
Editorial

Somewhat paradoxically, as the numbers of homeless people are rising in many EU Member States, there is greater optimism than ever before that homelessness can be ended. A key reason for this optimism is that our knowledge of what works in preventing and ending homelessness has advanced significantly over the past decade. Methodologically robust research has demonstrated the success of rapid-rehousing programs when people are threatened with homelessness, and of Housing First programs that consistently show high rates of housing retention for formerly long-term dual diagnosed homeless people. In their respective contributions to this edition of the *European Journal of Homelessness*, Evelyn Dyb and Nicholas Pleace describe and interpret recent substantial reductions in homelessness in Norway, and the ongoing decline in Finland. Whether the recent decline in Norway is indicative of a longer-term trend due to the adoption of housing led policies, or a temporary decline, remains to be seen, but Dyb provides strong evidence for an optimistic interpretation. However, in the case of Finland, an early adopter of housing led policies to end homelessness, the long-term decline in homelessness is unequivocal, leading Pleace to assert that Finland 'is approaching a point at which recurrent and long-term homelessness will be nearly eradicated and experience of any form of homelessness will become uncommon.'

Recent homelessness strategies in Northern Ireland and in Flanders are explored respectively by Beth Watts and Suzanne Fitzpatrick, and Koen Hermans. In the case of Northern Ireland, Watts and Fitzpatrick laud the emphasis placed on recognising and addressing hidden homelessness, but lament the failure of the strategy to fully embrace a Housing First approach to ending homelessness. Hermans, in his contribution notes the significance of recent policy initiatives that aim for an integrated housing led approach to ending homelessness in Flanders. Regrettably, no clear monitoring system to measure the impact of the initiatives is provided for, and Hermans argues persuasively for the provision of robust, reliable and timely data to demonstrate what is, and is not, working in the recent progressive initiatives.

Different members states use different sources of data to measure the nature and extent of homelessness, and hence to determine whether or not homelessness is increasing or decreasing, but administrative data is increasingly viewed as a powerful source of reliable and timely data. In their contribution to the EJH, Veera Niemi and Elina Ahola provide a valuable example of how combining different

administrative data sources in Helsinki generated a rich data set that allowed for the analysis of homeless pathways amongst young people. Methodological and data issues are also raised by Aris Sapounakis and Ioanna Katapid, who outline the process whereby they gathered data on evictions in Greece, thus providing the first estimates for the extent of evictions from primary residences. In addition, they provide a clear analysis of the difficulties and limitations of using largely survey-based methodologies to capture the details of evictions in Greece.

Our knowledge of the costs of maintaining people in homelessness, *via* the provision of congregate emergency and temporary accommodation demonstrate that it is both fiscally responsible and ethically justifiable to provide evidence-based housing responses to homelessness, with support where necessary, based on the financial costs to the Exchequer, and damage to the capabilities and productivity of individuals, if their homelessness is not ended. Kateřina Glumbíková and Dana Nedělníková provide a further case study of the limits of shelter-based approaches to managing homelessness, in this instance, an analysis of five shelters for lone-mothers in Ostrava in the Czech Republic. In their nuanced account, Glumbíková and Nedělníková carefully outline the perspectives of the different parties in the shelters, recognising that for some users, shelters offer support, but ultimately, are impotent in the face of a lack of affordable housing.

How we think about homelessness is often determined by the images of homeless people portrayed by the media and NGOs. Lígia Teixeira argues in her contribution that the media and NGOs need to change the way in which they present homeless people, as the current depiction of homelessness induces a sense of fatalism that homelessness could ever be ended. This is as a consequence of a of thinking of homelessness as individual issue that could strike at anyone, anytime, and hence, beyond the power of any Government to change. The readers of the EJM know that this is simply not the case, rather homelessness does not happen to anyone, anytime, but is largely determined by broader structural factors, in particular structural poverty, but the perception of homelessness as resulting from individual dysfunction and distress remains deeply embedded in the public understanding of homelessness.

This individualistic understanding of the causes of homelessness is perhaps one of the factors that has led to a multitude of ‘concerned citizens’, across Europe, North America and Australia, troubled by the extent of visible homelessness in their cities, coming together to provide ‘subsistence provision’ to homeless people ranging from soup, soap, sweets and showers to tea, toiletries, tampons and track-suits. Cameron Parsell and Beth Watts in their contribution to the EJM argue that firstly, such provision, albeit well-intentioned reflects a poverty of ambition to end homelessness through effective policies such as Housing First and Rapid

Re-Housing, and secondly, rather than simply viewing such interventions as benevolent, “careful and sustained attention needs to be given to whether the positive intentions of the giver achieve positive impacts for the receiver.”

This is the last print edition of the EJH as we will move to an online version only from 2018. The success of the online-first section of our website have prompted the move, allowing for more rapid dissemination of articles, think-pieces and reviews that we hope will inform policy and practice in ending homelessness.