
Editorial

At the launch of the publication of the Fourth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe by FEANTSA and the Fondation Abbé Pierre in March of this year, it was striking that the research by Chloé Serme-Morin and Sarah Coupechoux that underpinned the report, highlighted the ongoing extensive use of emergency accommodation for those currently experiencing homelessness across Europe, but also noted the long history of the provision of such accommodation. As the EIJ has noted in earlier editorials, although the popularity of congregate emergency and temporary accommodation as a response to homelessness has ebbed and flowed over the past 150 years, it has remained a constant presence, showing remarkable resilience, and remains the default position for responding to periodic surges in residential instability in the majority of EU member states. Such services are provided by municipal authorities, private for-profit providers, non-profit providers, with often the strong presence of religiously inspired organisations, and are heterogeneous in terms of size, staffing etc. Despite extensive critiques of the limitations of this form of congregate accommodation as a response to residential instability, and the largely negative experience of those who reside in such facilities, this form of congregate accommodation remains the single most significant intervention in the lives people experiencing homelessness in majority of Western countries – described in the Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe as ‘oversubscribed, insecure and unsuitable.’

Managing homelessness through the provision of emergency congregate is extraordinarily expensive, and a minority of shelter users also make extensive use of other expensive emergency health services, as they traverse through and ‘institutional circuit’ of short stays in various services without ever resolving their residential instability. Yet, it is not that we don’t know what services do work to break the circuit of residential instability. For example, in this edition of the EIJ, Mackie, Johnson and Wood provide an excellent overview of what works in ending street homelessness; while Anderberg and Dahlberg in their analysis of two Swedish cities starkly highlight the limitations of emergency responses to people experiencing homelessness, and stress instead the need for permanent supportive housing. The importance of good quality data in providing evidence-based solutions to those experiencing homelessness is highlighted in the research notes by Wirehag in the case of Sweden and by Demaerschalk and colleagues in the case of rural Belgium.

The EJH aims to be a platform for the dissemination of research, commentary and critique on how best to respond to people experiencing homelessness across the European Union. We hope that the mix of articles, think pieces, research notes and book reviews in this edition of the EJH continue to contribute to building an evidenced-based response to homelessness in Europe.