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## Editorial

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At the annual research conference on homelessness in Europe organised by the European Observatory on Homelessness and partners, held in Pisa on 16 September, a special edition of the European Journal of Homelessness, (Vol.5, No.1) was launched, and contained key papers from our 2010 research conference, which was held in Budapest. At the annual meeting of the International Advisory Committee to the journal held in Budapest, it was agreed that we would move to publish both a special edition of the journal each year – based on the proceedings of our annual research conference, and an open edition of the journal. The rationale for developing an open edition of the journal was that it would allow the editorial team to accommodate a greater diversity of research and policy analyses that was the case when each edition focused on a particular theme. That the International Advisory Committee, the Consultative Committee and the Editorial Team felt confident, after 4 years of producing a single edition per annum, to publish a second open edition of the journal each year is a reflection of the supply of high quality original research and policy commentaries received by the editorial team each year. It also reflects the demand by academics, policy makers and practitioners for concise, accessible and policy relevant analyses of homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe and further afield. In this, our first open edition, we are pleased that we are in a position to publish original research articles, policy commentaries, think pieces, debates and a special section reflecting on the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness which was held in Brussels in December 2010, in addition to a section providing up-dates on ongoing research on homelessness in Europe and a number of book reviews.

### Articles

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In the first article in the journal, Amore and colleagues provide an analysis and critique of the validity of the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS), which they note is arguably the most prominent definition and classification of homelessness with an articulated theoretical foundation in current use. In their article, they propose a modified approach to conceptualising homelessness. In doing so, two parts of the ETHOS conceptualisation are examined: the conceptual model, and the typology of subgroups that make up the homeless and

housing excluded populations. The authors argue that each part is found to have conceptual weaknesses that compromise the validity of the typology and a modified definition and classification of homelessness is proposed.

Stenberg and colleagues, in our second article, argue that although evictions are a significant cause of homelessness, little is known of the processes leading to evictions. The paper attempts to shed some light on this relatively unknown problem by exploring the legal basis, procedures of evictions and the possibilities of avoiding homelessness because of rent arrears in Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Preliminary data on the numbers of evictions are also given. Some striking differences in the process of dealing with evictions between the three countries are brought to light, but the overall lack of data on evictions is emphasized.

In our third article, Carminucci describes the system of social organisations and agencies providing support for homeless people in five major European train stations (Rome “Termini” station, Paris “Gare du Nord”, Berlin Zoo Station, Brussels “Gare Centrale”, and Luxemburg City’s station). The paper provides a detailed description of the homeless population in these stations, and explores the services provided by a range of organisations, and the potential effects of their cooperation in addressing the needs of homeless people.

## Policy Review

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In our policy review section, having earlier reviewed national homeless strategies in Scotland, Ireland, Denmark and Finland, Houard provides an analysis of the French homeless strategy.

Launched in November 2009, the strategy aims to ensure that housing provision adheres to ‘Housing First’ principle, making a clean break with the existing ‘staircase’ system of homeless service provision. However, the paper argues that the ‘staircase’ model continues to be used in practice both locally and nationally. In the second paper in our policy review section, Downey argues that quality, systematic and programme-based data on homelessness is vital for effective public policy formulation. Using the example of the Homeless Agency Partnership, established in Dublin in 2001, it outlines the data deficit that existed and how the Homeless Agency Partnership developed a data and information strategy. This paper reviews the challenges and obstacles to establishing the data and information strategy, how these were tackled over the period, and the resulting changes that took place.

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## Think Pieces

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The issue of the applicability of the 'Housing First' approach, which originated in New York, to European member states is discussed in detail by Pleave in our first think piece. Noting that while there is strong evidence that the 'Housing First' model, in particular, the 'Pathways Housing First' model can move homeless people with sustained experiences of living rough, with problematic drug and alcohol use, and with severe mental illness straight into ordinary housing, and successfully sustain them in that housing, nonetheless questions can be raised about what 'Housing First' is delivering in a wider sense. The paper firstly explores what is meant by 'Housing First' as an ethos and as a model of service delivery, as there can be a lack of clarity about what these services are delivering. Secondly, to what extent can 'Housing First' services address the needs of 'chronically homeless' people that exist alongside a fundamental requirement for sustainable housing? The third and final question posed in the paper centres on the wider role of the 'Housing First' model, and whether the policy and research focus on 'Housing First' is overemphasising one aspect of the wider social problem of homelessness.

In his think piece, DeDecker notes that it is often argued that the substantial participation of the middle-classes in the social security system, is functional for combating poverty. The argument is that it is thanks to its universal character that the system has sufficient societal support to offer groups at risk or with a low income an acceptable minimum protection. Using the example of Flanders, Belgium, the paper argues that since the mid-1990s, the Flanders government has used this argument to increase the income ceilings for all kinds of housing subsidies. Utilising both data and discourses, the author argues that the middle-classes were never excluded from subsidies, nor are they, as some have claimed the victims of a newly emerging housing need.

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## Debates

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In previous editions of the Journal we have published contributions to a vigorous debate on the role and meaning of participation by homeless people in shaping policy and practice. In our latest contribution to this ongoing discussion, Jordi Sanchez provides a perspective from Spain and argues that participation has changed from being simply a fashionable concept to a widely used term, but, that the practical application of participation in the field of homelessness still suffers from a lack of systematic and improvised approaches. His paper outlines some factors that have hindered the practical implementation of participation in services for homeless people in Spain.

## European Consensus Conference on Homelessness

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On the 9th and 10th of December, 2010 (in co-operation with FEANTSA, the European Commission and the French government), the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council organised a Consensus Conference on Homelessness. This conference built on the French Consensus Conference held in November 2007 (see Loison-Leruste, 2008 for further details) utilising a methodology, which involved the selection of experts in various domains (but not homelessness) who would adjudicate on a range of evidence and viewpoints from those with an expertise in homelessness. The Jury's report (European Consensus Conference on Homelessness, 2010), which drew on a review of literature on homelessness in Europe (Busch-Geertsema et al, 2010) and the expert opinions is a significant milestone, both in terms of how the Jury conceptualised homelessness and their recommendations for the delivery of services to homeless people. The editorial team invited a number of policy reviews of the Jury's report from a number of expert commentators – ranging from academics to service users. In addition, Ruth Owen, one of the organisers of the Conference, provides a detailed overview of the methodology involved in organising a consensus conference.

## Conclusion

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In 2006, Bill Edgar, one of the co-ordinators of the European Observatory on Homelessness conceived the idea for a European Journal of Homelessness as a vehicle for disseminating knowledge of policy and practice on homelessness across the European Union, and indeed further afield, to a diverse audience of policy makers, practitioners, and researchers. The reception that such a journal would receive was unknown, but since the publication of the first edition of the journal in December 2007, it is clear that the journal serves an important role in the dissemination of knowledge and ideas about homelessness across the European Union. The editorial team would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of the members of the International Advisory Committee, the members of the Consultative Committee, the contributors to the journal and the staff of FEANTSA in ensuring the success enjoyed by the journal to-date, and the maintenance of the high standards established by Bill Edgar as the first editor of the journal.

**› References**

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Loison-Leruste, M. (2008) Building Consensus? The French Experience of a 'Consensus Conference' on Homelessness, *European Journal of Homelessness* 2, pp.139-156.