for young women experiencing homelessness in Portugal and Lithuania and what are the roles of social workers in the settings?        | PARTH                       | PARTH model will be used as the theme related to social work practices when assisting young women experiencing homelessness. PARTH also captures challenges and coping strategies during practice. |
| RQ3: What are the challenges that social workers face during their practice and what coping strategies and motivational sources sustain their practice                        |                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| RQ4: What are possible improvements in social work practice or in the service that might help young women experiencing homelessness to exit from the homelessness situations? | PAP<br>PARTH                | PAP points to structural improvements and PARTH suggest the practice level improvements.                                                                                                           |

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This research uses a qualitative methodology to explore the perspective from social worker related to homelessness for youth group that happen in Lithuania and Portugal. Qualitative research is particularly effective for capturing individual perspectives, social contexts, and value systems that shape human behaviour (Macqueen et al., 2005). Qualitative research encompasses a broad range of techniques and methods for examining the phenomena of natural social life (Saldana, 2011). The approach is justified by its capacity to generate an in-depth understanding of complex social issues, especially in contexts where personal narratives and relational dynamics are central to the phenomenon being studied.

#### **3.1 Participants**

The study uses purposive sampling and snowball sampling to select the participants. Participants should be social workers who have been actively involved in providing services for youth experiencing homelessness. The search for participants will begin by contacting all the organisations via email. In addition, participants may also be approached through social media platform such as LinkedIn by messaging both organizations and the social workers. On LinkedIn, potential participants will be identified as employees of organizations with programs specifically targeting homelessness, who have a social work education and hold positions as social workers.

Participants will be given a link to join the interview before the interview activity begins. There are also participant criteria that will be informed to the social service provider organisations in Portugal and Lithuania, as follows:

1. Social workers who engaged in supporting young people specifically young women who experiencing homelessness.
2. Have at least one year experience working with young women experiencing homelessness

#### **List of Participants**

A total of 15 (N=15) social workers participated in the interview. The shortest working experience is more than 1 year, and the longest experience are 18 years. Social workers work across a range of organizations that provide various services. Yet, they share a common focus on supporting individuals or families who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless. In addition, during the interview, the other staff team such as social educators, technician, and psychologist also participated as the group.

**Table 5. List of Participants**

| <b>Gender and Analytical Code</b>                            | <b>Education Level</b> | <b>Country</b> | <b>Years of Experience</b> | <b>Work Institutions</b>                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Male (SW1)                                                   | Bachelor               | Lithuania      | 18                         | Transitional Support Housing for Youth                           |
| Female (SW2)                                                 | Master                 | Lithuania      | 2                          | Transitional Support Housing for Youth                           |
| Female (SW3)<br>With team (psychologist)                     | Bachelor               | Lithuania      | 15                         | Municipality Temporary Accommodation Center                      |
| Female (SW4)                                                 | Master                 | Portugal       | 15                         | Non-Government Organization with multiple services               |
| Female (SW5)                                                 | Master                 | Portugal       | 1                          | Temporary Housing Support for first time homelessness experience |
| Female (SW6)                                                 | Bachelor               | Portugal       | 5                          | Housing First Project in NGO                                     |
| Female (SW7)<br>With team (psychologist and social educator) | Bachelor               | Portugal       | 3                          | Non-Government Organization with multiple services               |
| Female (SW8)<br>With team (Director)                         | Bachelor               | Portugal       | 7                          | Emergency Support                                                |
| Female (SW9)                                                 | Bachelor               | Portugal       | 6                          | Emergency Support                                                |
| Female (SW10)                                                | Bachelor               | Portugal       | 4                          | Reintegration Support                                            |
| Female (SW11)                                                | Master                 | Portugal       | 18                         | Outreach Team                                                    |
| Female (SW12)<br>With team (Technician)                      | Bachelor               | Portugal       | 2                          | Night Shelter and Emergency Support                              |
| Female (SW13)                                                | Bachelor               | Lithuania      | 17                         | Temporary Hostel                                                 |
| Female (SW14)                                                | Bachelor               | Lithuania      | 3                          | Temporary Hostel                                                 |
| Female (SW15)                                                | Bachelor               | Portugal       | 3                          | Temporary Housing Support for first time homelessness experience |

### 3.2 Data Collection

The data collection used a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview aims to explore the personal experiences of both youth homeless and social worker. Then the interview guide will include questions related to the research questions.

The interview was conducted online and in person. A phone recorder was used for the face-to-face interview, and Microsoft Teams for the online interview. The interview was recorded and transcribed using the Microsoft Teams application. For the phone recording, Microsoft Word was used to transcribe the audio file to text. Then, the transcribed results will be checked manually to ensure they match the interview conducted. The average interview was 1 hour, with the shortest at 42 minutes and the longest at 82 minutes.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

The data was analysed using thematic analysis. Boyatzis, (1998) Elliott, (2018) and Thomas, (2006) in (Naeem et al., 2023) stated that thematic analysis was used to further clarify patterns or themes in the data and often leads to new insights. Naeem et al. (2023) define the analysis process as including the transcription and familiarisation of the data, the selection of keywords, coding, the development of the theme, and the conceptualisation and development of the conceptual model. MAXQDA was used to support the organization, coding, and thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. In addition, the study ensures data triangulation by recruiting social workers from different types of organizations in both Lithuania and Portugal (e.g., emergency services, Housing First, outreach, and transitional housing) and by including participants working in different regions within each country.

### **3.4 Ethical Consideration**

This study will obtain ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board. Participants will receive information related to the purpose, procedures, and information related to their rights in this study. There will be informed consent for the participants, and the confidentiality of the participants will be kept safe and secure. The participation is voluntary based. The participants have the right to refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the research process anytime without any negative consequences.

In this study, an artificial intelligence assistant was used to support writing, organisation, and language editing. 4 AI applications were used. The first one is Scopus AI, which was used to find a reliable source for the literature section. The second one was Grammarly, to help with grammatical and structural writing order. The third one is Mendeley, used to help reference the study, and the last one is Perplexity, used to help brainstorm ideas for the thesis structure.

#### **3.4.1. Informed Consent**

Informed consent was sent to the potential participants who are willing to participate in the interview, and the consent are explained before the interview begin (See Appendix 3)

#### **3.4.2. Voluntary Participation**

The participation in this research was voluntary, the participant was informed that they could withdraw from the study, refuse to answer any questions and stop the interview at any time without giving a reason.

### **3.4.3. Benefit of The Participants**

During the interview, participants did not have any direct benefit.

### **3.4.4. Data Confidentiality**

In this research, participants' responses will be confidential. The names and organizations of the participants are anonymous. After the recording, all identification information for the participant was replaced with a pseudonym, ensuring that the data analysis process is completely anonymous. The interview was recorded in audio and video formats, so personal data, such as audio and video, is used. In addition, the recordings will be kept confidential, and the researcher will keep the data secure.

However, two different projects are mentioned in this study, and both projects are publicly announced on the organization's website. The researcher also obtained the organization's permission to mention the names of the projects.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Themes 1: Concept of Homelessness

#### 4.1.1 The Situation of Young Women Experiencing Homelessness in Lithuania and Portugal

Social workers perceive the homeless situation as one of someone living without a safe place. Social workers identify three types of living arrangements: living on the street, living with someone such as partner or friend, and living in service institutions. In addition, social workers also mention that homelessness is against human rights because having a safe place to live is a human right for everyone.

*“<...> is when a person doesn't have a living place. It doesn't matter if they live on the street or if they live in shelter” (SW3)*

*“Okay, as we can see in the streets, in the places where we deliver the food, like in Saldana, Cascais, or Orient, most of the people are male, not female. Like a small percentage of people are female, and there aren't a lot of people that are female in the streets” (SW7)*

However, one participant (SW12) mentioned that as a worker in Portugal, they cannot label someone as *a homeless person*, and they change the phrase to *people experiencing homelessness*. Social workers believe that experiencing homelessness does not change the identity of the person, and living in a homeless situation is part of the experience of a service user's life.

*“In Portugal, we are eliminating this phrase, homeless people, because we don't acknowledge that. We think that people are people, that they are experiencing bad times, so this type of time can't dictate your identity”*

Specifically for young women, social workers said that sometimes they are hidden, meaning they are not trying to reach out for help and are living in different kinds of places, such as abandoned houses, *couch-surfing*, or living temporarily with friends or family.

*“Women always try to other alternatives before ending up on the street. That's it. They stay in abandoned houses, in the old houses, old family houses, you know, belonging to the relatives.” (SW4)*

*“There was a couple. They were sleeping in the car, in the car. So, they were 18 years old. So that was the first female that young to experience homelessness that I've seen it.” (SW12)*

Besides living outside the service, young women are also trying to conceal their homelessness situation, as reflected in the following quotes below:

*“The girls even are not telling that they are homeless to their closest people, to their family, to their relatives, to their friends. And when their friends are asking where to live, they are not saying the address exact location, even for employers, they are not saying that I'm living in shelter because there were some situations when employee and employer kind of use that situation for their benefit.” (SW14)*

*“What SW14 tells also that what she hears from especially young women, maybe more often than from others, that they feel ashamed to be in this kind of place, in a shelter. And sometimes they go somewhere just not to be in shelter, not to be homeless, you know, but not necessarily in a better situation. It could be, for example, abusive relationships, but just not to be called homeless.” (SW14)*

Furthermore, there are many stigmas attached to people experiencing homelessness. A total of 7 participants mentioned that the stigma is usually related to the general population who experience homelessness and not specifically related to their gender or age group. However, some participants mentioned stigma that is mostly related to women experiencing homelessness. For example, stigma about women who are experiencing homelessness is usually associated with being a sex worker. In addition, two social workers mentioned that if a woman had a child and was experiencing homelessness, there is stigma around the woman saying that she is a “*bad mother*” and that stigma sometimes came from a staff worker from the health institution.

*“If a woman has a child. So, and she's in a situation, you know, that she doesn't have stable housing, then you can meet even some stigma from institutions like child support, etc. that you are a really bad mother, how could you, you know, like something like this. (SW14, Pos. 30)”*

Besides stigma, women also face discrimination in the job market. Three social workers note that women earn less than men even when they hold the same position. There is also stigma about the job market for women in Portugal. People stigmatize working in the care sector, such as working in a nursing home, as a job for women. In addition, some informal jobs, such as cleaning services, are also stigmatized as jobs for women. Lower salaries and fewer job opportunities for women create higher vulnerabilities for women to experience homelessness.

#### **4.1.2 Factors that Lead Young Women Experiencing Homelessness**

Many social workers (N=9) highlighted that institutional transitions are one of the factors that led young women to experience homelessness. For example, a service user who is out of prison and does not have a job or a place to live ends up living in a homeless situation. In addition, other examples come from young women leaving care institutions. At 18, young women can leave the residential care. After being out of care, they don't have a place to live and could end up in a homeless situation.

The individual's different conditions also complicate the out-of-care situation. SW1 mentioned that there might be a chance that the child would go into residential care when they are older, for example, when they were 16 years old, then the social workers do not have enough time to build a supportive relationship with this youth. In addition, these factors are compounded by another determinant, such as limited financial literacy and the absence of supportive social networks.

*“I remember when I was in the outreach team, we had some situations of young women in the street. There were most of women that get out of an institution because, we had that too, because they are left by the parents and get inside an institution when they were like, I don't know, it depends, but five years old, or less. And then when they did 18 years, they need to get out and they don't have any supports or family and start to get in the streets.”*

Other social workers (N=8) mentioned that a lack of social network is also another main factor that led young women to experience homelessness. Lacking a social network could happen for several reasons, such as disconnection from family networks due to conflict, separation, or a non-harmonious family environment (*which they refer to as a “destructured” or “toxic” family*). This disconnection leaves young women without a safety net, and, consequently, when they have a problem, they are unable to articulate their needs to their families or unwilling to communicate due to family conflict.

In addition, a total of 6 social workers also stated that young women were living in a homeless situation due to escaping from domestic violence. They do not feel safe anymore living with their family members or with their partner, so they are seeking another safe place to live, which sometimes leads them to live in a homeless situation. Social workers also said that young women are trying to survive from trauma that happened in their family environment or in their relationships.

*“I don't know the numbers from my head, but violence, domestic statistics are quite high. And this also starts sometimes when teenagers get involved in the kind of relationship. And yeah, and some of them, they also experience domestic violence. Even if they are not living together. They can suffer, they can suffer, yeah, because of boyfriends or girlfriends, and this can lead them to become homeless, for example. As I said, we are, so our family network is quite strong, but I think that this can be one of the reasons that can lead them to become homeless”*

These factors including lack of transitional care and lack of social network are not a single factor that will lead young women to live in a homeless situation. There is one story from a social worker about the service user who had several different factors such as trauma, health issues due to miscarriage and mental health issue that led to young women experiencing homelessness:

*“So, she also had like bad experiences with men. For example, like...like, like sexual abuse, but rape, like she was raped. Then she also like some sex video tape was, you know, somewhere put publicly and, she had... miscarriage. So, she had those kinds of experiences. And, she had schizophrenia.”*  
(SW14)

Other factors that different social workers mentioned are financial problems and literacy, addiction related to drugs or alcohol, and migration. Related to the migration issues, the social worker mentioned that there are undocumented youth who came to Portugal, as explained below:

*“We also have a critical case related to migration where people can regularize their status in the country and are staying with us. Sometimes the only option is to return to the country of origin because they don't have documents. Which isn't an option for the people themselves. So, they end up*

*staying with us and without documents, without work, without access to healthcare, without access to training and continuing to live with us day by day without any alternatives, so. Yeah, this is very sad.”*

Migration issues are also exacerbated by a lack of social networks, so that young women might end up in a homeless situation. However, other factors, such as gender identities, also emerged. One social worker (SW8) mentioned that sometimes when a young person became transgender, the family rejected the idea, and they kicked the young person out of their house.

*“We had some not only women, but young men and young women during the COVID. It was something that I realized that many young people come to the streets because of the identity. (SW 8)*

Furthermore, another issue is lack of basic skills means that young women sometimes lack soft skills, such as communication, or individual skills, such as maintaining their hygiene. One social worker (SW7) explained that some service users who came to the institution do not understand how to clean themselves, brush their teeth, or make their beds. And another social worker mentioned a layered set of factors in one person related to their skills and other factors, as explained below:

*“It's a complex issue with all these little parts. So, homelessness of course is the main one. We need stable housing, but also, they do not have regular income. So, with their financial education, they like ability to solve the financial situation. Life is kind of complicated. They don't know how to act with money. Also, the lack of education. So only a small percentage of them are seeking higher education also. Different soft skills like problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork and stuff. Also, I would say psychological and psychiatric issues.” (SW2, Pos. 21)*

In short, the factors that are leading young women to experience homelessness is multifactor with complex situation.

#### **4.1.3 Impacts of Young Women Experiencing Homelessness**

The impact of experiencing homelessness is somewhat similar to the factors that led young women to experience homelessness. One social worker (SW12) mentioned that living on the street is very hard, so people are trying to adapt and develop habits for survival. For example, young people try to build a social network while ending up with worsening addiction situation because they want to maintain their friendships or network in the street.

*“So, there are the cause and the consequence of both, because when this young lady, the young women or ladies, they are from the destructed families a lot with health problems and already using drugs, so when they are in the homeless situation, it will reinforce the problem of the drugs because they are in the homeless situation. But they already had problems with drugs in the family or in friends, friends, history of the life. So, I think it's that. (SW4, Pos. 22)”*

In addition, another impact is the mental health issues that might emerge from the addiction or arise due to the trauma that led people to leave their homes. Specifically for women, when they are living in a homeless

situation, they are trying to earn money by engaging in sexual activities. However, nowadays, women who are involved in sexual work are not easy to detect by social workers due to technology. As SW11 mentioned below, recent technology is helping people to communicate online, so women can do their sexual work without showing themselves on the street. SW11 mentioned that this condition will make it more difficult for social workers to reach the person.

*“15, 20 years ago, you could see more women working on the streets much more. It was much more common than now. It is not so common now, but this is happening because of internet. You can do many things on the internet, so you can have like visual sex. And you can, so women can book clients on WhatsApp or on Facebook and things like that. So, they don't need to go to the streets to expose their body. So, they can do it online and then they can book clients to go to their apartments or flats or whatever. And we believe that this is one of the reasons why they are not so exposed to the streets. But it is also, but this makes it much more difficult to support services them because they are not visible. (SW11, Pos. 423)”*

Furthermore, when women are involved in sexual work, other risks might happen to them, such as being a target of abuse and exploitation.

*“I don't know if it's the majority, but to provide for themselves, they need to do sexual work. In this sexual work, they are even more vulnerable, so they can be, they can be I want to say the word target. They can be targets for aggression, for exploitation. Yeah. And sometimes they need to link themselves, this young woman. They need to be or to feel more safe in the community, they link themselves with some older people, sometimes men, majority of the time men, who to gain this protection, to gain this sense of safety. But then they are exploited. by them in many ways, even to get money, to get drugs or to get money in general. So, it's very complicated. (SW8, Pos. 65)”*

#### **4.1.4 Needs of Young Women Experiencing Homelessness**

One of the needs for young women experiencing homelessness is a sense of safety. It means the place is safe enough for staying and for young women to grow and live independently. A safe place also means that the place can protect young women from the risks that emerge when they live in a homeless situation. In addition, SW8 mentioned that a safe place for women should include place where young women experiencing homelessness will not get any stigma or judgment from service providers staff such as social worker, social educator or other staff or from the community such as the neighbor around the institution services or from other service user.

In general, social workers mentioned that basic needs, including food and a place to sleep are the most important needs for people experiencing homelessness. Basic needs include food, clothing, and a place to live. Besides the basic needs, social workers also mentioned that young women usually have psychological needs, and they need access to mental health services. Furthermore, social workers mentioned that access to health institutions is needed. Particularly for women, access to a gynecologist is occasionally necessary. Social

workers also mention that young women have different hygiene needs due to menstruation. Young women need items such as tampons and pads, and they need greater access to hygiene products, especially when they are menstruating.

#### **4.1.5 Specifics Condition about Young Women Experiencing Homelessness**

Social worker (SW4) mentioned that women are always trying other alternatives before reaching out to social workers or institutions. This situation means that women usually turn to service institutions as their last resort. In addition, women who experience homelessness are often observed to have a partner or some companionship.

*“When they (young women) are in this kind of situations, they usually try to be with men to feel safe, you know, they always try to have a male presence so they can feel safe, but sometimes it's the opposite” (SW4)*

One of the participants mentioned that the strategy of seeking companionship occurs when young women experience homelessness, and this situation usually only happens to women, not to men.

*“Most of the time it's not a partnership that started before the homeless part. But, when they become homeless, they start to find people in the streets that have the same things that they want” (SW7)*

However, social workers mentioned that having companionship or a partner has a different impact, both positive and negative. The negative consequence of companionship could increase the risk of abuse, exploitation, or have an increased vulnerabilities on young women who experience homelessness.

*“She was a couple years, not that old, but he was older. So, I think that he was influencing her. It happens a lot of times when if you don't have a good support system, you can, you're going to look outside of your home, outside of your house. And sometimes young girls just end up to be with a guy. And sometimes they're drugging, they're using drugs, and they'll lead them to actually try also drug”*

*“<...> sometimes the couples are in a vulnerable situation in the street and sometimes with a lot of abuse in the relation, but they don't want to get to different places, even if we saw that it's a better option sometimes, ... So, it's very complicated” (SW6, Pos. 104-106)*

However, one social worker mentioned that seeking a companion can serve as protection, as mentioned below:

*“I've seen a lot of our service users really be wonderfully supportive and keep an eye out. Really. I can see they're watching and the young girl I mentioned, I think that she's got some nice people, male companions, just friends.” (SW 9)*

In addition, many social workers (N=6) mentioned that young women are more vulnerable when they are experiencing homelessness. Young women may be more vulnerable, depending on their situations. As mentioned in the pathway section (4.1.2), young women could end up in a homeless situation due to trauma and domestic violence. They are already vulnerable before they leave their house. Then, the homelessness situation also added more vulnerabilities to the young women. One social worker explains the higher vulnerabilities in young women experiencing homelessness below:

*“So, when people are young, I think they're more vulnerable as well. So being a woman, young, you have two factors that come as a vulnerability for you. If you are a woman and you are in a home situation and you have children, you have three factors. If you have, if you are a woman in the you have mental health issues, like, but this is for men too, if you have mental health issues and you are in the streets, more factors.” (SW5)*

*“We don't see so much than we see men because they are experiencing these violent situations and sometimes controlling situations and then it's not so easy to see. Okay, but they are there.” (SW10)*

## **4.2 Discussion of Theme 1: Concept of Homelessness**

Social workers understand that the experience of homelessness violates human rights and aligns with the Poverty Aware Social Work Paradigm (Krumer-Nevo, 2016). In addition, social workers described different kinds of living places for young women experiencing homelessness, and all the places mentioned are included in the ETHOS categories (FEANTSA, 2017a). However, the national report of both Lithuania and Portugal did not include all categories, so the numbers in the statistical report will be lower than the reality in both Lithuania and Portugal. In addition, a social worker notes that young women are sometimes couch-surfing or living temporarily with family and friends, creating a hidden homelessness situation. This condition is reflected in mobility as the strategy for young people, as noted by Golubić et al. (2023) and Jackson (2012).

There is not a single factor that will lead young women to experience homelessness, but rather several interconnected factors. Majority of social workers (N=9) mention transition institutions, such as leaving prison or residing in residential care, along with dual factors, such as individual factors. The individual factors are aligned with the study from Sadauskas & Kewoh-Vainio (2024) about financial illiteracy and substance abuse as one of the individual factors that lead young people to experience homelessness. These interconnected factors are resulting in young women experiencing homelessness, and many social workers explain that it is not a single factor but several different factors. One of the examples is below:

*“Most of the time we don't have many cases about people that come to us and say, oh, that the four of us became homeless because the rent, we can't pay the rent. Most of the time it's drug addiction, and family support. It's most of the time it's that. That's the problem.”*

Several social workers highlight domestic violence as the pathway that leads young women to experience homelessness. Domestic violence among young women is illustrated by the Gender Index Report in Europe, which states that both Lithuanian and Portuguese women have been experiencing physical and or sexual violence since they were 15 years old (EIGE, 2025).

Furthermore, the impact on young women has similarities to the factors that led them to experience homelessness. For example, several social workers (N=6) mentioned that domestic violence is a factors that lead young women to experience homelessness. However, it could also be the impact when young women experience homelessness. In addition, the young women will be exposed to other vulnerabilities, such as abuse or exploitation. Increased vulnerability is one of the apparent impacts that might happen to young women when they live in a homeless situation, and it is aligned with Mikene (2018) study.

Then, other factors are related to gendered stigma and the job market. Several social workers noted that women earn less than men, and a study by EIGE (2025) found that women across the EU earned 77% of what men earn. That means women should work for 15 months and men for 12 months to earn the same amount of money (EIGE, 2025). With this condition, women became more vulnerable than men, and women also had more difficulties paying their rent due to lower salaries than men.

Other important factors are a lack of a supportive social network, which is caused by escaping the unsafe family environment, and also leaving domestic violence, which is one of the most significant factors that lead women to experience homelessness, according to Broll & Huey (2020) study.

On the other hand, the impact that might affect young women is similar to the factors that led them to experience homelessness. For example, several social workers mentioned addiction as a factor, and others mentioned that addiction is the impact of living in homelessness situations. Another impact mentioned is that young women could be involved in sexual work to survive, and it could also increase their vulnerability (Castaños-Cervantes & Vélez-Agosto, 2018; Gultekin et al., 2020). These impacts and factors differ for each individual and may also be interconnected.

For young women, their basic needs are similar to those of the general population living in a homeless situation. However, there is one difference related to their physical health: menstruation. During their period, young women have more urgency to keep their hygiene and to get tampons or pads. The last subtheme is related to differences in conditions among the young women who experience homelessness. One apparent difference is young women and women tend to look for a partner or companionship. This condition differs because it only affects women. Aligned with Mikene (2018) and Castaños-Cervantes & Vélez-Agosto (2018) study, women are looking for a partner as a source of protection and friendship, but the partnership can also increase women's vulnerabilities because this can also be the source of violence and abuse.

## **4.3 Theme 2: Available Support, Roles of Social Work and Practice**

### **4.3.1 Available Support for Young Women Experiencing Homelessness**

Table 6 is highlighting the main type of support are available to young women at risk of homelessness or during the homelessness situation in Lithuania and Portugal. The available support is divided into 4 different phases: the preventive support for individual at risk of homelessness, the emergency support for individual in homelessness situation, the temporary support and the end stages support to help exiting the homelessness situation. However, in homelessness situation, the available support in Lithuania and Portugal is mostly for general population, except there is transitional support for youth in Lithuania with a gender separated services for young people age 18 to 24. While other institutions are not specifically for young women, the target group are still able to access the services. On the other hand, there are several institutions that are only available for men or young men, but the gap is due to the bigger number of men that experiencing homelessness the number of available services is nor balanced between men and women.

**Table 6 Available Support in Portugal and Lithuania**

| Phases              | Type of Support                 | Description of Services                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Preventive Supports | Family Support: Housing         | Helping families who are living in precarious conditions (or at risk of poverty) to get better situation by giving them furniture to create a child-friendly housing condition.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                     | Family Support: Food            | Giving out food or hot meals to family in a routine schedule.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Emergency Supports  | Basic needs support: Food       | Organization prepares a hot meal and gives out food in several areas every day.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                     | Basic needs support: Clothing   | Organization established a solidarity shop that is free and accessible for individuals in homelessness situations. The target group can take clothes, shoes or other items.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                     | Outreach team                   | Teams, including social workers, are going to the street and meeting people who are experiencing homelessness, offering several programs that are available in the institutions or offering consultation in the street or schedule other appointments in the office.<br><br>There is additional support for addiction where organizations give out methadone and needles in the street as a harm reduction effort.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                     | Housing support: Night shelter  | People can stay during the night in the building, and the organization provides several activities during the day to increase the capacity of the individuals.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                     | Basic Needs Support: Day Center | A building that is accessible during the day, usually the places provide food, drink, and access to shower. Additionally, the institution also provides health services including doctors or nurses. In this place, service users can also meet the social workers, and they will provide some information based on their needs. Some examples of support are creating a mailing address, individual consultation or referral to get mental health services.<br><br>In the day center, the team usually includes social educator or technician, social worker, and psychologist. There is also a community hall, where people can come and socialize. Several organizations provide access to computers and internet, games, locket to place belongings, and a space to play with pets.<br><br>Furthermore, there are also day centers specifically for individuals experiencing homelessness and addiction, where there are consumption rooms monitored by nurses, and health access for people to get the HIV / TB / Hepatitis test and medications. |

|                    |                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Temporary Supports | Transitional Housing Support | A space for individual youth aged 18 to 24 to have independent lives, time limited until they are 24 years old. One young woman usually gets individual room and living in an gender separated apartment (for example 1 house with 3-4 separated bedroom) with a shared kitchen, living room and shared bathroom. This is a part of the Life Skills Training Program, so they are monitored by teams (technician, social worker, coordinator of program). During their stay, social worker creates individual assessment and intervention plan for young women. Then, social workers are trying to support the needs of young women.                                                                                                                               |
|                    | Temporary Housing Support    | Temporary housing for individuals who are experiencing homelessness for the first time. Individuals can stay in the house up to 3 months (in Portugal) and up to 1 year in Lithuania. The place is usually gender separated. In Portugal there is one section with 3 separated bedrooms for 1 gender, and in Lithuania, the gender is separated by floor (for example, 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor for men, 3 <sup>rd</sup> floor for women) and there is limited access so only women can enter their floor. In this housing, usually there are social workers and psychologists in the building.                                                                                                                                                   |
|                    | Reintegration Support        | During transition from the day center, social workers are helping individuals with addiction to get services from rehabilitation center.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                    |                              | Service users in temporary housing or transitional housing can increase their capacity related to their life skills. Social workers and team are helping individuals to give the knowledge related financial literacy, communication skill, cooking, preparing for job interview, or any skill that are needed to sustain young women independent life. Social workers can also provide referrals and enroll young women in courses such as English course, digital class, or other lesson.<br><br>In addition, there is also a sport program as a life skill program. The organization provides a street football competition with the aim of promoting fair play and help to develop communication, emotional regulation and resolving conflict during the game. |
| End-stage Supports |                              | Support for migrant, organization provides a language class (Portuguese Class, dan English Class), document support, integration class for migrant and providing lawyer to help the documentation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                    |                              | Job training for individuals experiencing homelessness. Social workers are trying to assess the skill of individuals and connect people with job market. Organizations are trying to create a partnership with companies and allowing individuals to get internships in those companies. Individuals also receive group training to help them enter the job market.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                    | Housing First                | Individual housing support, for no duration but still monitored by social workers and team. The housing support is available for individuals or couples. In the housing first, integration support is available based on the needs of individuals.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

*Source: Author's Compilation from the interview 2026*

In the temporary housing support, the social workers stated that they are receiving donations and sometimes they receive make up or skin and hair products, and they gave it away to the woman to help them being confident during homelessness situations.

*“Because there were times that we got the hair dye and the lipsticks that we could put from people who donate them. And of course we give the girls all of it, the perfumes, their lipsticks and everything. And they were so happy about it. They all put the lipstick on, went to the yard, and felt pretty. It was fun. So, we provide everything according to ourselves, what we can give. (SW3, Pos. 99)*

SW15 then explained that even after service users move out from the transitional housing support, social workers continue to maintain contact with the service user, and they are allowed to access the available services such as getting mental health consultation from clinical psychologist after they move out. In addition, several organizations mentioned that they are also creating leisure group activities. One example of the activities is visiting the zoo and museum.

*“So, most of the time we receive some money that we can spend in specific places and activities. So, we are trying to go to zoo. We go to the oceanarium with them. We try to go to the cinema, to the museums, to stuff like that, to give them some normality and normalization of everyone as the right and the power to go to those kinds of things. And we try to give them some space for them to go. We went to the theater last week, last week. So, we try to give them some normalization for them. (SW7 and team Pos. 154)”*

Other leisure activities are the institution that allows the staff to bring their own pet on one specific day every week, and service users can play and give some food to the pet. Then, some institutions also allowing women to have leisure group activities such as playing games, card, and watching movie together. Furthermore, one social worker mentioned that in the temporary institutions, they are planning to do gardening as other group activities, and they plan to grow their own vegetables in the yard shelter.

There are two specific projects for women and including young women. The first project is INTERACT, funded by the European Social Fund (ESF+). One of the implementers in this project are Ares do Pinhal (ADP), from Portugal, and the staff mentioned that recently they are piloting this project. The project aims to create and piloting the intervention model which includes women experiencing homelessness or living under precarious condition, with additional condition such as having addiction problem, experiencing violence from partner, having a mental health issue, or trauma. In ADP, they are trying to build a more gender sensitive intervention for women by adding a specific space for women to get the health services. The room are designed to create a comfortable environment for women. Then, the organization also adding several activities for women as stated below:

*“For example, now in that shelter we are doing that, a specific project only for women. Here we have a specific medical appointment for women, just for women. We have twice a month self-defense*

*lessons only for women, with a woman as a teacher, not men are allowed to come. And we also are very in favor of the trauma-informed care approach. So, we are very sensitive not to traumatize people when we are asking about their lives.” (SW 8 and team)*

Then, other organization, Crescer, have another project specifically for women named SOMOS *Mulheres*. This organization is a network specifically for women and led by a woman who are having a lived experience in homelessness situation. In this project, there are scheduled meeting to discuss about the needs of women who experience homelessness, and they are trying to advocate their needs. Several activities that are held in this network organization are securing audience with Portuguese president in 2022, featured in podcast and a movie.

#### **4.3.2 Roles of Social Worker in Homelessness Setting**

Social workers divided their job position into 2 different positions including coordinator of project, and direct workers. As coordinators, social workers are responsible for leading their project or program and managing their own team. Therefore, coordinators sometimes are also working directly with young women, and sometimes they are not the one who responsible to have a direct contact with young women. Other main responsibility for the coordinator is networking to make sure that the needs of people experiencing homelessness are fulfilled, doing the administrative job to create reports, some social workers also mentioned about doing a fundraising job and leading responses for cases such as responsible to look and rent apartment for young women to live.

As the direct worker, social workers explained that they are helping young women in individual consultation, held assessment and creating intervention plan with the young women, monitored the intervention and sometimes mentoring the intervention, connecting individuals with other institution or other services based on the needs. One of the examples is helping young women to find job as mentioned below:

*“If the person is young and is able to work, we will try to find the job together to and look to among the job offers. (SW3, Pos. 45)”*

Other examples are helping young women to build their individual skill to independent living, and if the young women need to develop skills beyond what a social worker can teach, they will try to find information about the relevant service provider and share the information to the young women.

*“If there's a thing that I think I feel I can help, we do it here. Like training for interviews, we do it here, like role plays. And if it's like one of the things we do also, it's to promote home competencies, like skills, like cleaning, and organization. And they live here with us. If there's anything more technical that get out of my abilities, I try to find training outside, free courses or some that other institutions provide” (SW15, Pos. 81)*

In addition, several social workers mentioned that they are also trying to support young women by accompanying them to go to hospital and communicate with the doctor or going to the law enforcement.

*“If it's needed, we register and lead to the doctor to make an appointment. Sometimes the girl is afraid to see the doctor because the girl feels, well, ever felt humiliated by the doctor, because there are so if she is afraid of the doctor, we can go together.” (SW3, Pos. 45)*

Another example of individual accompaniment is helping young women to be reunited with their families

*“Well, not one, but few cases where girls lived in our shelter for some time and after a few weeks, they are trying to communicate back with their families and resolve the issue we had reunited.” (SW3, Pos. 27)*

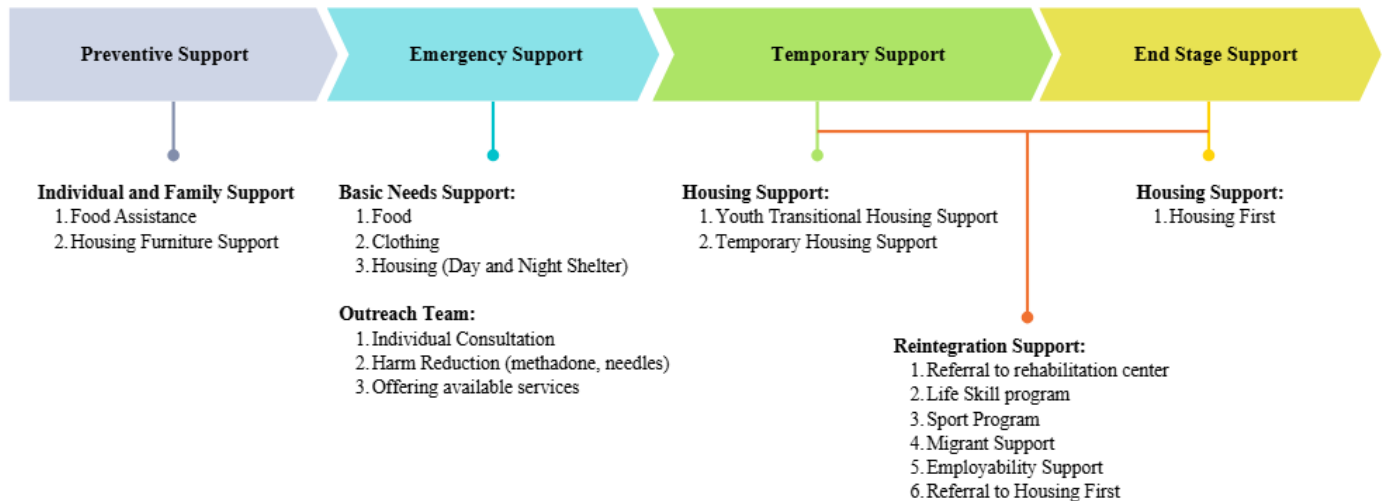
Furthermore, other social workers mentioned the job position as an outreach team, so they are responsible to reach out the potential service user, explaining the available support for them, and offering some service or help based on the individual decision. One of the examples is offering individual consultation by arranging the appointment date and place.

*“So, we do some appointments on the street as well as in the service, because there are lots issues that they need support with around the social security or health that we cannot do that on the street safely because of confidentiality and things like that. So, we also do appointments indoors and outdoors. We also give them some food and clothes and support them to find like a short term” (SW11, Pos. 233-238)*

#### **4.4 Discussion of Theme 2: Available Support, Roles of Social Work and Practice**

In this theme, the available support is illustrated in Picture 3, divided into four phases: the preventive support for individuals at risk of homelessness, the emergency support for individuals in homelessness situation, the temporary support and the end stages support to help exit the homelessness situation. In addition, this theme also describes the roles of social workers in different institutions that target both individuals and families at risk of homelessness and in homelessness situations and the connection between available support, roles and the PARTH model for social work practice.

**Picture 3. Stages during Practice in Homelessness Setting**



Source: Author Compilation from the interview, 2026

The current support available in both countries remains focused on people experiencing homelessness, including basic needs support, emergency and temporary support, and reintegration programs to help individuals exit homelessness. Furthermore, the available support is still very much focused on helping people in homeless situations, without prevention projects or programs, either for young people or specifically for young women.

In addition, the available support targets the general population rather than a specific group. For example, social workers mentioned that residential care for children is available, while the only available support specifically for youth is gender-separated transitional housing in Lithuania. In the Portuguese context, there is no available support specifically made for youth and women. However, Portugal began its gender awareness efforts by creating two separate projects through two different organizations. The first project is SOMOS Mulheres, an organization network specifically made for women experiencing homelessness. A woman leads this network with a lived experience of homelessness, and they are actively discussing and advocating. SOMOS raises awareness through media such as creating a movie, participating in a podcast, and marching in the streets. The advocacy held by this network aligns with the PARTH model, the action oriented and agency (Sanders & Munford, 2019). Creating a space for women experiencing homelessness to network is one way to let their voices be heard.

Another project is INTERACT, which is also part of the adaptation and action-oriented components of the PARTH Model. In this project, the available support is redesigned to enhance women's gender awareness. In this pilot, the organization added health support specifically for women, as well as a self-defense class taught

by women and targeting only women participants. Then organizations also add trauma-informed care to the service.

In addition, the roles of social workers in the outreach team are also consistent with the PARTH model in the 'relationship' section. One of their duties is to reach out to individuals experiencing homelessness on the streets, and social workers strive to respect young women's decisions regarding whether to accept the services on offer. Other examples include social workers offering consultations either on the street or in the office, depending on the women's preferences (Sanders & Munford, 2019).

In practice, one of the social worker's roles in the homelessness setting is helping individuals develop social skills. Aligned with Cvilikiene et al. (2024) study, social workers explained that they assist young women by teaching them to organize their living spaces and to cook while in temporary accommodation. Furthermore, the findings regarding the roles of social workers are consistent with Žilinskaitė (2024) study on social workers' roles in supporting reintegration, as mentioned in Table 6, which supports that reintegration includes helping young women find employment and referring them to other necessary institutions, including service providers offering language or digital skills training. These roles also illustrate that social workers operate in coordination with multidisciplinary teams and provide multi-level support (Machová & Špiláčková, 2025; Munford & Sanders, 2021).

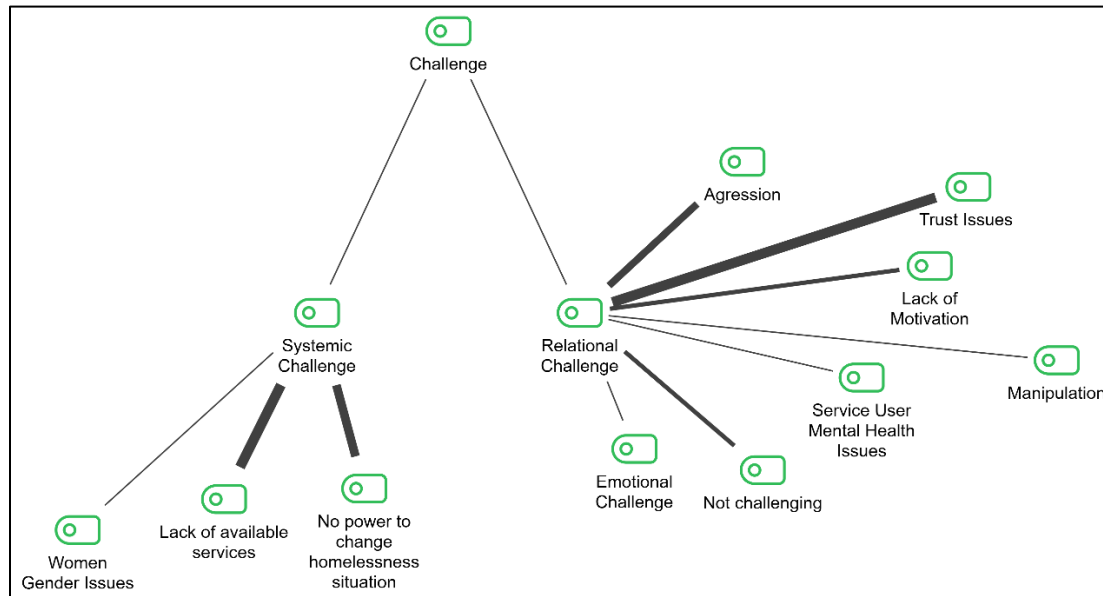
Furthermore, social workers provide active support to young women by accompanying them to other institutions, such as medical appointments or meetings with the police. In addition, social workers provide active support by helping young women improve their skills. SW15 provided another example of active support by conducting role-play with a young woman as she prepared for a job interview. The roles undertaken by social workers in Lithuania and Portugal demonstrate that they have been practicing their roles in accordance with the Poverty-Aware Paradigm outlined by Krumer-Nevo (2016). In her study, Krumer-Nevo (2016) explains that the Poverty Aware Paradigm describes social work practice as relationship-based and by active mediation and advocacy.

In summary, whilst there are currently no specific practices targeting young women in either of these countries, the available support is becoming more gender-aware, as evidenced by the provision of transitional housing for young people with gender-segregated accommodation and by the creation of projects that specifically involve women as the target group. However, this support remains insufficient, as demonstrated by the systematic challenges social workers highlight in the next section.

## 4.5 Theme 3: Challenges and Coping Strategies

### 4.5.1 Social Worker Challenges during Practice in Homelessness Setting

Picture 4. Challenges during Practice in Homelessness Setting



Source: Author Compilation from MAXQDA, 2026.

In this part, social workers highlighting two different challenges during their practice in the homelessness setting such as systemic challenges and relational challenges. In addition, social workers explain systemic challenges are related to lack of service, power to change the situation and issues related to gender. Then, social workers mentioned relational challenges such as trust issues, emotional challenges and aggression. However, in relationship between social workers and young women, several social workers highlight sometimes the relationship is not a challenge for them.

#### 4.5.1.1 Systemic Challenges

According to social workers, gender issues such as discrimination among women in job market as mentioned in section 4.2 is a challenge during supporting young women to exit the homelessness situation. Furthermore, women also have different needs so fulfilling the needs are also challenge to the social workers. Several services who are targeting general population does not aware of women needs did not provide basic needs such as tampons or menstrual pad for women.

*“I would think, when you need some kind of materials that women need and men don't need, like hygiene items, that can always also be a challenge because you have to have some partnership or some money that you have to invent to go and try to arrange these materials.” (SW5)*

In addition, the physical spaces or responses sometimes are not aware of the trauma, and it is also another systematical challenge that social workers face.

*“However, we have physical spaces that are that are not sensitive to trauma, which ends up harming these people and making them want to leave.”*

*“We don't have a separate response for gender, and we don't have response for the youngsters, because we for general. We don't have response yet. But we are working on it. We would like to have a center just for, to response to the women needs just for women.” (SW4, Pos. 27-28)*

In addition, the available services are sometimes insufficient. One example is the lack of transition from an organization providing emergency shelter to a temporary hostel or long-term housing support. This condition forced service users to remain in the emergency shelter accommodation for an indefinite period. Furthermore, other services, such as rehabilitation services for addiction, do not cover all stages of treatment for women. This situation arises from an attempt to avoid any conflict of interest between men and women, but it ends up creating a gap for women.

One social worker explains that in the field of addiction, there are various organizations providing services, and one of the methods is group therapy (TC). According to the social workers (SW8 and the team), this group therapy is divided into three stages, and women can only enter the final stage. Furthermore, available services for addiction are also limited, so not everyone who registers can immediately receive help for their addiction.

*“I think everything is a challenge, not only because those people are in a vulnerable situation and they have a lot of things that have to be, we have to work with them and help them, but also because the system does not have a lot of answers. So sometimes it's harder because of that, because you are trying to help people, but sometimes you don't have the resources to do it. So, but I don't think that is worse in women than in men. I think it's about the homeless situation in general.” (SW4)*

*“The lack of answers is high than the responses that we have at the moment. And this is quite frustrating because you can see that there is not too much work around that.” (SW11)*

*“But you know when that person or that young woman has difficult to get out of that situation and sometimes it's not depending on us, like a social worker. It does not depend on the young woman, but it can depend in some situations. And in other situations, it depends on the system that we live, because there may be the policies and the programs that are not sufficient.” (SW10)*

Social workers mentioned that this lack of services can lead to a frustrating situation for both social workers and young women as the service user.

*“it's very difficult for them because they, us like social workers, say, go here. Then the people go to a service. And then in the service, they say, no, it's not here. You should go to another place. And people get around to try to get a help, you know, and sometimes the services, the services are made by people and if people and professionals are not so empathic and they don't want to listen, it's more difficult for the people, the young woman and the client that are asking for help. So, the services sometimes don't work, you know, and because of the people on those services. And it's normal because*

*it happens all the time. But I understand that for the client it is worse than everything because it's the person that are asking for help and no one is helping” (SW10)*

Therefore, the gap between the complex needs of young women and the lack of available services creates a shared sense of frustration, in which both clients and social workers feel ‘trapped’ in a system that fails to offer the solutions.

#### **4.5.1.2 Relational Challenges**

Majority social workers (N=8) highlight that one of the challenges when working with young women in homelessness setting is building the trust relationship. Social workers mentioned that sometimes young women are not trusting the social worker and having a limited or close communication in the beginning of the consultation. One social worker realized that the lack of trust emerged from their traumatic experiences, which made it difficult for them to trust people.

*“Okay, these girls and also the general of the people, but... in relation with these girls, they are very distrustful, distrustful. It's still right. They don't, it's like they don't believe in the services, they don't believe in people. So I feel when I'm talking to them that they never tell all the story, like they, because they are afraid.” (SW8)*

*“So in their life, in their like stage where they're, you know, they they're always abandoned by people and when they meet me or my colleagues, it seems like they're always testing us. “So you're also going to leave me. So, you're also going to leave me. I will not connect with you. I will not establish my relationships with you because you're also going to leave me and you're not important to me and stuff like that.” (SW1)*

Another social worker stated that the longer individual lives on the street, then they will lose some hope and become increasingly unmotivated and lose trust in social services. Some social workers noted that sometimes there are young women who lack the motivation even to accept the available support.

*“That matters a lot because the more time you're being in the street, the less motivated you are. And the less you trust on the social services.” (SW12)*

One social worker explained that there are sometimes service users who are suspected of having mental health issues but refuse to see a psychiatrist, which can make it difficult to build a professional relationship with them.

*“And sometimes there are no services who can provide this safe place because some people have mental health issues. So, it's more difficult to engage in a process to do something. It's sometimes people of this human who have these mental health issues, they don't deal very well with this disease, mental disease, and then they don't they don't want to take medication. which could help them to stabilize. So, they don't want to be connected to the health, mental health services. And then it's more difficult to create a professional relation with them. And there are not many, not many services as well.”*

Regarding the mental health issues, social workers also noted that these young women sometimes exhibit suicidal tendencies; some of them are on the spectrum (one social worker mentioned a young woman with autism); and some service users also use manipulative tactics on social workers to get what they want by lying. These mental health issues can lead to aggressive behaviour, which may cause conflict within the institution or pose a danger to other service users. This situation presents a challenge for social workers, as they aim to provide a safe environment that does not trigger or exacerbate the condition of the young women or other service users whilst they are within the services.

*“For example, we have one woman who have really deep psychological issues, and we called her an ambulance lots of times, even police, because sometimes she feels really aggressive and she throws things out of the window, she tried to hurt another girl with a pen and with a chair. She burned candles near the papers and yeah, she even tried to jump out of the window” (SW3)*

However, several social workers mentioned that building a trusting relationship with young women experiencing homelessness is not challenging. One of the reasons is the social workers are also a young woman, so it is easier for them to show their empathy. In addition, one social worker stated that she is also young, and she finds it easier to relate to service users when having a conversation with them. Another social worker said that building the relationship is depends on the individual, both social workers and also the service user.

#### **4.5.2 Coping Strategies in Daily Practice**

**Networking** is one of the strategies to tackle the systematic challenge. Social workers are trying to enlarge their resources by connecting themselves to other service institutions and companies. One of the examples are one social worker is trying to reach out to shops or communities which can provide emergency assistance such as clothes, food or beverages.

*“I think one of best strategies it's networking. Okay, try to find solutions outside of the project, articulation with other institutions that may have other solutions. So, I think networking helps a lot because we can open more opportunities. Also try to, I think we share, we do a lot of advocacies because we need to, like the beliefs, they need to change. So that You only do that if you share knowledge and if you do some advocacy for our beneficiaries. And also, the training of skills, I think, for the person, individual, like giving her more skills and help her to be more recognized.” (SW15)*

Then, social workers mention that **having a strong team is important**. The strong team means that social workers are supported by their team, and they feel that they are working as a whole team. During the interview, several participants are stated that they are happy to work in the institutions because they have a very supportive team that will help them anytime. Social workers also mentioning about a scheduled **supervision**. Social workers stated that supervision could be a safe place for them to share about their difficulties. In addition, two

social workers stated that they the institution also provide a regular supervision with the expert of harm reduction and it helps them to understand the situation of homelessness better.

Furthermore, several social workers mention that they are trying their best not to leave any individual going back to the street. They mentioned that sometimes they rather to let individuals stay longer than what the law said about the duration of stay rather than leaving them. This could mean that the next available service is not yet available, but it could also mean that the social worker and the organisation strive to always be there to assist service users.

*“We don't we don't send no one to the streets. From the shelter, they should go to other kind of accommodation or housing first or whatever.” (SW8)*

Then social workers highlighted that **being transparent with service users** is one of the strategies to support young women experiencing homelessness. When they are transparent, they will share realistic information and their knowledge to make service users match expectation with reality.

*“So, or imagine, because the waiting list for together. that to get treatment is very long. I will try to say to them, you need to wait, you need to be conscious that maybe for the first appointment to start the process of going to treatment, you need to wait two months or three months. So, because It's the only way for them to understand. And for them to not feel that they are being betrayed. I always try to be very honest about things and how things work. Because I know and I feel if they are aware of the conditions of the and the difficulties of to get some service, to get some answers to their needs, if they are more aware, the frustration is going to be less.” (SW8)*

After mentioning about transparency, there is one story from a technician story about their induction before working in the homelessness setting. during the orientation, they were taught that one of the cores values a technician is respecting the service user decision. Social workers also stated that would always try to be honest when speaking to service users and would strive to involve young women as service users in the decision-making process.

*“What we do is we inform people about everything, about the law, about our programs, about other institutions. We inform people so they can decide what they want to do.” (SW10)*

*“I can give them orientation, but I always try to reassure them that it's their lives. I don't obligate them to do what I think is right for them. They should know what is right for them, and I will respect that.” (SW8)*

In addition, social workers explained that when dealing with service users' aggression or frustration, they need **to understand the client's motives.**

*“they are very vulnerable, or they are avoidant, or sometimes when they want to become more, and I think that's a kind of protection, self-protection system, they can become a bit aggressive as well,*

*because this is the way that they can show that to prevent them to be exposed to violence, for example, and then they become violence first off of.” (SW11)*

*“<...> and she was saying that when he was cursing her, he was cursing the world. And it was kind of, he's not doing towards me, but towards the life he had that wasn't fair for him. And I was like; how can she think that? She was being cursed in front of everybody. Like she was just trying to do her work and it's kind of being punished by just trying to help him. And she was saying, no, I do not see like that. I see it a different way because when you start to see different, you're going to act different. And that's why I changed my perspective a little bit. And when someone said they don't want to work with me, I tried another approach myself. Like, okay, you're not ready to do this. Let me just make myself available. Let me make my face very noticeable to you. So that's what I do.” (SW12)*

Social workers mentioned sometimes they take a pause and trying to understand the meaning of the service user's behaviour. Social workers also understand that sometimes the aggression is part of the frustration that emerged due to the lack of services as mentioned in section 4.5.1.1.

Then, social workers mention that **showing empathy** is one of their coping strategies to build a trusting relationship with young women. One social worker mentioned one story about a young woman who decided to leave the service and live with the abusive partner. To deal with the situation, social workers are trying to respect the young woman decision and trying to “*open the half door*” meaning that they would remain open to communication in the future even though the young woman is no longer a service user. Then, one social worker also mentioned that in the transition housing support, they are trying to communicate with young women even after they left the services for a year.

Another social worker shared that she met someone who refused to communicate with the team and refused any kind of help from the outreach team. In such cases, the social worker decided to give them their business card and say that they are available at any time if the young woman needs help. Another social worker who works in the outreach team also mentioned that they can offer private counselling to ensure they feel comfortable during the individual consultation.

Another strategy to build a trusted relationship is **creating an equal relationship**. Social workers and their team mentioned that their relationship between staff and service user is more informal with a casual conversation.

*“I feel it's easy because I try to be really informal and really horizontal, like a light relation. So, it depends on the person, of course, but even the hard ones to get a trust relationship. I feel that with time, because everybody has different times, with time, we can, I don't think it's, I don't feel it's difficult to have a trust relationship.” (SW15)*

Social workers emphasise the importance of an equal relationship rather than a ‘top-down’ dynamic between staff and client. One participant explained that she tries to ‘talk as one human being to another’, because when

communication is conducted with a sense of distance and hierarchy, it becomes very difficult to truly engage with their lives and be fully present in the helping relationship.

*“And what you have to do, you have to be the one that the girl is not coming to you. You have to go to the girl and talk with her and ask her opinion. Be there for her and be well, be natural, be simple. Do not be. I'm in a higher position and something like that. Be with her on her level, but I'm here for you. I'm trying to support you. I'm trying to help you and and that's what we trust in the relationship.” (SW3)*

*“I try to talk as a human to human. It's only that. Because if you talk with a lot of distance, most of the time it's very rare that you can come to their lives. So most of the time I try to be very present.” (SW7)*

Furthermore, a nonjudgmental attitude marks an equal relationship, and the social worker also actively listens to young women to help them feel heard during the conversation.

*“So, I try as best as I can to make them feel that they are being listened, not judged, not judged. And that's, they're like, and that is their decision to do what they think it's best.” (SW8)*

Moreover, most social workers (N=8) also stated that they needed time to build a trusting relationship. The social workers said they did not force the issue by asking too many questions during their conversations and sometimes began discussions with very simple dialogues. Another social worker explained that, in their organisation, the assessment phase lasted one month and involved observing all areas of life, including health, employment, education, and the support system.

*“You need to talk to them sometimes many times, or sometimes you start only by, hello, how are you today? Four months. Until you get a point that you can have a conversation with them” (SW8)*

#### **4.5.3 Motivation Source to Sustain Working in Homelessness Setting**

Social workers mentioned several motivational resources in sustaining their job in the homelessness setting, such as the ability to help people and involve in someone growth, and because they have a good team to rely on. Social workers stated that working to supports young women sometimes challenging yet deeply rewarding when they witness changes in the lives of those they support.

One of the greatest motivations for social workers when working in the field of homelessness is that they enjoy seeing change and being able to be involved in that change. The changes that occur in service users' lives are not only measured by major milestones, such as exiting homelessness, but these small changes can also serve as small steps that motivate social workers to continue their work in this field.

*“And I like to help them to achieve some steps that sometimes are very small, but they are very important in their lives ... I'm thinking about a person that comes here and has been homeless for many years and didn't take showers, didn't used to drink a lot, has mental health issues. But if we achieve that, she at least once a week has a shower and changes all her clothes, it's a big victory. And I think I get my motivation in these little victories that for a person who deals with other kinds of fields of society, it's not very, it's not much, but for these people it's a big victory. I think it's this. It's not like I think I'm going to change the world, I'm going to save people, I'm not going to save anybody, but maybe I can help them to do little changes that can improve their lives.” (SW8)*

One social worker stated that working in the field of homelessness is challenging, but it is also rewarding because of the opportunity to meet new people and be a part of positive change in their lives. Furthermore, working in this field is seen as giving life greater meaning, as social workers engage directly with service users.

*“Like, so I think it's really that, because it's a very exhausting work, because every day there are problems to solve, but it's very, like you feel like warm-hearted and you feel like you're doing something that has meaning. So, you cannot like, you cannot replace that with some company job by desk.” (SW5)*

*“It's challenging and it's always interesting and your kind of every year you meet the new people, and you can see how they grow.” (SW1)*

Then, social workers stated that working in the homelessness setting also give them **the ability to help people**. This ability is one of the motivation sources as mentioned by one social worker below:

*“I think that is more about empowering other people. So I like just and giving them the like kind of capacity and give them the advocating for them, giving them the information that because There are many people that they don't have, they don't make use of their own rights because they don't have knowledge about them or about information or they don't know how to do things. And this is what I like most in my profession. It's about empowering them to make their own decisions and perhaps with in some of the cases they will improve they will improve their own lives and expectations, and I think that sometimes our integration can change their, their way. So, this is what keeps me motivated to be honest with you at the moment, but also after working in this sector for 20 years, sometimes I feel really, really tired. Yeah, off, yeah, off, yeah, because sometimes you feel that you are swimming against of the waves.” (SW11)*

In addition, the social workers also stated that working in the humanitarian sector is a pleasant job, particularly when they are reinforced by a supportive team. Several social workers mentioned in the interviews that they were very happy working for their organisations, even though the challenges they faced were not always easy. They stated that having a supportive team as one of the sources of motivation for them to work in the field of homelessness.

*“I want to go to work each day because I know if there will be an issue, my colleagues, they will be there for me and they will help me to recite the problem.” (SW3)*

*“It's very good to work with a lot of people, but if we have a good team around us, it's very different because we can help more than more and more happy, exactly.” (SW7 and their team)”*

## 4.6 Discussion of Theme 3: Challenges and Coping Strategies

In this theme, several topics will be discussed, including the challenges faced by social workers, how social workers address these challenges, an explanation of practices and coping strategies related to the PARTH model, and what motivates social workers in their work in the homelessness setting.

The challenges highlighted by social workers in their work within the homelessness sector fall into two broad categories: systemic and relational. In terms of systemic challenges, the available support is insufficient, compounded by a lack of gender awareness, which can sometimes lead to frustration, both for young women as service users and for social workers as frontline staff. This challenge aligns with Wirth, Mette, Prill, et al. (2019) statement that one of the greatest challenges in the homelessness sector is the system itself, which can lead to frustration due to limited success.

In addition to systemic challenges, many social workers highlighted relational challenges such as emotional challenges, dealing with aggression, lack of motivation, and trust issues. However, some social workers stated that building relationships with young women was not a challenge because they were fellow young women, so they found it easy to empathize and communicate, which aligned with Daugininkaitė (2024), Fogel et al. (2025), and Healy (2018) studies that highlight the importance of communication and empathy when working in a homelessness setting.

These two challenges not only pose barriers to the practice of social work but can also be a source of stress for both social workers and service users, potentially hindering the trusting relationship between them.

To address both challenges, social workers use several strategies that are also consistent with the PARTH model. The coping strategies and relationship practices discussed in these interviews are summarised in Table 7, aligned with the PARTH model proposed by Sanders & Munford (2019).

**Table 7. PARTH Model Applied in Social Work Practice in Lithuania and Portugal**

| <b>PARTH Model</b>                                 | <b>Examples</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| P – Passion, perseverance, patient and perspective | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understanding that aggression might be the self-protection system due to exposed of violence and trauma (SW1)</li> <li>2. Keep reminding themselves that aggression is not directly toward the social worker but the act of frustration (SW12 and team)</li> <li>3. Take a pause dan doing reflection (SW1)</li> <li>4. Giving a chance after young women declining the service, such as by giving the business card number and saying that they are still open to communication in the future (SW8, SW9, SW13, SW14)</li> </ol> |

|                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A – Adaptability, action oriented and agency      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Respecting service user decision and involving them during the decision-making process (SW8 and team, SW10, SW11, SW12, SW14)</li> <li>2. Creating network for women (SW5, SW6)</li> <li>3. Adapting the gender awareness into the service by separating the accommodation (SW 8 and team, SW10)</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| R – relationship based on respect and reciprocity | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Creating the equal relationship without showing hierarchy or power imbalance (SW3, SW7, SW8, SW12 and team, SW14, SW15)</li> <li>2. Active listening during communication and trying their best not to judge the service user (SW7 and team, SW8 and team, SW10, SW12 and team)</li> <li>3. Informal communication, trying to be more casual to young women (SW5, SW6, SW7 and team)</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| T – time, trust, transparency, transition         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Being transparent by sharing the information to matched service user expectation (SW7, SW8, SW10, SW11, SW12)</li> <li>2. Slowly building the relationship even by starting from simple conversation (SW2, SW3, SW8, SW9, SW10, SW11, SW12, SW14, SW15)</li> <li>3. Still opening communication after moving out (<i>opening the half door</i>) (SW9, SW13)</li> <li>4. Helping service user referring to other services needs such as rehabilitation centre (SW8 and team, SW10, SW15)</li> <li>5. Never let anyone going back to the street, even if it means staying longer than the time limit set by the government (SW8 and team, SW4, SW3)</li> </ol> |
| H – honesty, humility and hopeful orientation     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social workers always trying to being honest about the limit in the services (SW2, SW4, SW8, SW9, SW10, SW11)</li> <li>2. The social worker and their team (technician or social educator) always try to draw up a realistic plan in line with the client's objectives. For example, when clients say they want housing, they explain the various options available to them (SW7 and team, SW12 and team)</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

*Source: Author Compilation from the interview, 2026.*

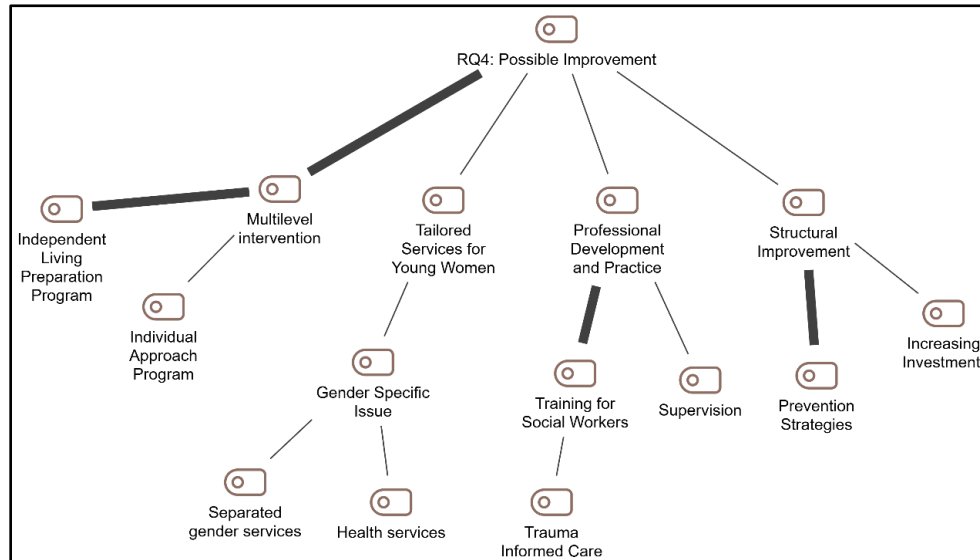
From the examples cited by the social worker during the interview, it is clear that social workers are already implementing PARTH practices in homelessness settings. Sanders & Munford (2019) have indeed demonstrated that the PARTH model is effective in interventions with vulnerable young people, as social workers need to understand the reasoning behind young people's behaviour. Thus, the PARTH model relates to social workers' practice and to their coping strategies when facing challenges, both systemic and relationship.

In addition to coping strategies and practices related to the PARTH model, social workers also highlighted the importance of regular supervision. They mentioned that they receive supervision and hold open discussions with their teams. These social relation strategies are consistent with the findings of Mette et al. (2020) study. Furthermore, Fogel et al. (2025) and Wirth, Mette, Prill, et al. (2019) also noted that supportive institutions help them tackle the challenges they face at work; for instance, some social workers reported being happy in their roles because they have strong teams within their organizations. Supervision and support from the team

can be understood as job resources that are considered capable of balancing high job demands, in line with Mette et al. (2020) and Wirth, Mette, Prill, et al. (2019) regarding the importance of social relations and supportive organizations for workers' well-being. Furthermore, social workers have several motivations that help them sustain their work in homelessness settings. The first motivation relates to the ability to help, such as assisting service users in developing their individual skills, acting as mentors in their job search, and serving as enablers for service users in need of support. Those examples are aligned with the findings of (Salem et al., 2018). In addition to helping, social workers also witness changes in service users, which can motivate them in their work. Social workers also mentioned that these changes are not just major ones. Small changes, such as helping service users schedule to shower regularly, are also small victories for social workers. The ability to help and witness service users' changes provides a rewarding experience for social workers and can also serve as a protective factor against the stress of working in a homelessness setting (Lemieux-Cumberlege & Taylor, 2019; Yamada, 2022).

#### 4.7 Theme 4: Possible Improvement for Supporting Young Women Experiencing Homelessness

**Picture 5. Possible Improvement for Supporting Young Women Experiencing Homelessness**



Source: Author Compilation from MAXQDA, 2026.

In this theme, social workers highlight several recommendations to improve the support for young women experiencing homelessness, such as suggesting the structural improvement, increasing social workers capacity through professional development, creating a service tailored for women or young women, and creating a multilevel intervention. As shown in Picture 5 above, social workers primarily provide recommendations on

prevention strategies and maintain multi-level interventions that support independent living for young women. These recommendations aim to prevent young women from experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, social workers also mentioned training for social workers, particularly regarding trauma-informed care. Ultimately, social workers also highlighted gender awareness issues relating to young women experiencing homelessness.

#### **4.7.1 Structural Improvement**

The first suggestion related to structural improvement is related to the increasing investment. Social workers recognize that homelessness is complex problem, and society is ignoring people experiencing homelessness. Therefore, there is a need to increase investment to help individuals to exit the homelessness situation or prevent individual experiencing homelessness.

*“We do need more investment in this area. We do need more like people to really see this problem of people being in a homeless situation as a real problem and not ignore them. Not only for people in general, but mostly for the government, the people that make decisions and do that” (SW5)*

*“Because I think there are good ideas and they are good projects, but then there are, there is this project they receive so. a small amount of financial support from the state, the government. So, it's not possible to do more, to do whatever we want, because we don't have the money to do it.” (SW 8)*

In addition, another social worker (SW11) also mentioned that increasing investment also important to enlarge the service provision for general population across the country. Several social workers recommend to adding more investment outside of the capital, because there are differences related to projects in capital and other municipalities. One social worker even mentioned that in more remote areas there are no services available for women, as the shelters only accept men.

Besides the investment, many social workers (N=6) mentioned about prevention strategies. Prevention strategies are divided into several prevention such as transitional prevention and at-risk prevention through school. However, emergency support is still necessary due to the number of people experiencing homelessness is increasing particularly among young people.

*“So, we do have to work in prevention, preventing people that are in almost getting in a homeless situation and not getting in that situation. And we still have to be working in emergencies and intervention directly with these people. And the after like preventing that the person do not return to the situation.” (SW 5)*

In relation to the prevention, social worker mentioned that school can be serve as preventive measures to stop young people from experiencing homelessness situation. One of the recommendations is to improve knowledge and capacity of the young people, both at school and at home. For example, knowledge about critical thinking and knowledge related to understand the abuse and violence and how to report those situations.

*“Because I think that the schools could be also make like a kind of preventive job around homeless, specifically working with young women around that and give them more, again, strategies and working around like capacity and things like that for them to overcome some difficulties. Because there is still some kind of motherhood in teenagers and this can also be an issue.” (SW11)*

*“We see more and more and more homeless people in the streets nowadays. But we need to somehow prevent that happening. So, we see the families as a good opportunity for them to prepare them and give them some structure and give them what they need to, so they don't become the future homeless in the streets. So, we see them as an opportunity to give them some better life and very better opportunities. So, we see them with very potential that we need to grab it and help them.” (SW7)*

In addition, social workers mentioned about the transitional intervention. Many social workers (N=9) mentioned that lack of transition from care institution is one of the majority factors that led young women to experience homelessness. Therefore, one of the recommendations is to put more effort to help individual that are towards the transition.

*“Yeah, for example, the young people that are in institutionalized, that are in an institution when they are children, yeah, prevent they get out of an institution to the streets, or people there are in prison. Okay, prevent they get out to homelessness again. I think that's really the part that we need to do” (SW6)*

The last part related to the structural improvement is regarding to the database. During experiencing homelessness, young women are probably met more than one social worker and other staff, and sometimes they were asking the similar question which could risk re-traumatizing the service user. One social worker suggested government to establish a system in Portugal that social workers could access when assisting young women who are in transition or in need of other support, such as a database with appropriate security measures.

*“Yeah, specifically because with the homeless people, sometimes they work with too many different services, and they are and they are always talking about the same thing to different people. And this also is a way of becoming re-traumatized because they are always talking about trauma and trauma. And I think that we need to do things better about that, I think. It's also quite difficult nowadays because of that data protection. But I think that we should develop a kind of system that we could, of course, with the consent of the service user, but if they consent, we could share more information. Like, of course, respecting all principles of protection, but it's just to avoid doing the same questions all over and making them exactly. And I think that, yeah, it's about good practice. I think that we need to develop more these kinds of things” (SW11)*

#### **4.7.2 Professional Development and Practice**

The participants emphasized that improving support for young women experiencing homelessness also requires investing in the professional development of social workers. Social workers highlighted two main needs: specialized training for working with young people in homelessness settings and continuous learning through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and supervision.

The first recommendation is to provide training for social workers on understanding young people, such as their developmental phase or about how to communicate with young person. The social worker mentioned that whilst training is available for other target groups, such as children and the elderly, there is none specifically for working with young people.

*“I think there should be more trainings for coordinators because we do have so many different courses, right? How to work with families, how to work with older people, how to work with children, how to work with this and that, but in particular with this age group of young people, there's almost none.” (SW2)*

Furthermore, social workers also highlighted the need for a platform that can provide continuous learning for social workers specialising in the field of homelessness.

*“Another thing that is not happening in Portugal so often in the social sector is the training like the CPD, like the continuous learning. And this is something that new now that we have in Portugal. And I think that it is really important. It is really important because you have liked people working for many years. They had done the degree, but then they were not doing so much training. And they were working like 10 years as they were working in the first year that they started. But in general, I think that things are improving, improving slowly.” (SW11)*

Then, one of the key points highlighted by the social workers is the importance of regular supervision. Supervision is not only intended to resolve issues that may arise during work, but also to share best practices or lessons learnt from one social worker to others. Supervision expands opportunities for social workers to learn and can also enhance the knowledge of other social workers.

*“I think this supervision is very important because I don't know everything. I do what I know, I do what I think I know, but sometimes the sharing, if I share this situation with another teammate, maybe he knows more or he can give me brainstorming, you know. And sometimes I think this should be more important and not in my institution, but in all of other institutions, because I think we should be humble to understand that we don't know everything. We are in a privilege space, but sometimes we need to be humble to understand that sometimes things are not in our power. We should share that power with other people because the main goal is to resolve the situation of the young woman.” (SW10)*

Based on the social workers' statements above, these reflections suggest that any attempt to improve services for young women experiencing homelessness must also address the learning environment of social workers through continuous professional development to enhance their knowledge and skills.

#### **4.7.3 Tailored Service for Young Women**

In the first theme, the social worker highlighted that different pathways lead young women experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, the first theme also explains that young women face unique circumstances that can aggravate their vulnerability whilst experiencing homelessness. Therefore, the social worker stated that

providing services specifically tailored to women is one of the key objectives for improving support for young women experiencing homelessness.

*“So, the major concern within our population in general that is we serve everyone, but for me, women are a major concern and a major objective of ours. I consider it necessary to have the best answers to the needs they have. So, I hope that perhaps in a year or two, if we talk again, we will already have specific answers to the gender.” (SW4).*

Social workers explained that the gender specific services do not mean as one whole specific building specifically for young women, but it could also be a gender separation, or gender and age separation inside a building. A tailored service also means that the services provided are adapted to the needs of young women. For example, SW5 notes that women have different reproductive health needs, so providing access to gynaecologists could be a way of meeting the needs of young women.

*“I think that in Lithuania, we don't have so much specialized services. And sometimes it's nice, it would be nice, I guess, to have it and just maybe we don't see properly, you know what the difference it could create. But I guess that, for example, for a woman or for a young woman, something like separate, it could be an idea because, and women and even younger people in a shelter, we see that they have a bit different profile and maybe needs in a way. And yeah, it would be nice maybe to have even something separate, some accommodation, not necessarily a big shelter, but for young women, maybe you know, where they could share the experiences, especially when they have sometimes similar, some traumatizing, but some violence or something like some bad things and good. Yeah, so it's something about this.” (SW13)*

These gender sensitive recommendation emerged from the experience of social workers during their work, and this could be a strategy to reduce the vulnerability and supporting recovery for young women. Overall, participants agreed that gender-specific and gender-aware services are important but also recognized that these measures alone are not enough to address the complex situation of young women experiencing homelessness. Therefore, participants also suggest adding more multilevel approaches to help young women exit the situation or to prevent them from experiencing homelessness.

#### **4.7.4 Multilevel Intervention**

In the third theme, social workers explain that young women, as service users, struggle due to various other problems they face, such as mental health issues, trauma, or addiction. Furthermore, section 4.1.2 discusses how these young women are sometimes disconnected from their social networks, resulting in more limited opportunities. To help them exit homelessness, a multilevel approach is required. This multilevel approach means that social workers strive to help service users develop strategies to exit homelessness and assist in meeting the additional needs required by these young women.

*“We have people that they're struggling with mental health and also addiction and sometimes both at the same time. So, it's very hard to just as an organization to deal with all these types of matters. Because human beings are very complex. They have a lot of vulnerabilities. So sometimes they don't have a good support system. So, they don't even have a nice relationship with their families, with their parents. So, a lot of things happen.” (SW12)*

In fact, multilevel intervention is already common practice in some of the institutions where social workers are employed. However, some other social workers persist in emphasising that multilevel intervention must be in place and sustained so that service users can exit the homelessness situation and move towards independent living. One example of this multilevel approach is described by a social worker as follows:

*“My dream, my vision is to have something like we had in Oxford. It was a place called Somewhere Safe to Sleep and this was a mixed. This is for mixed people, any ethnic ethnicities, any ages, any sex. But it would actually be very good to have one purely for women. But it was a small hostel, let's say, and we at this place had about 16 to 20 people beds for 16 to 20 people. Everyone had a little pod. We had a few secure rooms for people that really needed to be. In that case, a young would be allowed to be allocated it, or if someone's escaping some sort of trauma or something, we would allocate the room. And there would be a case worker, a social worker allocated to each person and you become their mentor. (SW9, Pos. 118)”*

In addition to a multilevel approach, social workers also emphasise that an individualised approach is more appropriate for young women experiencing homelessness. As each individual's circumstances and journey differ, the approach must indeed be tailored to the individual. SW15 explains that investing in individual programmes is more effective than simply investing in emergency programmes, which are more general in nature.

*“So, I think what's missing, it's this individual intervention with every person like unique. It cannot be equal to everybody because we are all different. So yeah, I think we need to improve in investing projects that are scientifically proved that work. And we are keep investing in projects that the data show us that they don't work.” (SW15)*

This recommendation underscores the fact that improving services for young women experiencing homelessness cannot stop at emergency responses alone, but must move towards interventions that are more multilevel, sustainable, and tailored to individual needs

#### **4.8 Discussion of Theme 4: Possible Improvement for Supporting Young Women Experiencing Homelessness**

In this theme, social workers explained four different improvements to support young women experiencing homelessness, including structural improvements, adding professional development and practice, tailoring services for women or young women, and adding more multilevel interventions.

Social workers in this study emphasize that meaningful change requires greater financial investment in homelessness services, including outside the capital. Several social workers mentioned a gap in services available between the capital and the regions. For example, in the southern area of Portimão, shelters are only intended for men, with none for women. Meanwhile, social workers also mentioned that there are young women experiencing homelessness in the south as well, and they also need assistance. Therefore, to reach more young women who are experiencing homelessness, financial investment is one of the recommendations from the social workers.

In addition to investing in the region, social workers also noted that tailored services better attuned to the needs of young women are required. As discussed in Theme 2, the services available to the general population are insufficient to meet the needs of other target groups, particularly young women.

In addition, many social workers also mentioned that prevention strategies are necessary. To prevent people from experiencing homelessness, some possible approaches are through schools and families, particularly for those at risk of poverty or homelessness. In addition, prevention strategies can be implemented at other stages of homelessness.

As seen in Theme 2, the two end phases (the temporary support and the end-stages support) still suffer from a lack of available services. Recent media reports from Lithuania illustrate a similar gap, in which some local services have been closed, and people who had obtained social or dormitory housing have lost it again despite having a support plan (Ramanauskienė & Giambartolomei, 2024). The findings of this study suggest that such situations underscore the need for comprehensive prevention and multilevel support that address the complex, multi-layered nature of homelessness. Social workers in Portugal and Lithuania highlighted that young women often lack the skills and resources required for independent living, which can contribute to both entering and re-entering homelessness. From this perspective, prevention strategies across schools and families, combined with multilevel interventions during the transition out of homelessness, become crucial for supporting independent living and preventing returns to homelessness, in line with Housing First principles of ongoing, person-centre support or an individual approach. In addition, to add an individual approach, the social workers' capacity should be increased and retained by creating a continuous learning space and adding training related to trauma-informed care to meet the needs of young women.

## CONCLUSION

Social workers describe the circumstances of young women experiencing homelessness as differing from those of other target groups. In both countries, social workers noted that young women tend to use the service as a last resort. Furthermore, when young women are on the streets, they are often seen with an older male companion. Additionally, young women experience homelessness due to escaping from domestic violence, whether from family or a partner, and some are facing difficulties transitioning from care to independent living. Furthermore, the factors causing young women to experience homelessness are not single factors but rather several factors experienced simultaneously by young women. Moreover, these factors can also have varying impacts on everyone. Given these circumstances, social workers noted that these young women face an increased risk of vulnerability when they are experiencing homelessness.

Support for young women has begun to emerge, but there is as yet no sustainable, systematic support available. For example, both countries' available institutions are more focused on individuals experiencing homelessness, such as emergency and temporary support and a lack of preventive efforts. Furthermore, whilst these services are accessible to young women, they are not yet fully gender sensitive.

Nowadays, the organizational practices are becoming more gender-sensitive, such as involving lived experience in creating networks for women to advocate for their needs, and other examples include adding activities like self-defense classes led by women and open only to women. Some of these practices within the organization can certainly help social workers build trusted relationships with young women experiencing homelessness.

At the same time, social workers mentioned some of the challenges they face when working with young women. In terms of relationships, some female social workers said that working with young women is not particularly difficult because, as fellow young women, they can be more empathetic, and their conversations can be more relatable. However, other systemic challenges can lead to frustration for both social workers and young women. To address these challenges, the social workers also mentioned several coping strategies in their daily practice. These practices are aligned with the PARTH practice. Furthermore, the social workers have also highlighted that they possess a paradigm that recognizes homelessness as a complex phenomenon stemming from economic and systemic issues, compounded by individual family circumstances.

Therefore, social workers recommend structural improvements, including enhancing multilevel interventions such as implementing preventive measures and teaching life skills from an early age. Furthermore, social workers' work must be supported by capacity-building and knowledge enhancement through continuous professional development for those working in homelessness.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

### **1. Recommendation for policy and system**

National and local authorities in both countries should explicitly recognize that young women are a distinct target group within homelessness strategies. One example of recognizing young women in policy is integrating gender-based data, such as including young women in statistical data on the population experiencing homelessness. In addition, prevention strategies must be stepped up by supporting young people at risk through life skills training, which can be delivered in schools or at the family level. Then, particular attention must also be given to young women in transition, such as those leaving residential care, juvenile institutions or prison, through planned transitions that combine housing, employment and relational support.

### **2. Recommendation for social work practice**

Social welfare institutions need to develop more gender-sensitive services. This can be achieved by involving young women in the design of these services. Furthermore, more trauma-informed practices are required to minimize re-traumatization and create safe spaces for young women.

### **3. Recommendation for future research**

Future studies should broaden the perspective by directly involving young women experiencing homelessness in the research. Furthermore, research comparing different genders may also provide a deeper insight into how the situation of young women experiencing homelessness differs from that of the general population.

## **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The interviews were conducted in English and, in some cases, involved other participants who helped to translate between English and Lithuanian or Portuguese. This process may have led to a loss or dilution of nuance, particularly when participants tried to describe a specific experience or tried to explain something in their own language. In addition, English was not the first language of either the participants or the interviewer, which increases the possibility that certain meanings, emotions, or culturally specific expressions may not have been fully captured. Furthermore, the data on the number of people experiencing homelessness was drawn from secondary sources, specifically reports published by ENIPSSA and the OECD. These reports refer to periods prior to the fieldwork, so the situation at the time of the study may already have changed and may not be fully reflected in the available statistics. The secondary data also do not disaggregate homelessness figures by age group or gender in a way that would allow a precise focus on young women. One social worker shared more recent homelessness data, but it was limited to a single local area. They therefore could not be systematically compared with data from other regions or with national.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1. Table of Organization List Supporting Individual in Homelessness Situation in Lithuania and Portugal

| No        | Name of organizations                | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Focus Group                                                                                                                                                      | Program Related to Homelessness Situation                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Lithuania |                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1.        | Caritas Lithuania                    | A network under Caritas International organisation, mainly focus to help people in need.                                                                                                                      | Children and family, people with illness or lonely, elderly, people in needs, people who experiencing homelessness, violence and addiction, migrant and refugee. | Day center (Kaunas and Vilnius)<br>Food aid<br>Clothing assistance                                                                                                                                                              |
| Portugal  |                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1.        | Ares do Pinhal (ADP)                 | Founded in 1986, ADP specializing in support and treatment for addiction. After that, ADP operate emergency shelter. The work in ADP related to harm reduction, therapeutic approach with health integration. | People with addiction and or experiencing homelessness                                                                                                           | Sta Barbara Emergency Shelter Centre (CAEM), a transitional housing support<br>CAEM Sta Bárbara Health Support Programme (PAS)<br>Addiction treatment with Therapeutic Community method.<br>Lisbon methadone outpatient program |
| 2.        | Associação CAIS (CAIS)               | A charity organisation founded in 1994 with objectives to assist people with extreme poverty and social exclusion to regain independence.                                                                     | Homeless people and others who face poverty or social exclusion                                                                                                  | Vocational training and employability (CAIS Magazine, job quarter)<br>Street football project (Futebol de Rua)<br>Special project (WHARF Museum, Reflex)                                                                        |
| 3.        | Centro de Apoio ao Sem Abrigo (CASA) | A solidarity institution that operates homeless support centre who helps people regardless of any social background                                                                                           | People experiencing homelessness as priority, family at risk, and needy family                                                                                   | Emergency shelter and hostel accommodation<br>Daily meals and clothing distribution                                                                                                                                             |

|    |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                    | Psychological assistance<br>Social reintegration support<br>Provide hygiene products and referral service to health facilities                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 4. | Fundação Assistência Médica Internacional (AMI)      | International NGO founded in 1984 providing medical assistance and emergency response in disasters, conflicts and poverty setting.                                                                               | People experiencing homelessness (only in Portugal)                                                                                | <i>Porta Amiga Centers</i> , a social support facility for people with economic vulnerability<br><i>Equipa de Rua</i> , street work team for homeless support                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 5. | Associação para a Promoção da Saúde (Norte Vida)     | Private social solidarity institution founded in 1991. Norte Vida focus in youth, family and community development, health promotion especially for addicts, and education or professional training for citizen. | Youth, family, and community                                                                                                       | Prevention and reintegration project<br>Therapeutic community<br>Street outreach team ( <i>Equipa de Rua</i> ) for children and adolescent<br>Vocational training and school                                                                                                                                                       |
| 6. | Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa (SCML)          | Founded in 1498, SCML manage wide-ranging social services to improve the quality of life for society.                                                                                                            | Children, youth, adults, family and elder with different condition including dependency needs, disability or experiencing poverty. | Education facilities including nurseries and school<br>Nursing homes for elder<br>Disability support centre<br>Homeless shelter<br>Health clinic<br>Social support and training program                                                                                                                                            |
| 7. | Serviços de Assistência Organizações de Maria (SAOM) | A private social solidarity institution (IPSS) founded in 1976, mainly focus on reintegration and social support for youth and elder.                                                                            | Elderly and young people                                                                                                           | Day centre, home support<br>Social laundry<br>Social dining hall<br>Social reintegration program ( <i>Dar Sentido a Vida</i> )<br>Risk reduction program ( <i>Aqui &amp; Agora Project</i> , <i>Sala de Consumo Vigiado project</i> )<br>Health and social service for homeless, sex worker and addicts ( <i>Contato Project</i> ) |

Source: Author Compilation and FEANTSA Member List (FEANTSA Member Map, n.d.)

## Appendix 2. Table of Interview Question

| RESEARCH QUESTION                                                                                                                                                      | LITERATURE REVIEW                      | QUESTION                                                                                                                                | PROBES                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| RQ1: How do social workers perceive the homelessness situation experienced by young women in Portugal and Lithuania?                                                   | ETHOS definition of homelessness       | How do you see the situation of young women experiencing homelessness?                                                                  | We can start from their place of living; do they stay outside in the street or is there any other condition?                                                                                   |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | National definition of homelessness    |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | Factors of homelessness in young women | What are the main causes of girls being homeless?                                                                                       | Is there any other cause that you can mention?                                                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | Impact of homeless in young women      | What consequences do you most frequently observe?                                                                                       | Is there any other impact that you can mention?                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | Specifics about young women            | Are there differences between young women and young men?                                                                                | Or maybe differences between young women and adults or general populations                                                                                                                     |
|                                                                                                                                                                        |                                        | What, in your view, are the main needs of young women experiencing homelessness?                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                        |                                        | Is there any stigma related to girls being homeless?                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| RQ2: What kind of support that available for young women experiencing homelessness in Portugal and Lithuania and what are the roles of social workers in the settings? | Available support                      | What kind of support or services are available for young women in your organization or country?                                         | Is there any specific program for young women or youth?<br><br>Can you describe your daily activities as a social worker?<br><br>Lead to PARTH Model A (Adaptability, Action oriented, Agency) |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | PARTH Model – R, T                     | How do you build a helping relationship with young women experiencing homelessness?                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                        |                                        | If they are in a transition: how to help them during this period?<br><br>Or: what is your strategy to help them exiting this situation? |                                                                                                                                                                                                |

|                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                | Do you provide individual counselling with them, or maybe in a group?                                                                                                                               | How the transparency works in your relationship with young women?<br><br>Did you give them agency to decision making?                                                                                         |
|                                                                                                                                                                                | Roles of social worker                                                                         | What is your role in providing that support?                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| RQ 3: What are the challenges that social workers face during their practice and what coping strategies and motivational sources sustain their practice?                       | Job demands in homelessness setting<br><br>Motivation in retaining work<br><br>PARTH Model – H | What are the biggest challenges you face in your work with young women?<br><br>What is your strategy to cope with those challenges?<br><br>What is your motivation to keep working in this setting? | How do you take care of yourself?<br><br>How to handle the emotional demand or stress during working in this field? – <i>PARTH: P (passion, perseverance)</i>                                                 |
| RQ 4: What are possible improvements in social work practice or in the service that might help young women experiencing homelessness to exit from the homelessness situations? | PAP paradigm (structural, redistribution, solidarity)                                          | If you could change one thing to improve services for young women experiencing homelessness, what would it be?                                                                                      | What would help you do your job better? – <i>PARTH: T (time, transitions)</i><br><br><i>Is there any policy that needs to change?</i><br><br>What advice would you give to a new social worker in this field? |
| Closing Question                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                | Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience working with young women experiencing homelessness?                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

## Appendix 3. Informed Consent

### INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH AND PERSONAL DATA PROCESSING

Thesis Title : Peculiarities in Social Work Practice with Young Women Experiencing Homelessness  
Researcher : Maily Vintan ([mavintan@stud.mruni.eu](mailto:mavintan@stud.mruni.eu) / [mvnya@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:mvnya@iscte-iul.pt))  
Program : Social Work with Children and Youth (ESWOCHY)  
Institutions : Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), Riga Stradins University (Latvia), Catholic University in Ruzomberok (Slovakia) and ISCTE - University Institute of Lisbon (Portugal)  
Supervisor name and email : Assoc. Prof. Justinas Sadauskas ([justas\\_sad@mruni.eu](mailto:justas_sad@mruni.eu))  
Supervisor Institutions : Mykolo Romeris University, Lithuania

#### Introduction

You are invited to take part in a research study. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions if something is unclear. The purpose of this study is to analyse the theoretical aspects of young women's homelessness and the specifics of social work practice with young women experiencing homelessness. The study aims to better understand experiences, needs, and professional approaches related to this topic.

#### Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes. During the interview, the researcher may ask questions about your experiences, views, or professional practice related to young women experiencing homelessness.

#### Voluntary participation

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. You may refuse to answer any question, and you may stop the interview at any time without giving a reason.

#### Benefits of the study

You may not receive direct personal benefit from participating. However, your contribution may help improve knowledge about young women experiencing homelessness and support better social work practice and services. In addition, this study is expected to involve minimal risk.

#### Personal data use

This interview may be recorded in audio and video format for research purposes. The recordings will be used only for transcription, analysis, and documentation of the study. Audio and video recordings are considered personal data and will be treated as confidential data under the applicable research and data protection rules.

Your responses will be treated confidentially. Your name and other identifying details will not be used in any report, publication, or presentation arising from this study unless you give explicit permission. The identity of the participant will be kept confidential and replaced with a pseudonym code during data processing, transcription, analysis, and reporting.

#### **Data retention**

Your interview recording and transcript will be anonymized and kept for 12 months after the study ends. Then, the recording and transcript will be securely deleted.

#### **Feedback and further contact**

After the study, you are welcome to contact the researcher if you would like to receive a summary of the results or if you have any questions about the findings. If you wish to review any part of the draft report where your input is used, please let the researcher know.

By signing below, I confirm that:

- ☐ I have read and understood the information above.
- ☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.
- ☐ I understand that my interview may be audio and/or video recorded.
- ☐ I understand how my personal data will be used and protected.

Participant's name :  
Signature :  
Date :

Researcher's name :  
Signature :  
Date :

## Appendix 4. FEANTSA Definition of Homelessness

|                     | OPERATIONAL CATEGORY | LIVING SITUATION                                             | GENERIC DEFINITION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Conceptual Category | ROOFLESS             | 1 People Living Rough                                        | 1.1 Public space or external space<br>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<br>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<br>3.2 Temporary accommodation<br>3.3 Transitional supported accommodation<br>Where the period of stay is intended to be short term                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                     |                      | 4 People in Women's Shelter                                  | 4.1 Women's shelter accommodation<br>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<br>5.2 Migrant workers accommodation<br>Immigrants in reception or short term accommodation due to their immigrant status                                                                                                                                                      |
|                     |                      | 6 People due to be released from institutions                | 6.1 Penal institutions<br>6.2 Medical institutions (*)<br>6.3 Children's institutions/homes<br>No housing available prior to release<br>Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing<br>No housing identified (e.g. by 18th birthday)                                                                                      |
|                     |                      | 7 People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness) | 7.1 Residential care for older homeless people<br>7.2 Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people<br>Long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)                                                                                                                   |
|                     | INSECURE             | 8 People living in insecure accommodation                    | 8.1 Temporarily with family/friends<br>8.2 No legal (sub)tenancy<br>8.3 Illegal occupation of land<br>Living in conventional housing but not the usual place of residence due to lack of housing<br>Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy illegal occupation of a dwelling<br>Occupation of land with no legal rights |
|                     |                      | 9 People living under threat of eviction                     | 9.1 Legal orders enforced (rented)<br>9.2 Re-possession orders (owned)<br>Where orders for eviction are operative<br>Where mortgagee has legal order to re-possess                                                                                                                                                           |
|                     |                      | 10 People living under threat of violence                    | 10.1 Police recorded incidents<br>Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                     | INADEQUATE           | 11 People living in temporary/non-conventional structures    | 11.1 Mobile homes<br>11.2 Non-conventional building<br>11.3 Temporary structure<br>Not intended as place of usual residence<br>Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty<br>Semi-permanent structure hut or cabin                                                                                                                   |
|                     |                      | 12 People living in unfit housing                            | 12.1 Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation<br>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<br>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.

Source: FEANTSA (2017a)

## Appendix 5. Non-Plagiarism Declaration



Submitted to the Erasmus Mundus Master's Programme in Social Work with Child and Youth:

- Has not been submitted to any other Institute/University/College
- Contains proper references and citations for other scholarly work
- Contains proper citation and references from my own prior scholarly work
- Has listed all citations in a list of references.

I am aware that violation of this code of conduct is regarded as an attempt to plagiarize and will result in a failing grade in the programme.

Date: 28<sup>th</sup> May 2026

Signature: 

Name: MAILLY VINTAN

