

# Barriers to the Obvious

Understanding Uneven Progress in Developing and  
Delivering Integrated Homelessness Strategies

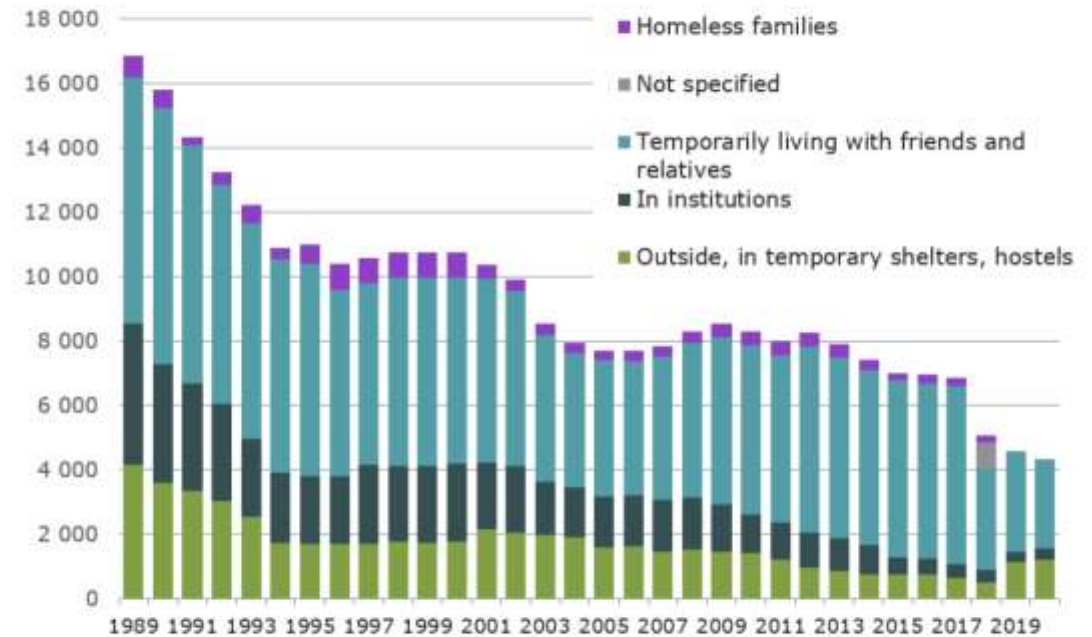
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# Finland

- There is a strategic model that, while not perfect, nevertheless works
- Early days for some EU-27, but strategies that emulate, reflect and build upon the Finnish approach tend to do better
- It is not a simple matter of the Finns just spending more than comparable countries

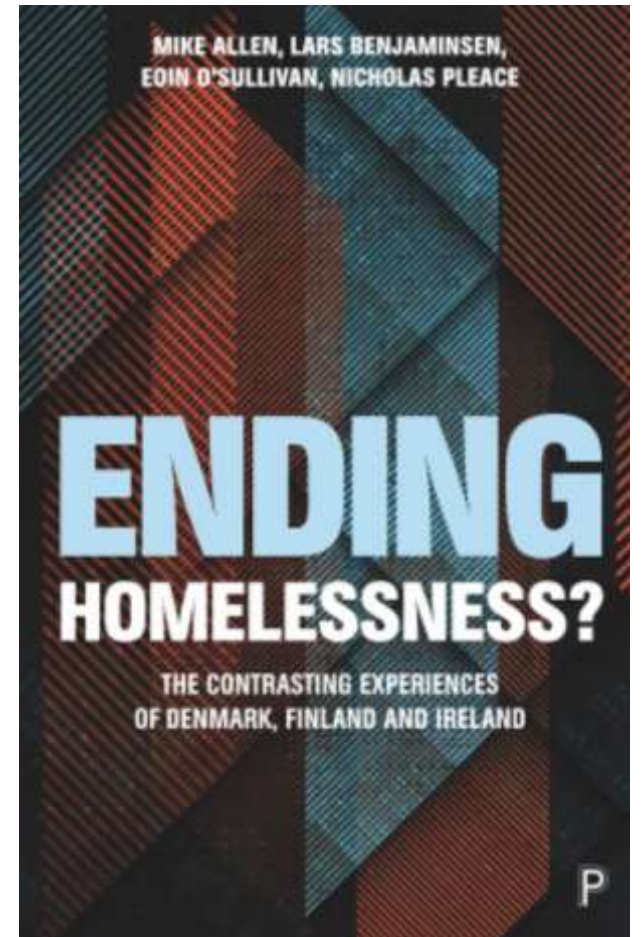


Homelessness in Finland 1989–2020.

Source: ARA, 2022

# Comparing similar EU-27 Member States

- Denmark, Finland and Ireland have been compared by colleagues from EOH and myself
- European countries that were similar economically and demographically but there were significant differences in the management of homelessness
- All three countries were spending at similar levels in trying to prevent and reduce homelessness, but outcomes were not the same
- Why was Finland ahead?



# Global comparisons

- Recent review of Irish national strategy
- Again looking at EU-27
- And now separate UK experiences
  - Outside EU
  - Different policies England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- North American and wider global experience



# Service mapping

- Research and consultancy looking at the implementation of Housing First at local and strategic level in the UK
- And at funding and commissioning structures for homelessness services in the UK





# Service mapping

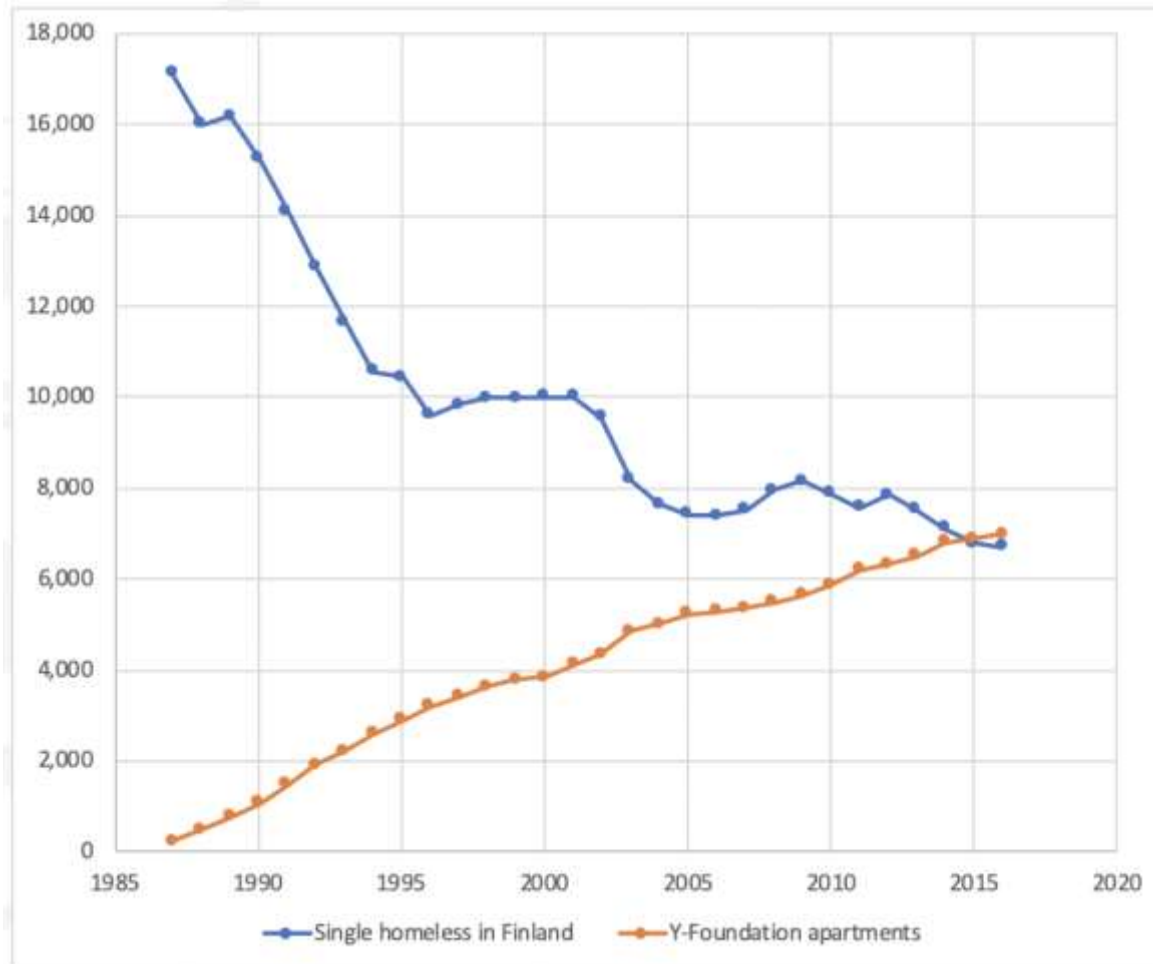
- Research and consultancy looking at the implementation of Housing First at local and strategic level in Europe
- Mapping of homelessness services, systems and structures across the EU-27 with colleagues at EOH
  - Mix of services
  - Staffing, regulation
  - Financing
  - Systems including local connection



# What needs to be in place

- Sufficient, affordable - ideally social - housing supply
- Full integration of public health, mental health, addiction, criminal justice, youth and social care/social services, social landlords, domestic abuse services, supported housing and the homelessness sector
- Evidence supports **housing-led, Housing First** interventions for people with multiple and complex needs, within system that also **maximises prevention** and offers sufficient social protection to minimise the risk of homelessness and housing exclusion being **generated by poverty**

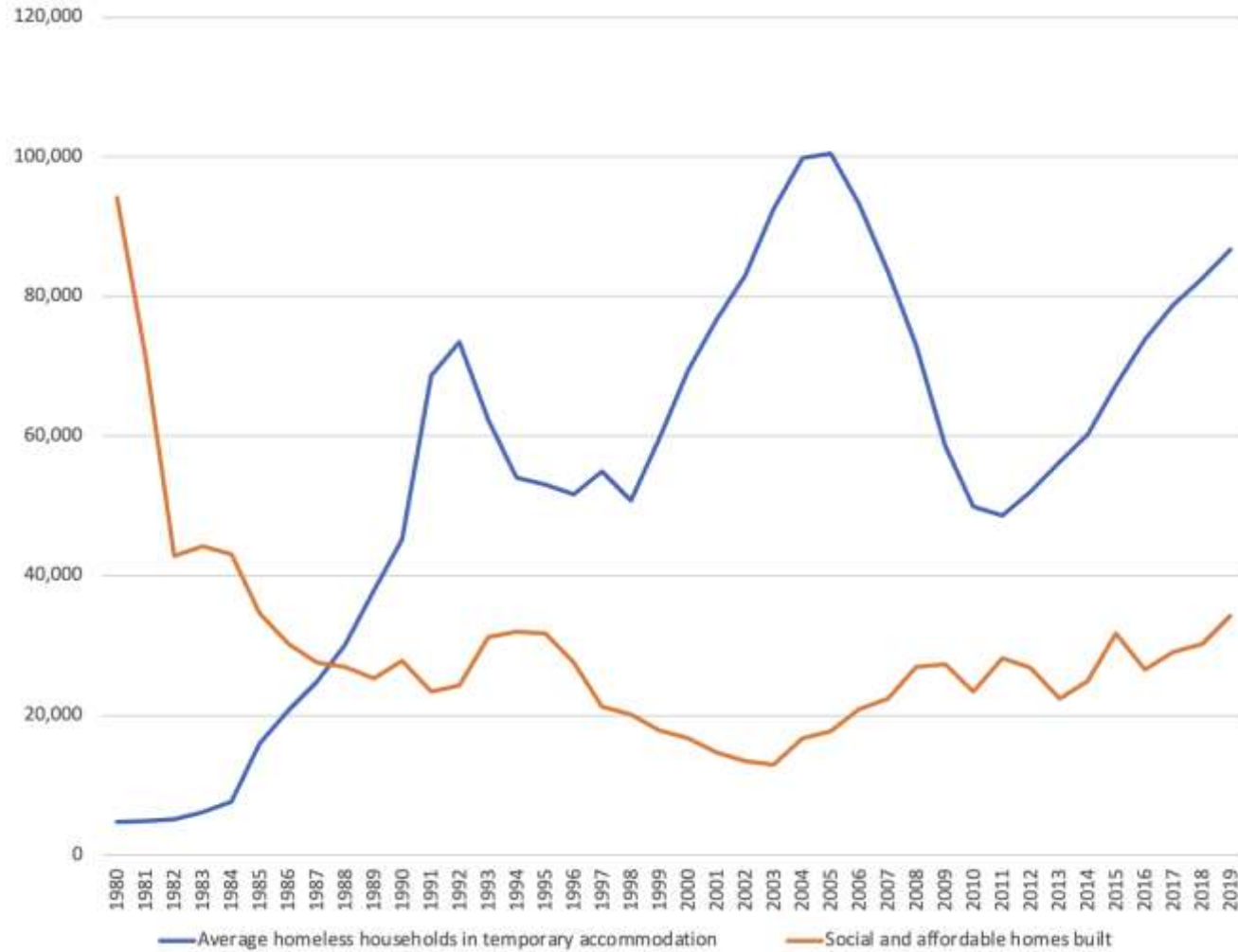
# Finland



Source: ARA

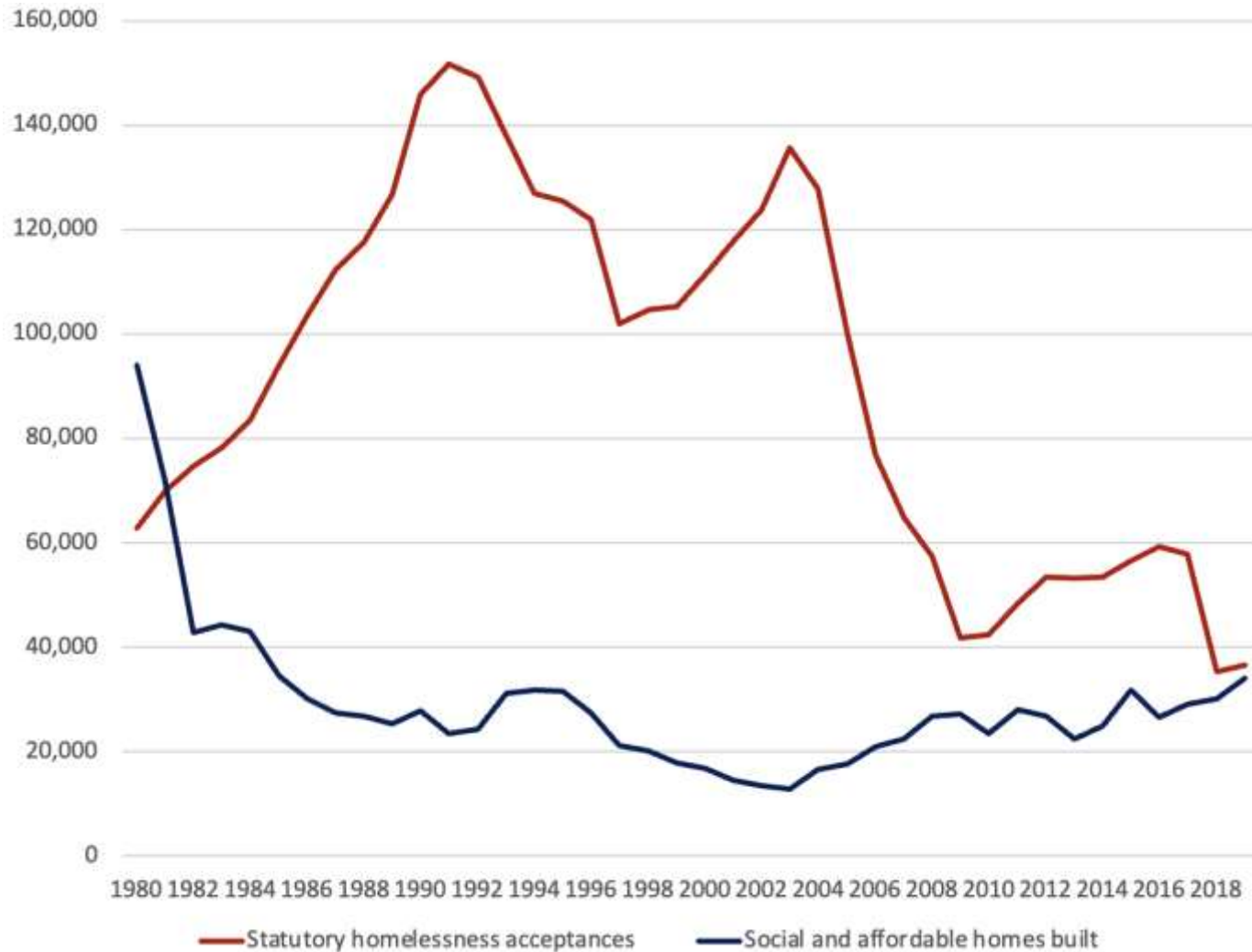


# England



Source: DLUHC

# England



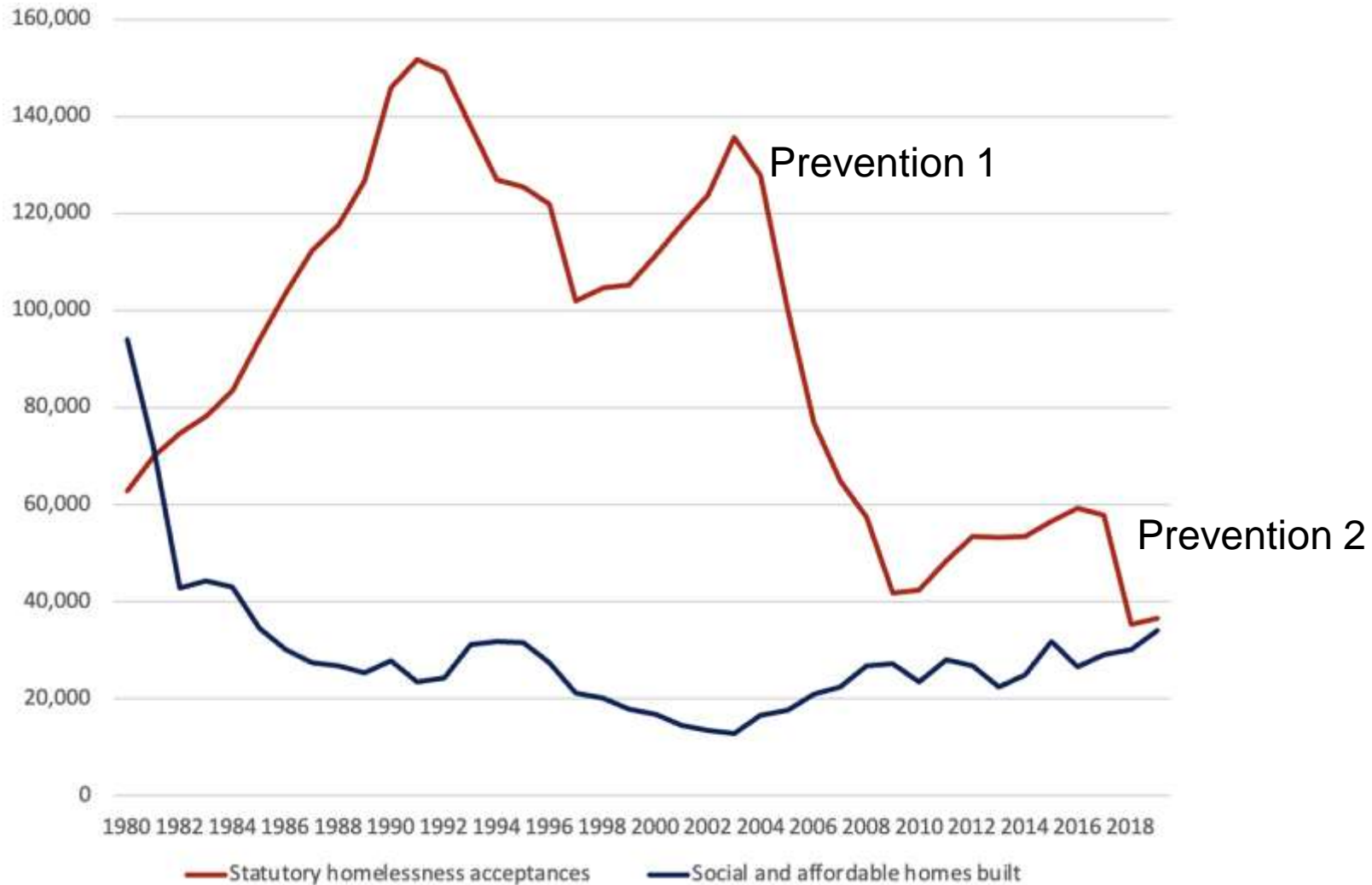
Source: DLUHC

# Housing matters most, strategy matters too

- Housing supply is the sine qua non of an effective homelessness strategy
- Juha Kaakinen *You can't have Housing First without housing, first.*
- Without the right level and sort of housing supply cascade failure in even the most effectively engineered, integrated and tested systems, from prevention to Housing First
- But other aspects of policy and strategy matter, the wrong policy mix and bad strategy can make homelessness worse and *waste resources*



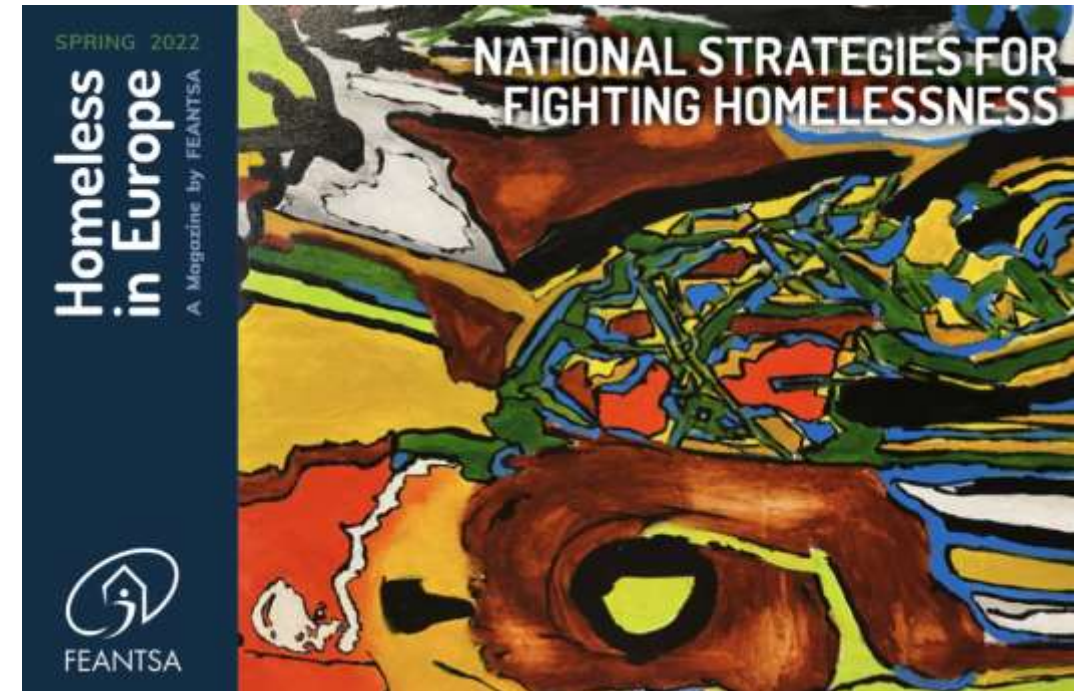
# England



Source: DLUHC

# Five ways to cause and perpetuate homelessness

- Individual pathology
  - ‘Scientific’ service design
  - Recognising inequality
- Dispersed innovation
  - The perpetual pilot
- Emergency
  - Shelters and temporary accommodation
- Bad data
  - Definition and measurement
- Irrational outcomes
  - The quickly perfect citizen





# Individual Pathology

- Homelessness is ‘explained’ by individual characteristics, experiences, actions and choices
- At its most crude, after Gowan, as ‘sin’ (addiction) and ‘sickness’ (mental illness)
- Currently: inequality plays a role, but some people with certain characteristics are inherently more at risk, sometimes combined with the idea that saying homelessness is ‘structural’ fails to recognise the human beings who experience it





# Individual Pathology

- By this logic, services that reduce ‘sin’ and ‘sickness’ are most effective in ending homelessness
- And those services can be scientifically selected by testing their effects on ‘sick’ and ‘sinful’ people who become homeless, i.e. behavioural modification, including treatment compliance
- But this idea of homelessness is *not real*, let alone representative, services and strategies are being built not around who people experiencing homelessness are, but a false construct, a distorted and unrepresentative image
- So of course, it does not work – and most dangerous of all – it is used to frame misconceived criticism of services that do work in ending homelessness, like Housing First for not ‘fixing’ the ‘problems’ that supposedly characterise people experiencing homelessness: *Trumpian attacks on Housing First*



# Dispersed innovation

- Pilot, pilot, pilot, pilot...
- Housing First is often a pilot, a service developed for a specific group, to test the idea...
- It is not a philosophy, not an ethos that runs through the entirety of an integrated homelessness strategy, which is what has happened in Finland
- Innovation does not work when it is cut off, separated from, or stuck alongside a wider system or set of services that do not share its logic or philosophy
- Canada: Housing First and a lot of shelters...



# Emergency only

- Shelters on their own, tend not to work
- Some people self exit, but often back into populations experiencing sustained housing exclusion and precarity, which is where people experiencing homelessness tend to come from
- Others get stuck, and once its been any amount of time, they need Housing First to get out of homelessness



# Emergency only

- Overflow use of hotels, B&B, workers' hostels, caravans etc can quickly get out of control
- France and UK are at the extremes, but it is present elsewhere, e.g. Ireland
- Caused by insufficient adequate, affordable housing supply and homelessness services being overwhelmed
- No-one anywhere seems to think this is a good idea and it costs a fortune, but once you start it is very difficult to stop, because the bigger it becomes the greater and greater the cost and time needed to fix it – *EOH research will be out later this year* -



# Bad data

- If you do not count 'hidden' homelessness you are not counting homelessness
  - Women and children
  - Sofa surfing young people
  - Structural homelessness
- Rough sleeper counts are very narrow and very dodgy: bad representation of need, spatial errors
- Administrative errors: losing homelessness in domestic abuse and other services



# Bad data

- You aren't reducing homelessness if you reduce the number of people sleeping rough
- You're reducing the number of people sleeping rough – good - but that *isn't homelessness*, it is one small aspect of homelessness
- If you cut the number of people in shelters or temporary accommodation – good – but again that isn't all homelessness...





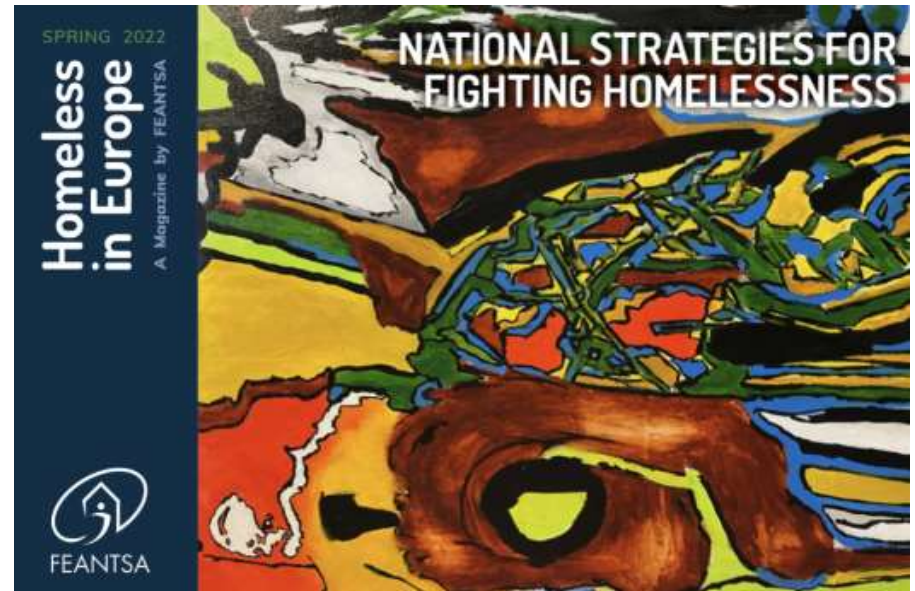
# Irrational Outcomes

- Goes back to the ideas of individual pathology
- Homelessness and people experiencing homelessness are seen as conditions of deep poverty, unmet needs and inequality to be *corrected*
- People experiencing homelessness have to be *willing to change* (fading a little with Housing First)
- And/or people experiencing homelessness have to exit any risk of recurrent homelessness
- Outcome measures, like the Outcomes Star and others, set 'targets' that require a degree of economic engagement, citizenship, community spirit, well judged and positive personal and familial relationships and personal organisation that *is not attainable by normal, housed humans*
- Dangerous: because this can set irrational goals for human beings who have become homeless and the services designed to meet their needs, we don't expect other social issues to just *end*



# We can fix this...

- The core message centres on what we need to let go of
- What we must move beyond
- The detail of how to get housing-led prevention, reduction and multiagency engagement within a shared 'Housing First' philosophy will always be complicated, but it can be done, in fact it *is* being done
- And yes, no Housing First without housing, first, nothing but failure will arise, no matter what the services or strategy, without sufficient supply of the right housing



# Thanks for listening

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