Editorial

As we near the end of another challenging year for those experiencing homelessness, the hope that mass vaccination across Europe would result in an end to the restrictions on social and economic activity that have characterised the past 18 months has receded, with a number of Member States introducing a new round of restrictions due to stubbornly high rates of infection, and in some cases rapidly rising Covid-19 case numbers. Familiar refrains to 'stay home', 'work from home' and to 'stay safe' are current once again; refrains that we hoped could be consigned to the past as we move into 2022 are regrettably to be heard across the European Union and beyond. Although extraordinarily difficult to predict what will transpire in 2022, the fact that at an individual, familial and societal level we continue to struggle to contain Covid-19, two things seem reasonably certain: firstly, Covid-19 and its variants will be with us for some time to come, and secondly, responses to Covid-19 and its variants fundamentally emphasise the centrality of secure housing to stay safe and to participate in social and economic activity.

Although seemingly self-evident, the experience of homelessness is fundamentally the absence of secure housing; that is housing which is affordable, provides security of tenure and a sense of safety, often referred to as ontological security. This fundamental understanding of homelessness is of-times lost in the cacophony of 'public noise' that understands homelessness variously as a consequence, for example, of mental ill-health, addiction and individual dysfunction. This is not to disregard those who experience homelessness and mental ill-health for example, but rather to emphasise that effectively meeting the needs of those who experience homelessness and mental-ill health is best done through the provision of secure housing as evidenced by the now robust outcomes from Housing First trials in Europe and North America.

Given the alignment of robust research evidence that points to secure housing as he most effective response to homelessness, and the realisation of just how fundamental secure housing is to protecting households from Covid-19 and its current and future variants, the provision of secure, sustainable and eco-friendly housing must be a political priority in Europe and beyond. However, despite the now considerable evidence base on how both to prevent and end homelessness, the political responses have not always aligned with the research, although the launch in June 2021 of the *European Platform on Combatting Homelessness* is a promising new development with the aim of ending homelessness in EU Members States by 2030.

The issue of mobilising political support to drive evidence based policy responses is highlighted in the paper by Nelson and colleagues in this edition of the *European Journal of Homelessness* where researchers from North America and Europe have attempted to understand the mechanisms that social scientists can use to influence public policy. Using the framework developed by John Kingdon which sees policy change requiring convergence across three streams; the problems stream, the policy stream and political stream, Nelson and colleagues contend that social scientists have been successful in reframing homelessness as primarily a structural issue rather than viewing homelessness as rooted in individual dysfunction requiring treatment of various hues (the problem stream). Their research has demonstrated that the most effective policy response is the provision of housing, with support if necessary (the policy stream), but social scientists have not successfully shifted the political response to homelessness on a sustained basis. Even in countries such as Sweden, where historically, State intervention and investment in secure housing was considerable, as Anna Granath Hansson highlights in her valuable paper, even where local municipalities have admirable strategies to provide housing for vulnerable populations, increasingly tight housing market has put strategies under considerable pressure in some localities resulting in restrictions of eligibility.

Moving from the macro to the micro, In their contribution, Nadia Ayed and colleagues seek to discern sources of support for those experiencing homelessness, in particular through adopting a social capital lens, how people with experiences of homelessness understand their community and what aspects are important to them. They highlight the diversity of experiences of community, of power relations in the provision of services, and importantly, the dark side of community whereby those experiencing homelessness are increasingly excluded from accessing public services. Sam Ross-Brown and Gerard Leavey also explore the contextual structures that shape pathways into homelessness amongst young people in Northern Ireland, showing how the limiting structures, adverse experiences, and inequality they have endured are internalised and perpetuated resulting in the normalising of isolation and instability. Sally Mann provides a fascinating ethnographic insight into the experiences of number of adults experiencing homelessness at a circle of six benches in an innocuous urban park in East Ham, East London during the first phase of lockdown in the UK, where witnessed their communality in a site over which they managed to retain a level of control.

In this edition

Other contributions to this edition of the *European Journal of Homelessness* include a first ever overview of homelessness in Turkey, review essays exploring neo-liberalism and Housing First, ethnographic methods and homelessness as well as reviews of individuals books (and films!). As ever, we hope the diverse readership of the *European Journal of Homelessness* find these contributions to our knowledge of the experience of homelessness, the policy and practice responses that can end homelessness stimulating and constructive and can contribute to the realisation of ending homelessness in the European Union by 2030.