

At the outbreak of the pandemic in Europe in early 2020, public authorities acted quickly to implement measures that would protect their populations. Among these were measures intended to protect homeless people - a high-risk group in terms of both transmission and health impact of the disease. The conversion of some night shelters into 24/7 shelters, the effort to provide single occupancy rooms, and the use of hotel rooms to accommodate rough sleepers all contributed to preventing coronavirus outbreaks among homeless populations. Meanwhile, eviction moratoria, rent breaks, and furlough schemes were rolled out to prevent new inflow into homelessness.

While some measures were punitive or exclusionary - as Malgorzata Sienczyk illustrates in her article from Poland, the call to “stay home” could feel like a mockery to those without one - others had a positive impact and should be built upon in the medium and longer term to better address homelessness.

Beyond simply protecting homeless people from the virus, some measures provided better responses and solutions to homelessness than those that were being implemented before the pandemic. Take for example the case of Ireland; Focus Ireland is able to show in their

article that the number of homeless families dropped every month for which there was a moratorium on evictions. Similarly, Crisis points to the huge reduction in street homelessness that was achieved by removing eligibility criteria for accessing homeless services in the UK. The pandemic showed us that we could improve the way we addressed homelessness. Responding to this, FEANTSA released a statement in August 2021 entitled [‘The way we address homelessness in Europe must change in the wake of the pandemic,’](#) which put forward several recommendations for quick wins and longer-term changes that should (and sometimes could easily) be adopted by building on the momentum of pandemic policies.

By the summer of 2021, a large and growing part of the European population was vaccinated. Despite the double advantage for homeless people of many of the policies introduced in the initial phases of the pandemic, this gearshift saw many of these measures come to an end, or at least threatened their continuation. Deborah K Padgett describes how, in New York, “hotel residents were moved en masse back to crowded shelters in June 2021.” But it makes no sense to go back to the old normal. Reversing measures that have proven to benefit homeless people and reduce homelessness is counterproductive and, where retrogressive measures are prohibited, a violation of human rights.

# EDITORIAL



By **Ruby Silk**, Communications and Information Officer, FEANTSA

In September 2021, FEANTSA launched our #RoomInTheRecovery campaign, with the aim of keeping pressure on national, local and regional public authorities to maintain effective measures for homeless people that had been implemented during the pandemic and to use their recovery plans and budgets as an opportunity to improve homelessness policies.

The campaign's central tool is the [Recovery Watch](#) monitor which tracks policy developments across Europe and holds them up as examples on social media, in addition to compiling them in our campaign page. The Recovery Watch tool has allowed us to expose some worrying developments - measures are often ended with much less fanfare than that with which they were introduced - and also to give a platform to those more promising.

While the Recovery Watch monitor is a useful way to flag the termination of individual measures, it isn't able (or intended) to give a comprehensive overview of the situation in any given country, or to illustrate the cumulative impact of measures and policy developments during the recovery period on homelessness or on the lives of people experiencing homelessness and working in the sector. We hoped this magazine - an extension of the campaign - could deliver broader insight into these developments and their impact, while allowing room for interpretation (there is room in the recovery for interpretation!) from our contributors. Indeed, the interpretation by our member Provienda of the impact of measures approved by the Spanish government to mitigate housing problems during the pandemic provides important

building blocks for the recovery, particularly in the light of Spain's new housing law and bigger than ever budget. Likewise, the analysis by Jules van Dam and Guusta van der Zwaard of how Covid-19 measures improved quality standards of homeless services in the Netherlands can feed usefully into a fledgling Dutch national housing first strategy.

Of course, no overview of developments across Europe would be complete without a pan-European perspective. This perspective is offered in our interview with the European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit, with which we close this issue. The recently launched (June 2021) European Platform for Combatting Homelessness and the Commission's recovery plans and budget provide plenty of scope for taking big steps towards ending homelessness. We spoke to the Commissioner to find out more about the Commission's ambitions in terms of homelessness, as well as whether he truly thought ending homelessness by 2030, as set out in the Lisbon Declaration which underpins the Platform, is possible.

While the future remains unclear, what is certain, as we head into 2022 with surging cases of the Omicron variant, is that there will be no going back to normal. A silver lining of the pandemic in its initial phases was seeing the progress that could be made in addressing homelessness when the issue was met with political will and a sense of urgency. We hope that this collection of articles is able to contribute to painting a picture of what works and what doesn't and to convince public authorities at all levels that there is room in the recovery to end homelessness.

