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The European Journal of Homelessness provides a critical analysis of policy and practice on homelessness in Europe for policy makers, practitioners, researchers and academics. The aim is to stimulate debate on homelessness and housing exclusion at the European level and to facilitate the development of a stronger evidential base for policy development and innovation. The journal seeks to give international exposure to significant national, regional and local developments and to provide a forum for comparative analysis of policy and practice in preventing and tackling homelessness in Europe. The journal will also assess the lessons for Europe, which can be derived from policy, practice and research from elsewhere.

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Editorial

In September 2012, the 7th European Research Conference on Homelessness, entitled *Access to Housing for Homeless People in Europe* and organized by the European Observatory on Homelessness, the ENHR Working Group on Welfare Policy, Homelessness and Social Exclusion and the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York, was held in York. Nearly 20 papers were presented at this one-day conference, and they explored and discussed the experience in different jurisdictions of providing housing for homeless people. We are delighted to publish a select number of these papers in this edition of the *European Journal of Homelessness*.

The context for the conference was research undertaken by the European Observatory on Homelessness, which explored *Social Housing Allocation and Homelessness* (Pleace *et al*, 2011). This report, the first of a new series of comparative studies of aspects of homelessness undertaken by the Observatory, looked at the relationship between social housing and homelessness in 13 EU member states, examining how different strategic roles for social housing and varying allocation policies determine the role of social housing in tackling homelessness. The report identified the ways in which social housing can provide a housing solution for some groups of homeless people, while often playing little or no role in addressing the housing needs of other groups of homeless people.

More broadly, there is now overwhelming research evidence from a number of jurisdictions, that housing led-approaches are more effective in ending homelessness than the 'staircase' approach (Busch-Geertsema, 2013). The 'staircase' approach, with an emphasis on hostels/shelters and transitional housing as a means of making people housing ready, had muted, in part, the debate about access to housing, as the evidence indicated that very few homeless people progressed through the required stages to access permanent housing. Thus, as housing first/led approaches are gradually gaining acceptance across Europe amongst policy makers, and to a lesser degree service providers, access to housing for homeless people is emerging as a major challenge facing those attempting to implement housing led policies. In particular, the attitudes of some landlords (private, public and not-for profit providers) towards homeless people, who can be viewed as undesirable tenants who might present housing management problems, can be a significant obstacle to the provision of rented housing. In addition, tensions in urban policy may also create obstacles to housing for

homeless people, such as the desire of urban planners to avoid spatial concentrations of poverty, which can effectively constrict the access of homeless people to the most affordable areas of some cities.

Although there are many pressures on housing supply in the European Union, affordable and adequate housing is potentially available for homeless people and different models for the allocation of housing are evident. One model that has generated particular interest is the Scottish model, where existing legal rights, previously confined to only certain categories of homeless people within 'priority need' groups, have now been extended to every homeless person or household who is a citizen of Scotland and can show they are not 'intentionally' homeless. In the first article in this edition of the *European Journal of Homelessness*, Isobel Anderson reviews the final phase of implementation of the Scottish model. She argues that the essence of the right to settled accommodation was successfully achieved, but incremental policy adjustment has meant that outcomes for those facing homelessness varied somewhat from the highest aspirations of the original 2002 policy review. She concludes that the extent to which the strengthened legal framework represents a policy success over the long term, will depend on whether its continued implementation withstands the risk of 'policy blurring' in the most recent shift towards blending homelessness assessment, homelessness prevention activities and the broader assessment of the 'housing options' available to those seeking assistance.

In the second paper, Beth Watts also explores the Scottish model, and compares the rights based Scottish approach to the 'softer' consensual approach to ending long-term homelessness in the Republic of Ireland. Drawing on primary research with national experts, service providers and homeless men in both jurisdictions, the paper considers whether legal rights better meet the housing needs of homeless men than the Irish approach, and whether they help mitigate the stigma of homelessness. The paper argues that the rights-based approach developed in Scotland, in contrast to the consensual or negotiated problem-solving approach between key partners evident in Ireland, provides a blunt, but effective tool in prioritising housing needs, and helps minimise stigma by casting homeless people as rights-bearers with legitimate entitlements.

Rights based approaches also feature in the third paper, where in England, the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 provides a set of justiciable rights to homeless people, whereby local authorities have a duty to assist homeless people who meet a set of eligibility criteria set out in the Act. One of the criteria, 'vulnerability', often requires consideration of medical evidence. Homelessness officers are the key actors in deciding whether or not an applicant is 'vulnerable', and Joanne Bretherton, Caroline Hunter and Sarah Johnsen in their paper examine decision-

making in relation to the use of medical evidence in homelessness cases in England. The paper explores how homelessness officers assess the 'expert' medical evidence that is put to them, how far they rely on their own intuition and judgement, and the other factors that influence their ultimate decision.

Despite the emerging consensus on the effectiveness of housing first/led approaches, the implementation of this approach to homelessness has been slow across the European Union. In a case study of Sweden, Marcus Knutagård and Arne Kristiansen note that only seven of Sweden's 290 municipalities have started or decided to start a Housing First project. The article identifies the nature of existing service delivery to homeless people in Sweden, which is characterised by a path dependency, in which the 'staircase' model has become an institutionalised practise, as a key obstacle to the implementation of housing first approaches. Of the Swedish Housing First services that have developed, the core elements of the Housing First philosophy have been adopted, but the authors note that they are not exact replicas of the original New York model.

Moving from Sweden to Austria, the next paper outlines the findings and analysis of the evaluation of *Haus Felberstraße*; a project in Vienna that offers supported transitional housing for homeless families with the aim of securing accommodation in the private rented housing sector. The project was initiated with the goal of testing a new approach within homelessness services policy, since efforts in Vienna to rehouse homeless families have in the past often focused on accessing the municipal stock. Sofia Martinsson, Tatjana Weiß and Andrea Zierler note that while immediate effective social support with a strong goal-orientation can influence and improve the capacity of vulnerable families in terms of stable housing, structural factors like rising costs for housing, lack of housing and low income levels and risk of poverty remain which ultimately require increased levels of affordable housing.

The final paper in the edition takes a broad overview of homelessness policy and access to housing by analysing 147 State Party reports under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). By exploring the states' consideration of homelessness, Michael Kolocek discusses housing, particularly homelessness, in the face of human rights and then conceptually differentiates between two basic forms of inadequate housing: homelessness and Spaces of Inadequate Housing. In part, the author aims to situate his discussion of the human right to adequate housing with an enhanced discussion of land policy as social policy.

The next special edition of the European Journal of Homelessness will feature selected papers from the 8th European Research Conference on Homelessness, which takes place in Berlin on the 20th of September 2013. The theme of the conference, '*Housing First. What's Second?*', will further elaborate on the issues raised

in this edition of the Journal, and we hope that the Journal continues to provide a platform for informed debate on all aspects of homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe and further afield.

› References

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