

European Observatory on Homelessness

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Journal Philosophy

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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Content

Editorial	9
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Articles

Evelyn Dyb

Counting Homelessness and Politics: The Case of Norway	15
--	----

Veera Niemi and Elina Ahola

Pathways between Housing and Homelessness of Young Income Support Recipients in Helsinki, Finland	39
--	----

Think Pieces

Cameron Parsell and Beth Watts

Charity and Justice: A Reflection on New Forms of Homelessness Provision in Australia	65
--	----

Ligia Teixeira

Why We Need to Change the Way We Talk about Homelessness	77
--	----

Strategy Reviews

Nicholas Pleace

The Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016-2019: The Culmination of an Integrated Strategy to End Homelessness?	95
---	----

Beth Watts and Suzanne Fitzpatrick

Ending Homelessness Together in Northern Ireland: A Unique Challenge	117
--	-----

Koen Hermans

A Flemish Strategy to Combat Homelessness	135
---	-----

Research Notes

Aris Sapounakis and Ioanna Katapidi

Evictions from Primary Residences in Greece: Methodological Concerns
Regarding the Collection of Data from Civil Courts' Records for Tenancies 149

Kateřina Glumbíková and Dana Nedělníková

Experiencing a Stay in a Shelter in the Context of a Lack of Social Housing 163

Book Reviews

John Sylvestre, Geoffrey Nelson and Tim Aubry (Eds.) (2017)

Housing, Citizenship, and Communities for People with Serious
Mental Illness. Theory, Research, Practice and Policy Perspectives. 177

Paula Mayock and Joanne Bretherton (Eds.) (2016)

Women's Homelessness in Europe 183

Kate Moss and Paramjitv Singh (2015)

Women Rough Sleepers in Europe:
Homelessness and Victims of Domestic Abuse 187

Editorial

Somewhat paradoxically, as the numbers of homeless people are rising in many EU Member States, there is greater optimism than ever before that homelessness can be ended. A key reason for this optimism is that our knowledge of what works in preventing and ending homelessness has advanced significantly over the past decade. Methodologically robust research has demonstrated the success of rapid-rehousing programs when people are threatened with homelessness, and of Housing First programs that consistently show high rates of housing retention for formerly long-term dual diagnosed homeless people. In their respective contributions to this edition of the *European Journal of Homelessness*, Evelyn Dyb and Nicholas Pleace describe and interpret recent substantial reductions in homelessness in Norway, and the ongoing decline in Finland. Whether the recent decline in Norway is indicative of a longer-term trend due to the adoption of housing led policies, or a temporary decline, remains to be seen, but Dyb provides strong evidence for an optimistic interpretation. However, in the case of Finland, an early adopter of housing led policies to end homelessness, the long-term decline in homelessness is unequivocal, leading Pleace to assert that Finland 'is approaching a point at which recurrent and long-term homelessness will be nearly eradicated and experience of any form of homelessness will become uncommon.'

Recent homelessness strategies in Northern Ireland and in Flanders are explored respectively by Beth Watts and Suzanne Fitzpatrick, and Koen Hermans. In the case of Northern Ireland, Watts and Fitzpatrick laud the emphasis placed on recognising and addressing hidden homelessness, but lament the failure of the strategy to fully embrace a Housing First approach to ending homelessness. Hermans, in his contribution notes the significance of recent policy initiatives that aim for an integrated housing led approach to ending homelessness in Flanders. Regrettably, no clear monitoring system to measure the impact of the initiatives is provided for, and Hermans argues persuasively for the provision of robust, reliable and timely data to demonstrate what is, and is not, working in the recent progressive initiatives.

Different members states use different sources of data to measure the nature and extent of homelessness, and hence to determine whether or not homelessness is increasing or decreasing, but administrative data is increasingly viewed as a powerful source of reliable and timely data. In their contribution to the EJH, Veera Niemi and Elina Ahola provide a valuable example of how combining different

administrative data sources in Helsinki generated a rich data set that allowed for the analysis of homeless pathways amongst young people. Methodological and data issues are also raised by Aris Sapounakis and Ioanna Katapid, who outline the process whereby they gathered data on evictions in Greece, thus providing the first estimates for the extent of evictions from primary residences. In addition, they provide a clear analysis of the difficulties and limitations of using largely survey-based methodologies to capture the details of evictions in Greece.

Our knowledge of the costs of maintaining people in homelessness, *via* the provision of congregate emergency and temporary accommodation demonstrate that it is both fiscally responsible and ethically justifiable to provide evidence-based housing responses to homelessness, with support where necessary, based on the financial costs to the Exchequer, and damage to the capabilities and productivity of individuals, if their homelessness is not ended. Kateřina Glumbíková and Dana Nedělníková provide a further case study of the limits of shelter-based approaches to managing homelessness, in this instance, an analysis of five shelters for lone-mothers in Ostrava in the Czech Republic. In their nuanced account, Glumbíková and Nedělníková carefully outline the perspectives of the different parties in the shelters, recognising that for some users, shelters offer support, but ultimately, are impotent in the face of a lack of affordable housing.

How we think about homelessness is often determined by the images of homeless people portrayed by the media and NGOs. Lígia Teixeira argues in her contribution that the media and NGOs need to change the way in which they present homeless people, as the current depiction of homelessness induces a sense of fatalism that homelessness could ever be ended. This is as a consequence of a of thinking of homelessness as individual issue that could strike at anyone, anytime, and hence, beyond the power of any Government to change. The readers of the EJH know that this is simply not the case, rather homelessness does not happen to anyone, anytime, but is largely determined by broader structural factors, in particular structural poverty, but the perception of homelessness as resulting from individual dysfunction and distress remains deeply embedded in the public understanding of homelessness.

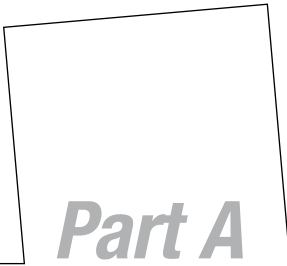
This individualistic understanding of the causes of homelessness is perhaps one of the factors that has led to a multitude of ‘concerned citizens’, across Europe, North America and Australia, troubled by the extent of visible homelessness in their cities, coming together to provide ‘subsistence provision’ to homeless people ranging from soup, soap, sweets and showers to tea, toiletries, tampons and track-suits. Cameron Parsell and Beth Watts in their contribution to the EJH argue that firstly, such provision, albeit well-intentioned reflects a poverty of ambition to end homelessness through effective policies such as Housing First and Rapid

Re-Housing, and secondly, rather than simply viewing such interventions as benevolent, “careful and sustained attention needs to be given to whether the positive intentions of the giver achieve positive impacts for the receiver.”

This is the last print edition of the EJH as we will move to an online version only from 2018. The success of the online-first section of our website have prompted the move, allowing for more rapid dissemination of articles, think-pieces and reviews that we hope will inform policy and practice in ending homelessness.



Articles



Part A

Counting Homelessness and Politics: The Case of Norway

Evelyn Dyb¹

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➤ **Abstract_** *The Norwegian Government has commissioned six homeless censuses since 1996. The most recent census was conducted in 2016. During the first decade the censuses were irregular, however since 2008 a national homeless census every fourth year is more or less the established rule. The censuses offer time series data on the extent and profile of the homeless population on a national scale over the period of 20 years. The first census, in 1996, prompted the very first national homeless initiative, succeeded by other national homeless initiatives. From the first to the second homeless census in 2003 levels of homelessness dropped, but after that the figures rose slightly but steadily until 2008 and remained stable until 2012. The most recent census in 2016 showed a considerable drop in the number of homeless persons. This article argues that there exists a close linkage between the census results and the governmental initiatives to prevent and counteract homelessness. The decrease can be explained by long-term efforts to alleviate homelessness. However, the institutional embeddedness in the housing policy area is just as important as the outline of the strategies and programs.*

➤ **Key words_** *homeless policy, measuring homelessness in Norway, homeless census, housing policy*

¹ The author has been involved in five of the six surveys and was project manager of the latest three (2008, 2012 and 2016).

Introduction

Comparing homelessness data between states and regions is a challenging task. The European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS)² has challenged and tried to bridge both the theoretical and operational gap between the diverging concepts of homelessness throughout Europe. ETHOS has not yet resulted in directly comparable figures across European countries, but ETHOS has brought about knowledge of how homelessness is defined and measured in a European context (Edgar *et al.*, 2004). There is still little consensus about who should be counted as homeless outside of the groups of visible rough sleepers (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014).

Despite the lack of agreement on the concept and comparable operational definitions, there is little doubt that the Nordic countries belong to the lower end of the scale measuring the homeless population. Three Nordic countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden use almost the same definitions (the differences are few and minimal) and methods for measuring homelessness. Up to a certain point in time, the figures in all three countries have continued to rise. Denmark are still experiencing an increase in the homeless population (Benjaminsen, 2017), while publication of the results from the last Swedish census is expected at the end of 2017. Up until 2011, the homeless figures in Sweden had grown. Unlike Denmark, the homeless figures in Norway flattened out between 2008 and 2012, before a considerable drop in the number of homeless individuals from 2012 to 2016. The stagnation displayed by the 2012 figures succeeded a decade of steady rise in the homeless population (Dyb and Lid, 2017).

Politically, the Nordic countries have to some extent shaped and implemented similar homeless strategies and programs to prevent and alleviate homelessness (Benjaminsen and Dyb, 2008). Similarities in approaches and measures are also found between the Nordic countries, the countries in UK and Ireland (Benjaminsen *et al.*, 2009). With the exception of Finland, no other country in Europe has experienced a decrease in the number of homeless people during the last decade.

The aim of this paper is to analyze and assess features of Norwegian institutions and homeless policies that may explain the decrease in homelessness, which actually started around 2012 and became evident in 2016. The next part of the article offers an explanation and discussion of the homeless survey; the definition of homelessness and the methods of the homeless survey and an assessment of the validity and reliability of the study conducted in 2016. The final part analyses

² ETHOS was developed by the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH).

homeless initiatives during the last two decades and concludes with an analysis of the connections between the national initiatives, institutional embeddedness of the policy and the (political) role of the homeless censuses.

Measuring Homelessness

With the sixth and most recent census carried out in 2016, comparable measurement of homelessness in Norway covers a time series of 20 years. The very first national homeless census conducted in 1996 employed the definition of homelessness and the method used in Sweden in 1993. This definition of homelessness is based on positions in the housing market or rather positions outside the market and in short reads as following: A person is considered homeless if he/she has no privately owned or rented accommodation and is in one of these situations: Reliant on occasional or temporary lodging, lives temporarily with friends, acquaintances or relatives, lives in an institution or in a correctional facility and is due to be discharged or released within two months without access to accommodation, or sleeps rough/has no place to sleep. Persons who live permanently with next of kin or in sublet accommodation are not considered homeless. The situations listed above are further operationalized and exemplified in the survey. Compared to many European countries, in particular those recognising only rough sleeping and persons staying in facilities for homeless people, this represents a wide definition. The largest group of homeless individuals found in all homeless surveys are those staying temporarily with friends, acquaintances or relatives, also including “sofa surfers”. The survey does not necessarily catch all households and persons that are doubling up due to lack of a dwelling of ones own. In order to be registered as homeless, the household must present the housing issue for a welfare authority. The study is cross sectional showing the number and profile of the homeless population in a time window of one week (usually week 48).

Information about the homeless population is gathered through an individual questionnaire. The questionnaires, one for each homeless person, are answered by a wide range of services in contact with homeless people. The main respondent group is the municipal social services³ supplemented with other services in larger municipalities. Others groups of respondents cover departments in health institutions, prisons, NGOs and other private agencies that provide services for homeless people. The respondent choses whether to answer the questionnaire together with the homeless person or not. Most respondents chose not to contact the homeless person. For quite a few respondents this is not a real choice, because a substantial number of the homeless clients, patients or service users are not in contact with

³ Social Services in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV).

the service during the specific week. By Norwegian legislation, every individual possesses information about him-/herself given to an authority, and both for research and other purposes consent should be obtained from the data owner before they are handed out to a third party. Conducting the homeless surveys under these conditions is hardly possible, because the group is hard to reach and, additionally, if only those individuals that agreed to share information were counted, the surveys would suffer from serious shortages. Five state bodies, representing the professional fields among the respondents, and the Norwegian Centre for Research Data has granted exception from client confidentiality, which is essential for carrying through the survey.

Validity and reliability

Validity of the survey, whether the survey measures the extent (number) and profile of the homeless population in the actual time window, depends largely on three steps of the research project. The first step consists of mapping and collecting the respondent group. The list of respondents from the previous census is useful as a starting point, but extensive revisions have always been essential. The list of respondents refers to the agencies that constitute the respondent group. Some major public welfare reforms during the 20 years of homeless surveys have changed the organization of the municipal health and welfare service as well as altered the institutional systems on state level. Responsibility for services has also shifted between administrative levels. Securing validity on the first step involves identifying the services that are in contact with and/or have knowledge of homeless persons.

The second step concerns the response rate. The response rate varies by the groups of respondents and by size of the municipality. The municipal social services are responsible for providing temporary accommodation and have a duty to assist with finding a permanent dwelling for those who need assistance⁴. Additionally, the social services represent the last security net of the welfare state, on which a substantial proportion of the homeless individuals depend, and are often the gate keeper to other services. Securing a high response rate from the social services, minimum 80%, is emphasized by the research team. Other respondent groups, although reporting fewer homeless individuals, register homeless individuals not captured by the social services. The response rate among these groups varies between 30 and 60%. The response rate among municipalities falls proportionate with the population size of the municipality: The largest municipalities are far better covered than the smaller (by end of 2016, Norway had 428 municipalities ranging from 600 000 to 200 population). The research team also prioritize reminders and

⁴ The Social Service Act in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV).

direct contact with the larger municipalities during the registration. The number of homeless individuals is weighted to compensate for fallouts in municipalities with less than 40 000 population.

A third consideration deals with whether the respondents that answer the survey report all individuals known to be homeless during the time window of one week. The researchers deal with the issue by comparing the number of homeless individuals against the numbers from the previous survey. As mentioned, the larger municipalities are contacted, and in case of a sharp drop or other reasons to question the result, the issue is discussed. Follow up on smaller municipalities is prioritized as far as there is the capacity within the project.

Are all the individuals experiencing homelessness in the time window of the survey captured? Most likely not. The issue concerning the validity of the survey is, however, whether the proportion of “dark figures” varies between the six surveys. The response rate and fall-outs shows minimal variation between the surveys. In the last survey (2016), the decrease in homelessness is most substantial in some of the municipalities with the highest response rate. Larger municipalities have more than one and some have many respondents, some with a coordinated effort and one person in charge. Some of the municipalities with a considerable decrease in homelessness were previously among those with a relatively (to the population) high rate, and which have worked on homelessness in a long-term perspective.

The reliability of the survey depends on its ability to produce the same results if repeating the survey under exact similar conditions. In reality, the conditions varies and are influenced by public reforms and other structural causes out of control of the authorities. An example of the latter is a specific impact of the financial crisis on the housing market in 2007 and 2008. Although Norway escaped the severe negative impact on the long run, the crisis caused a certain insecurity in the housing market and a delay among the cohorts that normally should move from the rental to the owner market. The inflow to the rental market continued “as normal”, causing pressure, increased prices and fewer vacant dwellings. This chain of events had negative consequences for vulnerable households.⁵

⁵ The issue is discussed in the evaluation of the homeless strategy, *The Pathway to a Permanent Home 2005-2007* (Dyb et al., 2008).

The Reduction of Homelessness in 2016

The homeless survey is expected to be systematic biased, because the most important and known error-source is dark figures; homeless individuals not captured by the survey. The comprehensive respondent group results in a certain amount of double counts, which are identified and taken out. Double counts are indirectly identified. Due to strict personal data protection legislation in Norway, personal identification is restricted to the individual's initials (first name and surname), the date of birth (not the month) and the year of birth. Matching cases are controlled for gender, home municipality and eventually other characteristics before decision about deleting cases. An essential issue is whether or to which extent the decrease noted in 2016 reflects a real decrease in homelessness or is better explained by biases of the survey. The sharp drop in the number of homeless people in 2016 led to a careful scrutinizing of the method, the implementation of the survey and the collected data. One major change, not in the method, but in the organizing of the project in 2016, is the inclusion of all municipalities. In the five previous surveys a representative selection of municipalities below 40 000 population was included.⁶ The fall outs among respondents are higher in smaller municipalities. However, the smaller municipalities, although high in number, report a very limited proportion of the homeless population.

Table 1. Number of homeless persons (No.) and homeless per 1000 inhabitants (1000 pop.) in four groups of municipalities and the total, all censuses.

Municip. by pop.	2016 No.	2012 No.	2008 No.	2005 No.	2003 No.	1996 No. ⁷	2016 1000 pop.	2012 1000 pop.	2008 1000 pop.	2005 1000 pop.	2003 1000 pop.	1996 1000 pop.
4 cities	1691	2637	2632	2419	2604	3843	1.35	2.23	2.36	2.42	2.56	4.01
>40000	878	1415	1164	973	1101		0.84	1.43	1.35	1.17	1.35	1.53
10-39999	849	1737	1724	1610	1193		0.48	1.06	1.07	1.06	0.78	0.63
<10000	374	470	570	395	336		0.32	0.40	0.48	0.32	0.27	0.36
Total ⁸	3909	6259	6091	5496	5200	6200	0.75	1.26	1.27	1.19	1.14	1.50

The explanation for the reduction from over 6000 to below 4000 homeless persons in four years, from 2012 to 2016, had to be sought among the larger municipalities. Table 1 shows the distribution of the number of homeless and homeless individuals

⁶ The respondent group included 25% of municipalities 10000-39999 and 20% of municipalities <10000. The results were weighted proportionally. Additionally, a careful weighting compensated for fall outs. This latter form of weighting is also applied in 2016.

⁷ The numbers for groups of municipalities except for the four largest cities are not available for 1996.

⁸ Due to weighting of the numbers within groups of municipalities, the total is slightly different from the sum of the numbers for each year. For 2016, a group of 117 individuals without registered home municipality is left out of the table.

per 1 000 population among four groups of municipalities. The level of homelessness relative to the size is reflected in the number homeless persons per 1 000 population. 43% of the homeless population are citizens of the four largest cities. 23% are residents in a group of the second largest towns (17 municipalities with >40 000 population). The remaining third of the homeless population is spread among 407 municipalities ranging from 39 999 to 200 population. Underreporting is likely to be highest in the smallest municipalities (<5 000 population), due to both a relative high fall out rate among the respondents and underreporting among those who did respond. A certain number of homeless citizens of the small municipalities, who are not registered by their home municipality, are reported from prisons, institutions and larger municipalities. Small municipalities seem less aware of the existence of homelessness locally and are less likely to participate in the homeless survey.

Inquiries in the cities and large towns with substantial reductions in homelessness clearly indicates that there has been a reduction and even a sharp drop in some municipalities who have a high level of homelessness both in 2012 and earlier, and who have faced considerable housing and/or social problems for a long period. These municipalities explain the reduction with long-term and continuous efforts and anchoring on political and high administrative level. Except for a couple of large municipalities situated in the heart of the oil industry, no other structural explanations for the drop have been identified. Downturn in the oil industry, particularly hitting the South Western part of Norway, led to job losses and first of all, temporary employed people left the area, leaving vacancies in a high priced rental market. The rental market opened up for those considered less attractive tenants and, not least, after a long period of rent rises the rents started on a downturn in 2014/2015 (Statistics Norway).⁹ However, in this region as well as in other parts of the country the reduction in homelessness is primarily considered the result of long-term investment in social housing policy and development of competence to meet the needs of homeless individuals.

Profile of the “New” Homeless Population

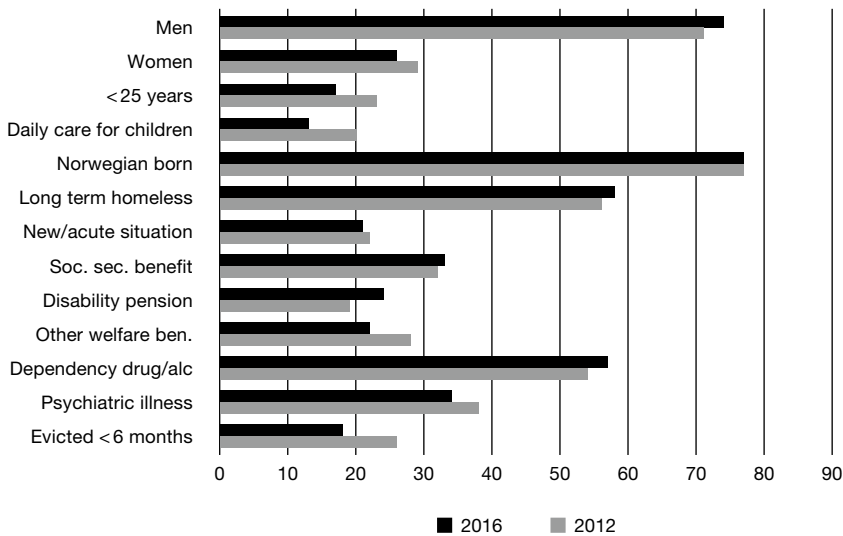
The very first national homeless census in Norway conducted in 1996 highlighted a “new” social problem (Ulfrstad, 1997). Or rather, the census rephrased and re-conceptualized a prominent social issue. The “new” homeless population consisted largely of persons involved in the open drug scene in the cities and individuals, known as the local rough sleepers of heavy drinkers or users of illegal

⁹ The general description of the method of the surveys is published in a report from each survey. The particular considerations regarding the 2016 survey is accounted for and discussed in the latest report (Dyb and Lid, 2017).

substances. However, the census showed that the number of individuals was higher and the homeless population was somewhat less homogenous than anticipated. After two decades of national homeless surveys in the Nordic countries (with a certain variation between the countries), it is evident that the majority of the homeless population is characterized by complex problems often connected to abuse, mental illness and other severe health problems. A comparative European study explains the composition of the homeless population in the Nordic countries with the tight security net and relatively generous public welfare spending. The groups likely to fall through the security net is smaller and more problem ridden compared to most other European countries (Stephens *et al.*, 2010).

In addition, to produce a number of the population in the whole country (also decomposed on each municipality), the surveys collect information about demographic features, income sources, where the person stays, the length of the stay and the duration of the homeless period. Additionally a block of questions collect information about social, health and housing problems and assistance and treatment. Although the questionnaire is limited, the data enable profiling the population and subgroups of homeless individuals, which is useful in shaping homeless policy on national and local levels. Figure 1 shows a selection of demographic features and other distinctive features comparing 2016 and 2012.

Figure 1. Profile of the homeless population in Norway, 2016 and 2012 (%)



Despite a strong decrease in the number of homeless person from 2012 to 2016, the profile of the population is on the whole stable. Firstly, a comment on the similarities between the two points in time: Three out of four are men, the vast majority are Norwegian born, around 55% are long term homeless (reoccurring situation over several years and/or >6 months) and one in five experience homelessness as an acute and new problem (there is a high share of 'unknown'). The most common income source is social security benefit, which is the bottom of the income security net, followed by disability pension and, third, other welfare benefits. From 2012 to 2016, there is a certain shift in the percentage receiving the three types of financial welfare support. A higher share receive disability pension in 2016 and the share on other welfare benefits has decreased during this time. Around 55% are dependent on drugs and/or alcohol and more than one in three is registered with a mental illness. The most significant changes are observed in the group of young (aged under 25 years) homeless persons; there is a decrease in this cohort from 23 to 17%, the proportion with daily custody of a child/children decreased from 20 to 13%, and the reduction of evictions from 26 to 18%. The national interventions and priorities described in the next section reflect the profile of the homeless population. The reduction of young homeless individuals and decrease in homeless families with children may also be understood as a result of the high priority of these two groups during the last years.

From Staircase to Housing Led

This section goes through the four national interventions to prevent and reduce homelessness since 2000. The projects, strategies and programs have many elements and this policy review describes the primary features of the interventions, which also in the long run best explain the reduction of homelessness.

Project Homeless

The first census activated the first initiative to prevent and fight homelessness. While the homeless survey was embedded in housing research and carried out by the Norwegian Building Research Institute,¹⁰ the policy initiative came from the Ministry of Social Affairs.¹¹ In White Paper No. 50 (1998-99) (St.meld. nr. 50 [1998-99]), the Ministry launched a pilot project aiming to develop models and methods for reducing homelessness. Interestingly, in retrospect, the White Paper explicitly pronounced that the staircase of transition model should frame the development and trials. The succeeding project plan maintained the staircase of transition as

¹⁰ The social science research department of Norwegian Building Research Institute joined the Norwegian Urban Research Institute in 2006.

¹¹ From 2008 split into The Health Directorate and The Welfare and Labour Directorate (NAV).

the principal approach to alleviate homelessness. This first initiative, titled Project Homeless, ran from 2001 to 2004 and included the seven largest cities and towns in Norway.

Simultaneously the staircase of transition model, which was the established approach to homelessness in Sweden, was sharply criticized by Swedish researchers (e.g. Löftstrand, 2005; Sahlin, 2005; Sahlin, 2008). In short, the staircase of transition demands changes in life style before the person will get a tenancy, and furthermore, the qualification for a tenancy is organized in several steps on which the person gets extended rights on his/hers way up the staircase. The criticism, supported by research evidence, maintained that few persons actually reached the last step and got an ordinary tenancy.

During the project period, the principal idea shifted from the staircase of transition to a housing led approach. This change of fundamental idea is of vital importance for the subsequent initiatives and strategies to prevent and reduce homelessness. Without a ranking, the below listed issues were of importance (Dyb, 2005):

- Although the Ministry of Social Affairs launched the project, The Norwegian State Housing Bank (the Housing Bank) became the principal coordinator of Project Homeless on the national level. The Health and Social Directorate contributed with funding for developing follow up services in housing (Hansen *et al.*, 2007). With the Housing Bank as the principal coordinator and main stakeholder the project was embedded in the housing sector on state level, which was vital for the change towards a housing led approach. Project funding and the Housing Bank's financial instruments (housing allowance, loans etc.) was made available.
- Project Homeless was a trial that should develop models and methods to alleviate homelessness in particular among the most vulnerable individuals with addiction to alcohol and substances and/or mental illness. However, there was not much new thinking in the staircase model. Projects that promote new ideas tend to attract persons with ambitions to change the dominant approach. Many employees engaged in the project grabbed the opportunity to do something for the most in need; those who had circulated on the "staircase" between shelters, prison and detox facilities. In other words, there was an internal drive for change on the implementing level.

- The majority of the target group had had a tenancy once or several times, and had to prove ability to live independently, by going through treatment or convincingly prove abstinence to get a new tenancy in social housing. Proving ability to live independently was embedded in the allocation criterion for social housing in the larger cities and in many other municipalities. However, in Oslo the criterion was about to change in this respect and other municipalities followed, which signified a change in approach.
- Between the first and second homeless census (from 1996 to 2003), the number of homeless persons fell from 6200 to 5200. The one and only reason for the decrease was a reduction of homelessness in Oslo by 50%, mainly resulting from a targeted intervention through “the hostel project”. The hostel project made a thorough review of the persons staying in the homeless hostels, and found that the clients made up a far more differentiated group than anticipated. People were moved out of the hostels and into municipal owned flats¹² or they were assisted with getting a flat in the private market. The hostel project in Oslo is important because it signalled a change in approach to homeless people, and because it demonstrates that homelessness may be significantly reduced with the right methods and targeted effort.

Project Homeless was a trial project implemented in the largest municipalities. The idea of a housing led approach, to house homeless people as the method of alleviating homelessness, was not spread nationwide. The idea also met resistance in the project municipalities and elsewhere. Discussions of the meaning of independent living, and how to house people with severe health and social problems continued. The Health and Social Directorate provided funding to develop services in housing. Norway has no tradition for social housing education, like for instance in the UK (Anderson *et al.*, 2012). Developing service provision corresponding to the needs of the homeless individuals with complex needs and often a long history of homelessness was set on the agenda.

¹² A negative effect was more short term tenancies, due to the need for higher turnover in social housing, and further, the composition of the tenant group has changed toward more social problems, which also effects the surroundings and has increased the social stigma especially in areas with many and congregated municipal-owned dwellings.

Table 2: National projects, strategies and programs from 2001: main objectives, approaches and stakeholders

Project/strategy	Objectives	Main approach and stakeholder(s)
Project Homeless 2001-2002	<p>Develop and establish housing solutions and models to fight and prevent homelessness.</p> <p>Try out various forms of assistance and establish cross-department services.</p> <p>Collate and disseminate experiences.</p>	<p>National development project implemented in the seven largest municipalities.</p> <p>First phase: The staircase of transition outlined as a frame for development.</p> <p>Second phase: A change towards a housing led approach.</p> <p>The municipalities received state funding and guidance.</p> <p>National coordinator: The Housing Bank</p>
National strategy to fight and prevent homelessness: The pathway to a permanent home 2005-2007	<p>Three primary objectives were set:</p> <p>To prevent people from becoming homeless, to improve the quality of overnight shelters and to ensure homeless people are re-housed without undue delay.</p>	<p>Housing led approach.</p> <p>A combination of performance targets and inter-department and multi-level governance.</p> <p>Principally the strategy encompassed all municipalities, however the cities and larger municipalities made up the majority of participants.</p> <p>The participating municipalities received state funding and guidance.</p> <p>National coordinator: The Housing Bank</p>
Social Housing Development Program (The Housing Bank's municipality program) 2009-2017	<p>Long-term partnership between the Housing Bank and the municipalities experiencing the most social housing policy challenges.</p> <p>Local/municipal set targets/ objectives based on external evaluations identifying the main challenges and problems.</p> <p>Target group expanded to disadvantaged households.</p>	<p>Housing led approach is well established. The overall strategy is preventing and fighting homelessness, increased activity and increased knowledge about social housing work in the municipalities.</p> <p>Active use of the Housing Bank's financial instruments (housing allowance, start-up loan etc.) locally is expected, but project funding reduced.</p> <p>National coordinator: The Housing Bank.</p>
Housing for welfare. National strategy for housing and support services 2014-2020	<p>Shared responsibility – shared goals.</p> <p>Main goals:</p> <p>Everyone should have a good place to live</p> <p>Everyone with a need for services, will receive assistance in managing their living</p> <p>Public effort shall be comprehensive and effective</p> <p>Target group: disadvantaged households</p>	<p>Housing led and comprehensive. The strategy plan is signed by the five Ministers responsible for welfare areas</p> <p>Weight on multi-level and horizontal co-governance and innovation</p> <p>Policy areas expanded to neighbourhood development, housing quality and the overall planning in the municipalities.</p> <p>The Social Housing development Program is part of the strategy.</p> <p>National coordinator: The Housing Bank</p>

“A Permanent Home”

In the proceeding national program, National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Homelessness “The Pathway to a Permanent Home” 2005-2007, the housing led approach was spelled out in the title. The strategy built on the experience from Project Homeless, but diverged from the project on several aspects. Institutionally, the strategy was still embedded in the Housing Bank on a national level in close cooperation with the Welfare and Labour Directorate¹³ (NAV). The Housing Bank scaled up the project funding available for participating municipalities. Now, a large number of municipalities was involved and got access to project funding. The competence funding was also spent on an increasing number of social housing courses offered at university colleges. Until then courses addressing social housing issues were sparse and random (Anderson *et al.*, 2012). Most of the new courses were and still are further education offered to social workers and other welfare professionals aiming to increase the knowledge of how to meet and assist homeless individuals with complex needs. Other arenas of learning and exchange of experience were established by the Housing Bank and NAV.

A peer review of the homeless strategy facilitated by the European Commission emphasized that the strategy was presented under the umbrella of a national housing policy. The synthesis report summarizes that “(h)omelessness is thus targeted as a housing issue and a problem of access to adequate and secure housing, in which the support needs of individual homeless people are one route to achieving and sustaining this goal.” (Edgar, 2006, p.2). The synthesis characterizes the strategy in terms of “housing first”, however the Norwegian strategy did not follow the guidelines of what is recognized as Housing First (Tsemberis *et al.*, 2004). The strategy emphasized a wider housing led approach.

Three primary objectives, to prevent people from becoming homeless, to improve the quality of overnight shelters and to ensure homeless people are re-housed without undue delay, was operationalized into five performance targets:

- Reduce the number of eviction petitions by 50%
- Reduce the number of evictions by 30%.
- No one should stay at an emergency shelter on release from prison and discharge from an institution.
- No one should be offered a shelter place without a quality agreement.
- A maximum length of three months stay in temporary accommodation.

¹³ NAV: The former social division of the Health and Social Directorate.

Mechanisms for monitoring achievements of the targets were set up, but were rather difficult to implement or there were start up problems, which often occur in many new systems.¹⁴ However, the monitoring schemes indicated that the targets were not achieved, which is in accordance with the local authorities evaluation of their performance and achievements (Dyb *et al.*, 2008). It is important to keep in mind that the Norwegian municipalities have extensive autonomy in service provision. Welfare services, except for the National Health Services and some institutions, are provided by the local authorities. Providing a roof over the head of a homeless citizen is phrased as duty put on the municipalities, while access to permanent housing is phrased as a duty to contribute to find a dwelling.¹⁵ The local authorities also held wide autonomy in shaping and defining what is good and/or sufficient quality of a service. Improving the quality of emergency shelters was thus addressed as a performance target and not imposed as a duty.

The autonomy held by the municipalities reduces the state's steering instruments towards the local authorities. National agencies applied soft measures; funding, arenas of mutual learning and cooperation contracts between state agencies. An example of cooperation contract is the one between the Correctional Services and municipalities (usually through the regional level on behalf of the municipalities) regarding release from prison. However, the local authorities chose to work on different targets in accordance with what they perceived as their greatest challenge. Whatever the local achievements would sum up to meet the national performance targets was rather random (Dyb *et al.*, 2008). In 2008, the Office of the General Audit in Norway published a report stating that households and individuals with housing needs did not get the assistance and services they were entitled to (Riksrevisjonen, 2007-2008), which indicated that there was still a way to go. The homeless figures also continued to rise in that period.

In retrospect, one of the most important experiences and learning from the strategy was the dissemination of a housing led approach to homelessness at a large scale in the municipalities, including NGOs working with homelessness. Cooperation on homelessness policy between the welfare ministries on a directorate (the executive body) level was improved through cooperation contracts. A housing led approach also spread among cooperating partners, such as the Correctional Services and to some extent to treatment departments in the National Health Services. Discussions of the meaning of housing led, which was at the core during Project Homeless, continued. Solutions, which hardly differed from an institution in other

¹⁴ A major issue was lack of routines and/or unclear concepts of what actually to report among municipal employees, enforcement offices and others that provided information about service activities, service users, evictions, etc.

¹⁵ The Social Service Act in the Labour and Welfare Administration.

aspects than that persons living there were tenants and not patients, emerged. Other issues, such as congregation of tenants with complex problems, is still a topic to be addressed.

Co-governance

The Social Housing Development Program followed from 2009 and runs until 2017. The housing led approach is maintained and strengthened and the Housing Bank continues as the principal coordinator at a national level. The program differs from the former Project Homeless and the homeless strategy in its organizing, funding and target groups. Firstly, the largescale competence funding administered by the Housing Bank is reduced. The program relies more on communicative measures, such as guidance, cooperation contracts and learning arenas. The program is based on mutual binding agreements between the Housing Bank and the municipalities. The cooperating municipalities are chosen from those with the largest problems and challenges in the social housing area. The selection by this criterion coincide with the largest municipalities including the four largest cities, thus the larger municipalities constitute the majority of the partners. The advantage of being a cooperating municipality is priority access to all the Housing Bank's services and financial means. The municipality finance or co-finance (with the state) their local projects and activity within their programs, which demands political and administrative commitment to the program.

Eviction from both municipal housing and private rental housing has been an issue from the very start of the homeless interventions and was explicitly addressed in the national strategy 2005-2007. Thus, while the former project and strategy focused on homelessness, the program addresses a wider group of vulnerable households and individuals, primarily households at risk of eviction and households living in unsuitable dwellings and conditions. People experiencing homelessness are still at the core of the program. The municipalities identify their most important target groups and the challenges they want to prioritize. The purpose of an external pre-analysis that the cooperating municipalities are obliged to commission (financed by the Housing Bank), is to have an objective eye and analysis of the challenges and how to prioritize within the scope of their available means.¹⁶ On the national level, the program expanded the co-governance or joined-up governance between policy areas. The program was initially supported by four ministries (extended to five, see below).

¹⁶ The pre-analyses are conducted by research institutes and consultancies in the housing area.

Housing for Welfare

The prevailing national strategy, Housing for Welfare, runs from 2014 to 2020. The strategy document is signed by five Ministers: Minister of Local Government and Modernisation (the Housing Bank's Ministry), Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Minister of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion, Minister of Health and Care Services and Minister of Justice and Public Security; in short, all the welfare ministries have signed the main strategy document. The cooperation between the Ministries through their directorates is coordinated by the Housing Bank. The primary strategic goals are:

- Everyone should have a good place to live.
- Everyone with a need for services will receive assistance in managing their living arrangements.
- Public effort shall be comprehensive and effective.

The goals are broken down to the following priority focus areas: assistance from temporary to permanent housing and provide assistance to find a suitable home, preventing evictions and providing follow-up services in the home, securing good management and goal orientation, stimulate new ideas and social innovation and planning for good living arrangements. The need for cooperation was recognized in the very first project, Project Homeless, however the acknowledgement of the importance of co-governance has increased throughout almost two decades of national intervention programs. One example of co-governance is that a national program against child poverty under the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion should contribute to achieving the objectives of Housing for Welfare.

The direct impact of the present strategy on reducing homelessness is difficult to evaluate, because the last survey was conducted in 2016 is at an early stage of the strategy implementation. Ongoing process evaluations have not yet published any results. The Social Housing Development Program is part of the strategy. As mentioned above, there are five ministries with five equivalent policy fields behind the strategy. The Social Housing Development program is the Housing Bank's main instrument for implementing the strategy in the municipalities. An evaluation of the program found increased social housing competence in the participating municipalities. Procedures and systems for housing allocation and services had improved. The municipalities were on the "right way", however there were no adequate measures for the results for the end-user (Grønningsæter *et al.*, 2014).

A short note on the difference between 'housing led' and Housing First: A number of municipalities have established Housing First project primarily guided by the principles of Housing First projects in New York (Tsemberis *et al.*, 2004). Housing First is defined as a narrower intervention designated for individuals with complex

needs, while 'housing led' is a wider approach under which Housing First is one element. Housing First projects are one of the interventions some municipalities have established.

Measuring and Alleviating Homelessness

There is a close connection between the homeless census and the political initiatives that followed since the first national census in 1996. This part discusses three points, which highlights the connection between the censuses, policies and interventions:

- The censuses broadened and set the concept and definition of homelessness.
- Specific groups of homeless and specific problems identified in the census have been addressed and focused in the programs and strategies.
- The number of homeless persons measured in the censuses is a 'litmus test' on the efficiency of the work on national and local levels.

Regarding the first point; the homeless population is quite well defined compared to other vulnerable groups in the housing market. The definition was established for research purposes, but became the "official" concept and definition of homelessness almost immediately. Before the first census in 1996 there were no exact definition of homelessness. The social services and the registration office apply the term 'without fixed address' (u.f.b.) in their files. However, the term embraces a smaller group than the population of homeless covered by the censuses. The administrative regulation to the Act of the Registration Office is rather vague regarding the situations when a person is without fixed address. The regulation states that persons without fixed address in a municipality are considered settled in that municipality depending on the duration of the stay and other circumstances.

Individuals in prison are considered settled in the place of residence before imprisonment. Individuals without an address at the time of imprisonment are considered settled at the place of residence (the prison). The same rule applies for individuals in institutions in general. Persons in institutions under drug and alcohol treatment are considered settled at the institution when the duration of the stay is one year or more.¹⁷ By the definition used in the survey, people in prison and institutions are counted as homeless if they are without a dwelling of their own two months or less before release or discharge.

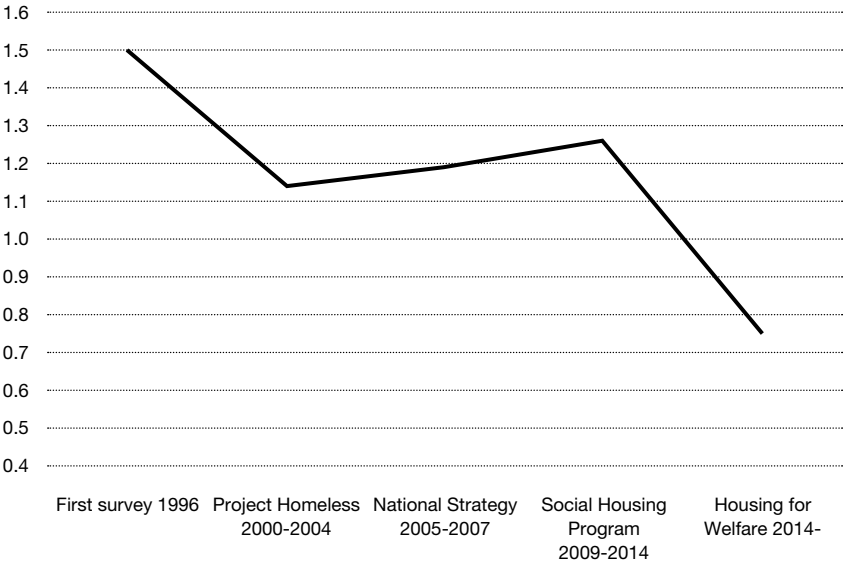
¹⁷ Source: <https://lovdata.no/dokument/LTI/forskrift/2007-11-09-1268>

About the second point, a couple of examples may highlight how the census identifies particularly vulnerable groups and informs about the number and profile. In the survey conducted in 2008, a new question about whether the person is homeless together with her/his minor children was added to the questionnaire, which uncovered that 400 children were homeless with their parent(s) during the one week of registration. In 2012, the number of homeless children staying together with a parent was nearing 700. Based on the results from the surveys and further informed by research on child poverty, homeless families with children that are homeless or living in precarious conditions are one of the prioritized target groups of the strategy Housing for Welfare.

Young persons experiencing homelessness is another group closely monitored through the homeless surveys. Young homeless persons is another target group in the prevailing strategy Housing for Welfare. The number of homeless below 25 years shows an increase until 2008, when the figures flattened out and decreased from 2012 and 2016. Both the actual numbers and the share of persons under 25 years fell (see Figure 1 above).

Figure 2 shows the development of the number of homeless during each of the national projects, strategies and programs, as an introduction to the discussion of the third point above.

Figure 2. Number of homeless per 1 000 population and national programs/strategies.



The curve shows the tendencies and marks the occurrence of sharp changes. The steep downward turn between 1996 and 2003 is already accounted for; the decrease is mainly explained by one targeted activity in Norway's capital, Oslo. Between 2003 and 2012, the curve shows a slight but steady increase, from 1.14 per 1 000 population to 1.27 in 2008 and 1.26 in 2012. The number of homeless people increased somewhat from 2008 to 2012, but due to growth of the population in Norway, the relative figures decreased slightly. The homeless surveys is one but very important and the most reliable indication of the effects from the strategies and programs initiated by the national authorities and implemented in the municipalities.

The interventions from around 2010 have some specific qualities. The target groups are extended beyond those who experience homelessness to individuals and households at risk of homelessness and in precarious housing. Thus, preventing homelessness is high on the agenda. Emphasis on co-governance or joined up governance involves the policy areas with responsibilities and means to address the complex needs of some groups but also the differentiated needs of the target groups. These elements points to a much wider approach compared to Project Homeless (2001-2004) and the strategy, 'The Pathway to a Permanent Home (2005-2006)'.

The prevailing program and strategy is at the same time more targeted. Firstly, the participating municipalities are chosen by size and extent of challenges in social housing policy. Secondly, the chosen municipalities are asked to direct their local programs and initiatives towards the most important issues and burning questions locally. Many of the municipalities do work on a series of projects and interventions. One example is municipalities that use the Housing Bank's financial means to assist people to move from the rental market to become homeowners (project: "From Tenancy to Homeownership"). In a country with 80% home ownership, staying in the rental market has some disadvantage. The limited rental market is unprofessional and volatile. Contracts of two years or shorter are not uncommon, resulting in frequent moves of housing. Renting is not less expensive than buying a home, however, the least affluent households will not get a loan on ordinary conditions from a bank. Start-up loans in combination with housing allowance and/or subsidy help some of those rejected on ordinary conditions in the banks to buy a home. In a few municipalities the reduction of homelessness is among others explained by practicing "from tenancy to homeownership" on a relatively large scale. This is but one example of innovative interventions in the social housing field.

Another important feature in some municipalities with high achievements (reduction in homelessness) is that social housing policy is integrated in the overall planning and ordinary housing plans. Affordable housing for sale and rental housing for the least affluent households is part of the plans for construction and infrastructure locally. However, the housing market is largely private in both ends. Construction projects

for housing are planned and implemented by private enterprises. The local authorities has the competence to regulate the areas and approve or disapprove on the projects. Usually, there are negotiations between the entrepreneurs and authorities and not uncommon that those living in the neighbourhood are part of the negotiations. There are examples of approval of plans under the condition of providing a certain share of affordable dwellings, where this part of the projects never came to realization.¹⁸ There are also examples of successful cooperation between private enterprises and local authorities regarding provision of affordable dwellings.

Services and Social Support

This paper has not focused on the development of services in connection with housing persons with complex needs. There has been and still are different initiatives addressing better knowledge and better services. The existing municipal home care services did not cope with providing services to clients with addiction and/or mental illness. The issue was identified as a lack of professional competence about the needs of the group. Competence development had started already with Project Homeless in the early 2000's along two lines: in the practice field and in the formal education system. Firstly, some of the municipalities set up a few positions called 'housing support' (booppfølging). The professional background of the employees filling the positions were indeed varied, although the majority had background and training in social work. These pioneers, that actually started up floating services for (former) homeless persons, developed knowledge and more or less defined what to do and how to do it along the road (Dyb, 2005; Hansen *et al.*, 2007; Ytrehus *et al.*, 2008).

Secondly, further education courses in social housing work developed rapidly in several university colleges usually under the umbrella of social work education. Housing issues and how to meet the needs of (former) homeless individuals are also integrated in further education courses about addiction and psychiatry work in the municipalities. Some of the courses are evaluated (e.g. Grønningsæter, 2015), but there are no joint evaluation or comparison of the content and the students of the various courses. Housing First contributed with a "new" services dimension; assertive community treatment (ACT), which is widely used within Housing First. However ACT was already applied by floating teams supporting people with mental illness often organised in cooperation with the National health services and municipalities. Today social housing work has a wider connotation. The term is used to describe all types activities, work and methods oriented towards moving people from homelessness into housing, preventing homelessness and supporting people.

¹⁸ The latest large scale construction of apartments on Oslo's sea side is a well known example.

Conclusion

The main argument of the paper is that reduction in homelessness follows a long period of national policy addressing the issue from different angles. What is just as important is the overall housing led approach to homelessness from the early 2000's. A housing led approach was not inevitable from the very beginning. Project Homeless started out framing the trials within the staircase of transition after the Swedish model. Institutional embeddedness in housing policy through the national coordination of the Housing Bank is vital for the turn from the staircase model to housing led, and for the persistent focus on housing in the succeeding strategies and programs.

The decrease in the number of homeless individuals brought about an expectation of an increase in the share with the most complex problems in connection with addiction and mental illness. The idea of a residual group, sometimes labelled "hard to house", was not confirmed. The profile of the population of homeless in 2016 is rather similar to that of the previous surveys. The majority are single men between 25 and 45 years. The share with dependency on drugs and/or alcohol is about the same and the share with a mental illness dropped insignificantly. Moreover, there is no substantial increase in the share of long term homeless individuals. People with a long history as homeless still dominate, but the share that experience homelessness as a new and acute problem is 21 and 22 per cent in 2016 and 2012. Of course, there are changes, like the decrease in the share of young people and almost absence of homeless families with minor children. The latter do appear in the data though, and almost all have recently become homeless.

At the moment, and after the positive results measured by the homeless survey there is a discussion about aiming at zero vision in the field of homelessness, meaning there should be no homeless persons in Norway, or at least that should be the vision for the work. However, social problems tend to reappear. Homelessness is a problem that needs to be addressed continuously and met with the right approaches. An overall housing led approach must continue to guide the policy, however financial and human recourses, including competence and people, is needed in order to maintain the results from 2016.

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Pathways between Housing and Homelessness of Young Income Support Recipients in Helsinki, Finland

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➤ **Abstract_** *This study analyses the pathways between housing and homelessness of young income support recipients in Helsinki. The data used is unique in the Nordic and European context. The data covers all young (19-27 years at the end of 2008) single people in Helsinki, who received income support for at least one month during 2008-2010. Subgroups of the homeless young adults, based on the duration of homelessness and the stability of the homeless pathway, were compared against several psycho-social factors. The study adds to knowledge about young homeless recipients of income support in Helsinki, and participates in the academic debate about methods for quantifying homelessness.*

➤ **Keywords_** *Homelessness, income support, young adults, pathways, transitions*

Introduction

Homelessness is a difficult social problem. It is an extreme violation of human rights and basic human needs (United Nations, 1948). Nevertheless, there are thousands of homeless people in all European countries and over a million globally, and the prevalence rates are rising almost everywhere (Buch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014; United Nations, 2015).

The definition of homelessness can vary from street-homelessness to a young adult not being able to move away from the parental home because of financial problems (FEANTSA, 2007; Edgar, 2009). The academic debate about the definitions has calmed down in recent years and the “ETHOS light” definition has been widely accepted as a common ground (it was also used in the estimates mentioned previously) (Buch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014). Of course, different variations of this definition are used for different purposes. According to the ETHOS Light definition, homelessness includes people living 1) on the streets, 2) in emergency accommodation, 3) in accommodation for the homeless, 4) in institutions (staying longer than needed due to lack of housing or no housing available when being released), 5) in non-conventional dwellings (such as mobile homes or abandoned houses) and 6) temporarily with family or friends. According to the Finnish homelessness statistics there were 6650 homeless single households and 325 family households in Finland in November 2016. Of the single homeless, 82% live temporarily with family or friends (Ahola 2017).

This study aims at increasing knowledge of young homeless adults in the capital of Finland. As the state-of-art research on homelessness emphasizes, homelessness is a period or periods in an individual's life rather than a defining characteristic of an individual. This study focuses on this sequential nature of homelessness. The study also contributes to the global debate about challenges in quantifying homelessness, and participates in increasing the knowledge on the psycho-social profiles of the homeless.

The data used is 719 young individuals (born between 1981-1989) who had been homeless and received income support as a single household for at least one month in Helsinki during the years 2008-2010. The data was created by joining together two different administrative registers in Finland. The aim of the analysis is threefold: 1) to describe the pathways of young single homeless recipients of income support between different forms of housing and homelessness, 2) to recognize subgroups of the homeless based on the combined duration of homelessness and the number of homeless periods, and 3) analyze the differences between the groups with regard to types of transitions into and out of homelessness. The statistical methods used are descriptive with statistical significance testing, and include drawing sequence index plots.

Quantifying Homelessness

Several attempts have been made to quantify homelessness. These attempts include different kinds of regional and national statistics and academic studies. Data collection has been based on registers (Buch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014), surveys targeted to either homeless people themselves (often filled during face-to-face interviews) (Caton *et al.*, 2005; Patterson *et al.*, 2012) or employees working with them (Warnes and Crane, 2006; Benjaminsen and Lauritzen, 2013; Dyb and Johannessen, 2013), and so-called street counts (Presland, 2014; City of Melbourne, 2014). In most data collection processes, homeless people have been accessed through homelessness service providers, for example night shelters, drop-in-centers or benefit and housing agencies (Weinreb *et al.*, 2010; Chamberlain and Johnson, 2013). Sometimes other broader registers or service providers have been used, such as extensive drug research projects (Cheng *et al.*, 2013; Linton *et al.*, 2013), data on youth ageing out of foster care (Dworsky *et al.*, 2013) or national surveys of housing insecurity (Scutella *et al.*, 2013). There have been some attempts to study homelessness through general population registers, but several problems are inherent in this form of data collection (such as people living abroad or in institutions being counted as homeless, and many homeless still having their previous address as current address in the register) (Kostiainen and Laakso, 2012; Buch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014).

When studying homelessness, especially through registers, the availability of relevant background variables may be restricted. There are greater opportunities for this in survey-based research, but homeless people themselves and homeless support workers tend to provide differing answers to the same questions. For example, in the study of Warnes and Crane (2010), heavy drinking was a central reason for homelessness for 25% of the homeless according to the homeless themselves and for 36% according to their support workers. Most homelessness data is cross-sectional point-in-time data, but in recent years longitudinal surveys (McQuistion *et al.*, 2014) and register-based panel data (McAllister *et al.*, 2010) have become more popular. Cross-sectional data tends to overemphasize the prevalence of long-term homelessness, because at any given time, the long-term homeless are more likely to be reached than the short-term homeless (Buch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010).

Homeless Pathways

Kuhn and Culhane (1998) in their groundbreaking study, identified chronic, episodic and transitional homeless subgroups, with 80% in the transitional category. In 2010, McAllister *et al.* replicated and suggested improvements for the study of Kuhn and Culhane (1998). Their improved methodology for determining the duration of homelessness, and their division of homeless people into ten, rather than just three subgroups, was more accurate in describing the diversity in the homeless population.

In Norway and Denmark, about 25% of homeless people had been homeless for 1-3 months, about 35% for 4-12 months and about 40% for over a year, according to the latest statistics (Benjaminsen and Lauritzen, 2013; Dyb and Johannessen, 2013). Long-term homelessness is a central part of homelessness in many European countries: 35% of homeless people had been homeless for over 10 years in Hungary, 31% for over 8 years in Poland, 24% for over 5 years in Czech Republic, 15% for over 4 years in Italy and 15% for over 3 years in France (Buch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014). However, caution is required in interpreting these numbers, because the definitions and methods for data collection vary greatly between the countries.

This understanding of the importance of temporal differences in homelessness, has led to the development of the concept of 'homeless careers' and 'homeless pathways'. The homeless career emphasizes the different small steps an individual takes before he/she becomes homeless in official terms and/or identifies himself/herself as homeless. The homeless pathway emphasizes homelessness as a period or periods in a person's continuum of different forms of housing (Fopp, 2009; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2013.) A homeless pathway may consist of just two periods, for example living in a parental home and thereafter chronic homelessness, as well as perhaps several periods of different forms of independent living and one short period of homelessness in between.

The main forms of housing in homeless pathways are independent living, living in an institution or supported housing and living in a parental home. Becoming homeless after being released from an institution ranges from 2 to 16% of the homeless in European and American studies (Caton *et al.*, 2005; van Laere *et al.*, 2009; Weinreb *et al.*, 2010) and from 10 to 15% in the Scandinavian homelessness statistics (Socialstyrelsen, 2012; Benjaminsen and Lauritzen, 2013; Dyb and Johannessen, 2013). Few studies provide empirical information on the rate of becoming homeless after leaving the parental home, but theoretical literature suggests this to be one of the central forms of transition into homelessness, especially among young homeless adults (Hutson *et al.*, 1994; Kim, 2014). However, it seems that the large majority of homeless people have lived independently prior to becoming homeless.

In the Nordic countries, eviction is the trigger for becoming homeless for 20-25% of homeless people, followed by family conflict or the end of a relationship for 15-20% and release from an institution for 10-15% of those who are homeless (Socialstyrelsen, 2012; Benjaminsen and Lauritzen, 2013; Dyb and Johannessen, 2013). The remaining triggers for homelessness include becoming homeless after immigration, the ending of a rental contract, or having to move away from unsuitable housing (for example, new needs related to location, size, costs etc.). Previous literature does not shed light on the prevalence rates of these latter triggers. When considering triggers, it is important to remember that only a minority of people experiencing any of the triggers will become homeless. This means that the majority of people who divorce, leave an institution or are evicted, do find a new place to live and do not become homeless (Buch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014).

Psycho-social Profiles

This study focuses on five aspects of the psycho-social profile of the studied homeless: sources of income, drug and mental health problems, sanctions in receiving income support and nationality. This section provides an overview of what is previously known about four of these factors among the homeless. Sanctions are not further discussed, as it is not a factor addressed by existing empirical literature. The five factors in this study have been chosen partly because of their central theoretical association with homelessness and partly because of their availability in a suitable form in the data.

The life-time prevalence of having had a paid job was 50-60% among the homeless in two studies from New York (Caton *et al.*, 2005; McQuiston *et al.*, 2014). The rate of unemployment during homelessness has varied between 75 and 97% (Weinreb *et al.*, 2010; Chamberlain and Johnson, 2013; McQuiston *et al.*, 2014). Unemployment was a central trigger for becoming homeless for 24-31% of homeless in Sweden (Socialstyrelsen, 2012), decrease of income was the trigger for 9% in Norway (Dyb and Johannessen, 2013) and economic problems for 32% in Denmark (Benjaminsen and Lauritzen, 2013). In theoretical literature homelessness is closely linked with poverty, the level of housing costs, and the supply of affordable housing (Fitzpatrick, 2005; Culhane and Metraux, 2008; Buch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010).

The prevalence rates of drug and mental health problems among homeless people vary greatly between studies and statistics depending on the definitions of both homelessness and these problems. About 50-60% of the homeless seem to have addiction problems and about 30-50% suffer from mental illnesses (Caton *et al.*, 2005; Socialstyrelsen, 2012; Benjaminsen and Lauritzen, 2013; Dyb and Johannessen, 2013; McQuiston *et al.*, 2014). According to a recent literature review (Philippot *et al.*,

2007) several studies show that 70-80% of the homeless with substance abuse problems had these problems when entering homelessness. Addiction problems seem to be associated with longer duration of homelessness among homeless families (Webrein *et al.*, 2010), with recurrent homelessness compared to successful transitions out of homelessness and with entering homelessness after eviction compared to after relationship problems (val Laerer *et al.*, 2009).

Between 15-40% of homeless people are immigrants, depending on the size and multiculturalism of the region being studied (Caton *et al.*, 2005; Warnes and Crane, 2006; van Laere *et al.*, 2009; Benjaminsen and Lauritzen, 2013; Dyb and Johannessen, 2013).

Context

The homeless people we focus on in this study (1) live in Helsinki, Finland, (2) receive income support and (3) are young single adults. In this section, we provide commentary on these aspects of the empirical context of this study.

The housing markets in Finland have traditionally been strongly based on home ownership. The proportion of rental housing among all housing units was 30 percent in Finland and 47 percent in Helsinki in 2013. Social housing accounted for 45% of rental housing (about 67 000 apartments) and the rate has declined from 47% in Helsinki during the last decade. Demand for social housing exceeds supply and the waiting lists for social housing are long. Average rents in the metropolitan area of Helsinki have risen 28% from 2005 to 2012, while the average income of households has only risen by 7% (Statistics Finland, 2013). The age at which young adults move away from the parental home in Finland is among the youngest in European Union. Half of the age group has moved at the age of 22 in Finland, whereas for example in Spain and Slovenia the corresponding age is almost 30 years of age (Iacovou and Skew, 2010).

Households with low income and means are entitled to housing allowance and income support in Finland. The criteria for housing allowance is different for students, pensioners and other households, but the basic idea is that the allowance covers part of the housing costs for those whose income and means are low, and in relation to these, housing costs are high. The income support is a last-resort form of income security in Finland. The amount of the total income support is calculated by subtracting the amount of reasonable costs from the income and means of the household at a monthly rate. If the remainder of these two is negative, the household receives income support for that amount.

In 2008, 11% of households in Helsinki received income support, and 13% in 2009 and 2010 (estimations based on Ahola, 2013 and Statistics Finland, 2013). The rates of receiving income support were relatively highest among men in single households (26-32% of the households) and families with one parent (17-19%). In about half of all households receiving income support, the claimant was unemployed or laid off (Ahola, 2013). Even though income support is meant to be a temporary and last resort benefit, dependency on it is known to be easily prolonged, especially among young recipients. In 2010, only one in three of 24-year-old recipients of income support in Helsinki had received income support combined for less than 13 months (Ylikännö, 2013).

The unemployment rate for 15-29-year-olds was 3.1% in the metropolitan area of Helsinki in 2008, which was less than the Finnish average (3.9%). Recently in Finland, there have been concerns about young people who are completely outside of the workforce and education, rather than about youth unemployment. The rate of these was 11% of the young people (15-29 years old) in the metropolitan area of Helsinki in 2008 (Myrskylä, 2011).

The young homeless are a heterogeneous population. Differences between subgroups of young homeless people can be more significant than those between the young and the older homeless. Much of the international research on homelessness focuses on the so called run-away or throw-away youth, who enter homelessness during a family conflict (Nebbit *et al.*, 2007; Slesnick *et al.*, 2009; Kim, 2014). Short-term homelessness and exiting homelessness via moving back to the parental home is typical among this group (Nebbit *et al.*, 2007). Homelessness of young adults has been described as both a more and a less severe social problem than the homelessness of older people (Fitzpatrick, 2000). On the one hand, a young person has not had time to become long-term homeless and deeply marginalized, and social networks and society may be more understanding towards a young person in trouble than with someone older. Moreover, there tends to be more social services and projects available for marginalized young people. On the other hand, a young homeless person has less life experience and may have fewer skills to cope when being homeless. Becoming homeless at an early age may also be a more severe sign of exclusion, since young adults are assumed to still have more people and networks to support them, for example family and educational services.

Data and Methods

The aims of the study are threefold: (1) to describe the pathways of young single homeless recipients of income support between different forms of housing and homelessness, (2) to recognize subgroups of the homeless based on the combined duration of homelessness and the number of homelessness periods, and (3) to analyze the differences between the groups as regards the types of transitions into and out of homelessness, and several psycho-social factors.

The data covers the years 2008 to 2010, on a monthly basis. The total data was of individuals who filled the following criteria: were born in 1981-1989, lived in Helsinki in the end of each year during 2008-2010 and received income support as a single household for at least one month during that time. Receiving income support as a single household means that the person did not live with a spouse or child(ren) when receiving the income support. They could, however, live in a parental home, in an institution or with a roommate. We will later refer to the recipients as single, and by that we mean the status as a single household receiving income support, not the relationship status. The individuals were 19-27 years old at the end of the year 2008 and, of course, the cohort aged every year. The size of the data was 7 102 persons, of which 719 (10%) had been homeless when receiving income support for at least one month during the studied time period.

The data was created by joining together data from the registers of the Social Insurance Institution of Finland and the register of the City of Helsinki Social Services and Health Care Department. The information on the year of birth, nationality, and entitlements for special reimbursements of medicines were obtained from the registers of the Social Insurance Institution of Finland. The data drawn from the register of the City of Helsinki Social Services and Health Care Department was based on the register of the income support: the information regarding a housing type, being a client in municipal substance abuse service, and receiving different benefits and other forms of income were obtained for the months when the person received the income support.

The data comprises five housing types: homeless, independent living (main tenant, subtenant, owner-occupied housing, company housing), living at relative's or friend's house, living in an institution or supported housing and unknown. According to the information from the City of Helsinki Social Services and Health Care Department, there could be delays when the housing type was updated, because the income support recipients' situations changed so often. The social worker classified the income support recipient as "homeless" if they lived on the streets or in a shelter or moved from one friend's or relative's house to another. If a person lived in a friend's or relative's house permanently, he was classified as "housing at relative's or friend's house". The final decision between these two classes was

made according to the income support recipient's own interpretation. In addition, it is worth noting that the adult income support recipients, who lived with their parents, were classified as "housing at relative's or friend's house".

The data was first analyzed by descriptive statistical methods, including drawing sequence index plots. Second, subgroups of the homeless were formed based on a theoretical approach of homelessness. During this phase, K-means-clustering with different number of clusters was also attempted in order to find the best possible criteria for forming the subgroups. Third, the homeless subgroups were compared using different psycho-social factors. Statistical significances were tested with Pearson's chi-squared test or Fisher's test. All the analyses were conducted using SAS Software (version 9.3), except for the sequence index plots, which were drawn using Stata Software (version 13.1).

Results

Housing pathways

The data included 719 young adults who were homeless while receiving income support as a single household for at least one month in Helsinki during the years 2008-2010. Table 1 describes the durations, number of homeless periods and transitions between homelessness and other housing statuses in the data.

Housing status was only known for the months when the person received income support. Of the homeless young adults, 98% had at least one month when they did not receive income support and 22% received income support only during those months with a homeless status. For the purposes of the analysis in this study, this feature of the data is, however, not a problem. We are not studying only homelessness, but rather the stability of housing pathways and the receipt of income support of young homeless social work clients.

Table 1: Duration of homelessness, number of homeless periods and transitions into and out of homelessness in the data.

	Number of people	% of the young homeless in the data
Combined duration of homelessness (months)		
1-3	246	34
4-6	147	20
7-9	111	15
10-12	65	9
13-18	61	8
19-24	48	7
25-30	21	3
31-36	20	3
Total	719	100
Number of homeless periods		
1	308	43
2	173	24
3	106	15
4	54	8
5	29	4
6	20	3
7	15	2
8 or more	14	2
Total	719	100
Transitions into homelessness		
no transitions	36	5
from not receiving income support	412	57
from independent living ^a	97	13
from living with relatives or friends ^a	59	8
from institution or supported housing ^a	43	6
from receiving income support, but housing status unknown ^a	66	9
other combination of transitions	6	1
total	719	100
Transitions out of homelessness		
no transitions	65	9
to not receiving income support	440	61
to independent living ^b	135	19
to living with relatives or friends ^b	30	4
to institution or supported housing ^b	44	6
to receiving income support, but housing status unknown	0	0
other combination of transitions	5	1
total	719	100

^a Of the cases 37-55% only include these kinds of transitions into homelessness (one or several transitions). The rest of the cases, in addition include one or more transitions from not receiving income support.

^b Of the cases 50-57% only include these kinds of transitions out of homelessness (one or several transitions). The rest of the cases, in addition include one or more transitions to not receiving income support.

The results can be interpreted to indicate more about short-term or long-term homelessness during the receipt of income support, depending on the perspective taken. On the one hand, one third of homeless young adults were homeless for three months or less during the studied time period; 54% were homeless for six months or less and only 6% were homeless for more than two years. On the other hand, as many as 150 young adults (21%) were homeless while receiving income support for more than a year during the time period studied. One year is a long time to be homeless, especially for a young person. Furthermore, since they received income support, they had contact with social services and their homelessness status was known in the system.

It is important to note that the data does not contain information on whether the individuals studied had been homeless before the year 2008 or after the year 2010. Hence, a person would be registered as short-term homeless in the data if his/her long-term period of homelessness ended in January 2008. However, this problem with measuring the duration of homelessness is prevalent in most homeless data. For example, in most national homeless surveys (Socialstyrelsen, 2012; Benjaminsen and Lauritzen, 2013; Dyb and Johannessen, 2013), the information of duration is based on an estimate given by a professional working with the homeless person, and the professionals may not be aware of the complete housing histories of all clients. In this study, different subgroups of homeless, based on the duration of homelessness and the stability of the housing pathway, are compared. The analysis will shed light on the heterogeneity of different subgroups compared to several factors and can, hence, give more information about the reliability of the variable of duration in this data.

Of the homeless young adults in this study, 43% had just one period of homelessness during the studied years. This single period was short for many, but the longest of these periods lasted for over 30 months. Of the homeless, 19% had four or more homeless periods. Fifty-five percent of the homeless had at least one situation whereby between two homeless months, they had one month when they did not receive income support. In many of these cases, the month in between was probably also a homeless month, and the people would also have been entitled to income support that month, but for some reason they did not receive the support.

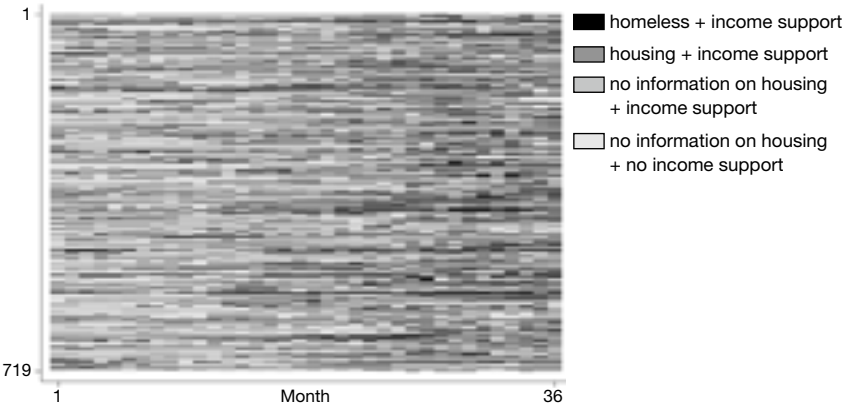
Fifty-seven percent of the homeless young adults in this study transition into homelessness while not receiving income support, and 61% transition out of homelessness not receiving income support. The rest of the homeless people either had no transitions into or out of homelessness at all (were homeless when the studied time period started or ended) or entered homelessness from independent living, living with relatives or friends or living in an institution or supported housing – or they exited from homelessness into one of these statuses. Even though the majority had

several periods of homelessness, only 1% had several kinds of transitions into or out of homelessness (for example, entered homelessness first from supported housing and then from independent living).

As mentioned earlier, it is likely that in many cases, the actual homelessness continued when the person stopped receiving income support, and so it appears that they were no longer homeless in the data. In other cases, this transition into not receiving income support may have meant actually exiting homelessness. However, it is likely that in many of these situations, the person would still have been entitled to income support at least for some months after the transition, but they, again, for some reason no longer received the support. It is unlikely that all the homeless transitioning from homelessness to not receiving income support, for example, obtained a job at the same time or moved away from Helsinki.

Figure 1 shows a visualization of the housing pathway for each homeless individual during the studied time period (a sequence index plot). Each line represents one person and the different scales of gray represent different housing statuses.

Figure 1: Visualization of the housing pathways with a sequence index plot.



Homeless subgroups

It is well known, that homeless people, even the young homeless, are not a homogenous group. Housing pathways vary greatly, and homeless people have different psycho-social backgrounds and life situations. Hence, it is important to analyze the data not only as a whole, but also in different subgroups. In previous studies, the subgroups have usually been formed based on the duration of the homelessness

(Caton *et al.*, 2005; Weinreb *et al.*, 2010). Sometimes the number of homeless periods and the homelessness triggers have also been used as criteria for forming subgroups (van Laere *et al.*, 2009; McAllister *et al.*, 2010).

Table 2 describes the criteria and basic characteristics of the subgroups used in this study. The criteria for defining the subgroups were formed theoretically. The aim was to create subgroups that would differ from each other when compared to the duration of the homelessness and the stability of both the housing pathway and recipient status in the income support services. It is a very different kind of experience to be homeless for just one month compared to several years. However, it is also very different to be homeless for several years continuously compared to exiting and entering homelessness (and/or being in receipt of income support services) several times.

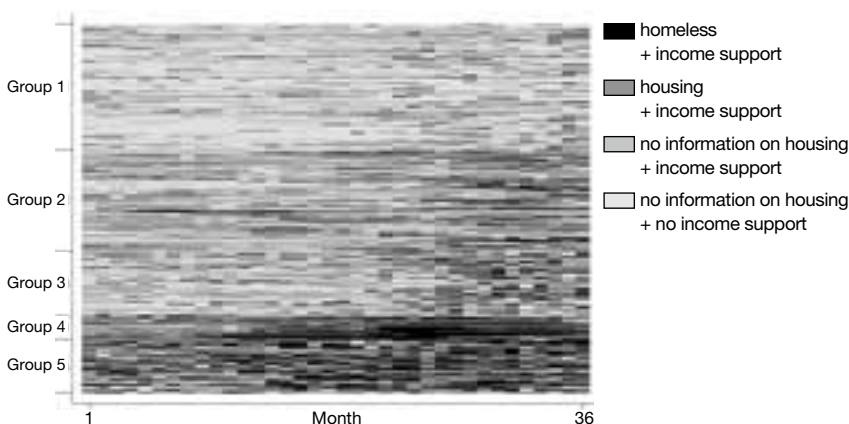
Table 2: Description of the homeless subgroups.

	Subgroups				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Short duration	Medium duration, stable pathway	Medium duration, episodic pathway	Long duration, stable pathway	Long duration, episodic pathway
Combined duration of homelessness (months)	1-3	4-12	4-12	13-36	13-36
mean	2,0	6,7	7,8	20,5	21,4
std dev	0,8	2,4	2,3	7,2	6,2
Number of homeless periods	any (in practice 1-3)	1-2	3 or more	1-2	3 or more
Mean	1,3	1,5	3,7	1,5	5,1
std dev	0,5	0,5	0,9	0,5	2,0
Size (n)	246	196	127	46	104
Size (% of the homeless)	34	27	18	6	14

Before choosing the theoretical approach for forming the subgroups, K-means-clustering based on the duration of homelessness and the number of homeless periods with different number of clusters was attempted. The problem with these clusters was that the grouping based on the duration fitted badly with what is already known about homelessness. When studying homeless, it is important to

be able to separate the very short homeless from a wide range of longer-term homeless, even if other cutting points would be preferred from a statistical perspective. Figure 2 visualizes the housing pathways for the final subgroups.

Figure 2: Visualization of housing pathways in the homeless subgroups with a sequence index plot.



Psycho-social Profiles

The homeless subgroups were compared with each other with regard to several psycho-social background variables. Table 3 describes the differences between the subgroups with reference to these factors.

Table 3: Prevalence rates of different transitions into and out of homelessness, sources of income and psycho-social factors in the homeless subgroups (%).

	Subgroups						
	1	2	3	4	5	total	p-value
Male gender	72	75	79	78	84	76	0,196 ^a
Age (years in December 2008)							
19-21	33	38	39	17	21	33	
22-23	24	20	19	30	21	22	
24-25	22	20	20	20	34	23	
26-27	21	21	22	33	24	22	
total	100	100	100	100	100	100	

Transitions into homelessness ^c

from not receiving income support	65	51	59	57	69	60	
from independent living ^d	16	14	11	24	11	14	
from living with relatives or friends ^d	7	14	8	7	6	9	
from institution or supported housing ^d	3	9	6	5	10	6	
from receiving income support, but housing status unknown ^d	10	10	15	5	4	10	
other combination of transitions	0	2	1	3	1	1	
total	100	100	100	100	100	100	0,004 ^b

Transitions out of homelessness ^c

to not receiving income support	74	54	80	35	72	67	
to independent living ^d	18	29	12	43	14	21	
to living with relatives or friends ^d	5	5	2	8	4	5	
to institution or supported housing ^d	2	10	6	14	8	7	
other combination of transitions	0	1	0	0	2	1	
total	100	100	100	100	100	100	<0,001 ^b

Sources of income during homeless months ^a

income from paid work	11	11	17	2	14	12	0,096 ^a
unemployment allowance or labor market subsidy	13	17	23	26	28	19	0,005 ^a
study benefits	6	8	6	13	8	7	0,457 ^a
sickness allowance	2	6	6	9	10	5	0,017 ^a
pension	5	3	5	4	5	4	0,815 ^a
housing allowance	8	19	17	48	27	18	<0,001 ^a
other	5	6	15	20	14	9	<0,001 ^a
had at least one month, when income support was the only source of income	73	87	95	91	95	85	<0,001 ^a

Sources of income during housing months ^a

income from paid work	22	14	10	14	6	15	0,024 ^a
unemployment allowance or labour market subsidy	31	34	28	14	19	29	0,059 ^a
study benefits	15	14	14	9	7	13	0,624 ^a
sickness allowance	7	8	9	3	4	7	0,641 ^a
pension	5	7	8	6	0	5	0,260 ^b
housing allowance	51	60	45	66	44	53	0,051 ^a
other	12	17	13	14	11	14	0,763 ^a
had at least one month, when income support was the only source of income	83	83	79	74	87	82	0,571 ^a

Psycho-social factors

clienthood in substance abuse services	17	33	29	54	50	31	< 0,001 ^a
entitlement for special reimbursement of medicines for mental illnesses	10	10	10	28	9	11	0,004 ^a
reduction of income support	8	15	17	17	16	13	0,067 ^a
not Finnish nationality	17	29	18	24	10	20	0,006 ^a

^a Pearson's chi-squared test^b Monte Carlo estimate for the Fisher's test, 100 000 samples^c Counted only among those who had at least one transition into/out of homelessness.^d For exact definitions, see Table 1.^e Income from the specified source was among the five main sources of income during the months when receiving income support.

Statistically significant differences were found between subgroups according to age, transitions into and out of homelessness, some sources of income, clienthood in substance abuse services, entitlement for special reimbursement of medicines for mental illnesses and nationality.

The homeless subgroups did not differ from each other regarding gender. However, a clear majority in all of the homeless subgroups were men. Not surprisingly, there tends to be higher rates of older homeless in the long-term subgroups and higher rates of younger homeless in the short- and medium-term groups. The younger recipients are less likely to have had time to be homeless for a long time.

Transitions into and out of homelessness in the total data were described in more detail in the section on housing pathways. The groups did differ from each other with regard to the distribution of different transitions from a statistical point of view. The results are, however, difficult to interpret, because in all the groups such a high rate of the homeless had only transitions from or to not receiving income support.

There were statistically significant differences between the groups receiving unemployment benefits, sickness allowance and housing allowance during the homeless months. Overall, in cases in which there were differences in receiving benefits, it seemed, that the rates were higher the longer the homelessness lasted. This could indicate that receiving these benefits was associated with longer-term homelessness. However, the longer-term homeless may also be more likely to receive benefits during the homeless months simply because they were homeless longer and hence had more possible months for receiving the benefits. The rates of having at least one homeless month when income support was the only source of income were higher in both subgroups with episodic pathways compared to the corresponding group with stable pathways. Moreover, the rates of having income from paid work during the not homeless months was lower in these groups. In theory, one should not be able to receive housing benefits during homeless months, but in practice this was true for almost 20% of the studied homeless people during at least one month. This may be due to delays in the registers in our data, but the housing allowance may also have been granted based on false information of the housing status, which would be an important possibility to study more closely.

The variable 'clienthood in substance abuse services' meant that the income support recipient had been identified as a client in the register of substance abuse services of the City of Helsinki at least once during 2008-2010. In the two groups of long-term homeless (groups 4 and 5) about half of the homeless were clients of substance abuse services. This was least prevalent in the group of short-term homeless (group 1). In the subgroups of medium- and long-term homelessness the

rates were higher among those with stable homeless pathways, compared to those with episodic pathways. The corresponding rate among income support recipients who were not homeless and of the same age in the data was 7%.

Entitlement for special reimbursement of medicines for mental illnesses is a unique variable in homelessness research. In Finland, when a person buys certain medicines from the pharmacy, part of the expenses is reimbursed by the National Health Insurance system. This applies to medicines that a doctor has prescribed for the treatment of an illness and which fill certain other criteria. The data includes a variable that defines whether the person was at some point during 2008-2010 entitled to the special reimbursement of 100% of the price for medicines, which were used for treating severe psychotic or other severe mental disorders. The rate of this entitlement was 11% among the homeless and 12% among other young single income support recipients.

Interestingly, there was only one subgroup that differed from the others as regards entitlement for special reimbursement of medicines for mental illnesses. The rate for this was 28% among the long-term homeless with stable pathways (group 4), while it was about 10% in all other groups. Higher rates of serious mental disorders among the long-term homeless supports findings in previous literature. The interesting question is, why did the other groups, including the long-term homeless with episodic pathways, not differ with regard to this variable. One explanation could be that mental problems are associated with longer duration of homelessness, but those with episodic pathways in housing and/or receiving income support may be less likely to use health care services and hence less likely to have a diagnosis or use medication.

Reduction of income support is a way of sanctioning the income support recipient. If the recipient, for example refuses to apply for work, take a job offered, or participate in specific social services, the income support can be paid with a reduction of 20-40% (Act on Social Assistance, 1997/1412). Among young homeless adults in this study, 13% had at least one month in which their income support had been reduced. The corresponding rate among income support recipients of the same age who were not homeless was 5%. The differences between the five groups in this study as regards reduction of income support were not statistically significant. However, the prevalence rates show clearly that the short-term homeless (group 1) had lower rates of income support reduction than the others. Factors leading to reduction of income support may be associated with more severe forms of homelessness.

About 20% of the homeless people in this study were not Finnish nationals. The corresponding rate among young income support recipients who were not homeless was 10%. A non-Finnish nationality seemed to be associated more with the stable nature of the pathway than with the duration of the homelessness. Both

stable subgroups (2 and 4) had higher rates of homeless people with non-Finnish nationality compared to the groups with an episodic pathway and the same duration (groups 3 and 5). In fact, the long-term episodic homeless (group 5) had the lowest rate of homeless people who were of non-Finnish nationality. One explanation for this could be that young immigrant homeless may have smaller networks and less available sources for income compared to the homeless with Finnish nationality. Hence, they may be less likely to have occasional months when they stay with a friend or do not receive income support.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study suggests a new method for quantifying homelessness. Traditional homeless surveys and street counts have their place in quantification, but the need for more detailed and reliable administrative data on homelessness is clear in many countries. This study provides an example of how different administrative registers can be combined in order to create rich and detailed panel data describing a specific group of homeless people.

In this study, the focus was on young homeless recipients of income support in Helsinki. However, the data would also allow analysis of homeless income support recipients of any age group, and also allow comparison of income support recipients who are homeless or not. Other cities could have been included using the corresponding registers of the income support recipients in other cities. However, this might be challenging, because registers differ very much between cities. In addition, different time periods could have been defined. Creating this kind of data takes some effort and requires co-operation between organizations. In the case of this study, the data had been created for other research purposes and utilizing it for studying homelessness was quite easy. The responsibility for paying basic income support recently changed from municipalities to the Social Insurance Institution of Finland. Hence, the analyses in relation to basic income support will now be easier to conduct in the future because the same register will cover the whole country.

Register-based panel data provides new methodological possibilities for homelessness research. The paths of different types of homelessness can be followed through time and the stability of the pathways can be analyzed. Transitions, sequences, and different turning points in life can be studied in much more detail than, for example, in traditional questionnaire-based research.

The results of this study indicate that the young homeless recipients of income support are a heterogeneous population. One third were homeless for less than four months and one fifth for more than a year in the data. About 40% of homeless

young adults had just one period of homelessness and about 20% had more than three periods. Subgroups based on the duration of homelessness and the number of homeless periods differed from each other as regards many factors: age, transitions into and out of homelessness, some sources of income, clienthood in substance abuse services, entitlement for special reimbursement of medicines for mental illnesses and nationality.

An important result of this study for social work is also the fact that long-term homelessness of young income support recipients exists, and many of these individuals receive income support in a very unstable way. One would hope for much lower rates of transitions from homelessness into not receiving income support, and higher rates of transitions from homelessness to independent living – and then possibly later into not receiving income support. In an ideal world, there would be no transitions into homelessness from institutions or supported housing, because the clienthood in the previous institutions should prevent the homelessness. Essentially, in an ideal world, there would not be any transitions into homelessness when receiving income support at all, because the clienthood in social work would also be able to prevent the homelessness. In practice, this is of course not always realistic.

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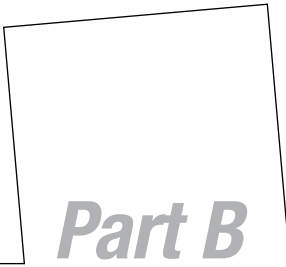
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Think Pieces



Part B

Charity and Justice: A Reflection on New Forms of Homelessness Provision in Australia

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➤ **Abstract_** *Charity directed at people who are homeless is invariably portrayed as positive. The good intentions of the provider of charity are not only lauded, but equated with positive outcomes for the receiver. The often severe material deprivation experienced by those who are homeless appears to justify the celebration of an extremely low bar of resource provision. Extending what has been the historic provision of food, drinks, blankets, and other day-to-day means of survival, contemporary charity in Australia also includes the provision of mobile shower, mobile clothes washing, and mobile hair dressing facilities. The emergence of similar 'novel' interventions to 'help the homeless' are seen in a wide range of other countries. In this paper we examine the consequences of providing charity to people who are homeless; consequences for the giver, receiver, and society more broadly. Drawing on the ideas of Peter Singer and the 'effective altruist' movement as a possible corrective to this prevailing view of charity, we suggest that such charitable interventions may not only do little good, but may actually do harm. We further argue that justice is achieved when inequities are disrupted so that people who are homeless can access the material condition required to exercise autonomy over how they live, including the resources required to wash, clothe and feed themselves how and when they choose.*

➤ **Keywords_** *charity, homelessness, justice, Australia, ethics*

Introduction

Popular and media portrayals of charitable efforts to assist people experiencing homelessness are almost always positive, focusing on the heart-warming generosity and industry of those concerned to ease the suffering of a group that confronts us with one of the starkest manifestations of poverty. This is particularly the case for supposedly 'innovative', small-scale and community-led interventions, which can attract high profile celebrity and business endorsement (Orange Sky Laundry, n.d.a; Wade, 2016). It is our contention that such interventions need to be subject to a more dispassionate and rational assessment of their value. In particular, careful and sustained attention needs to be given to whether the positive intentions of the giver achieve positive impacts for the receiver.

Our examination focuses on one specific case study that has recently received considerable attention in Australia. In 2014, an Australian charity established what it referred to as the world's first free mobile washing facility for people experiencing homelessness, using retrofitted vans with washing machines and clothes dryers (Orange Sky Laundry, n.d.a). Since then, the service has become so popular that mobile washing machines now operate across all six Australian state capital cities. Indeed, the model's popularity is not only evident in geographical spread: the two people who established the idea won the 2016 Young Australians of the Year. In 2017, they proposed extending their work to include a vehicle with Wi-Fi, a screen, and 30 chairs so that people who are homeless could produce and watch digital content (Orange Sky Laundry, n.d.b). In addition to philanthropic donations and volunteer contributions, in Queensland the charity received \$297 000 government funding to provide mobile washing machines and showers. Another organisation was granted \$305 000 from the Queensland Government "to buy and convert a bus so it can be used for a mobile shower and laundry service" (Queensland Government, 2017). Such facilities are not unique to Australia: we see similar models provided by charities including: Dignity on Wheels in California (Dignity on Wheels, n.d.), Ithaca Laundry in Athens (Ithaca Laundry, n.d.), and Mobil douche in Paris (DePaul, n.d.). Moreover, there are many other examples of interventions responding to homelessness – initiated by activists, community groups, social entrepreneurs, and faith based organisations, as well as charities – to which elements of the argument we develop here would also apply, including 'pop-up' on-street food distribution, 'street pastors' or 'novel' ways of providing shelter (opening disused buildings or converting shipping containers or old buses).

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We argue that these kinds of responses serve to distract from the underlying and largely structural causes of homelessness (Fitzpatrick and Bramley, 2017), as well as from more ambitious solutions that effectively prevent and resolve it (Johnson *et al.*, 2014; Fitzpatrick and Watts, 2016). Moreover, the focus and widespread celebration of these interventions risks normalising ameliorative responses that, at best, marginally and temporarily improve the wellbeing of those on the streets, and, at worse, actually undermine their wellbeing.

Ethical Responses to Homelessness

What constitutes an ethically just response to homelessness, and in particular its starkest and most life-limiting manifestation, rough sleeping? We propose that 'effective altruism' (MacAskill, 2015; Singer, 2015) offers one useful framework to consider this question. Effective altruism calls on those wishing to 'make a difference', to 'do good better', by using evidence and reason to maximise impact. Though often employed to encourage donors to target their contributions towards effective charities tackling the most extreme suffering globally (for the classic statement of this position, see Singer, 1972), the core prescriptions of effective altruism have relevance within advanced western economies. Of key relevance here, effective altruism offers a frame within which to challenge the profile and support given to well-intentioned but ineffective, or even counterproductive, non-profit responses. Donors, volunteers, and social entrepreneurs should not receive praise for their good intentions, but for investing their time and money into interventions that do *the most good* (Pummer, 2016). Enthusiasm and support for interventions that fall short of this standard ought to be redirected toward systemic policy changes and evidence-led interventions that can substantially and sustainably reduce levels of homelessness and dramatically improve the life chances and wellbeing of those experiencing it.

There is a robust body of contemporary and international evidence that demonstrates 'what works' in this area. A core part of this evidence reports the effectiveness of the Housing First model, which combines rapid access to affordable and secure housing, with appropriate, flexible and if necessary long-term support (Padgett *et al.*, 2016). The model stands in stark contradistinction to traditional and in many places still dominant responses to homelessness based on progression up a 'staircase' of provision or along a 'continuum of care' from emergency shelter, to supported accommodation, to mainstream 'normal' housing. In sum, the Housing First movement has solidified evidence from examples globally that show that housing-led responses can sustainably resolve homelessness for a group histori-

cally considered hard (even impossible) to help. People can sustain mainstream housing if given the support to do so, but many will struggle to navigate the staircase of support that traditional models expect them to.

Housing-led solutions are not just effective, they are also efficient. Since Dennis Culhane's (2008) watershed work, a substantial body of knowledge has shown the financial costs of homelessness and cost offsets of housing solutions. Across countries with very different housing markets, welfare systems, and social institutions, this work shows that providing affordable housing and linked support services, compared to the homelessness, health, and criminal justice service use associated with street homelessness, constitutes sound fiscal public policy and a better use of government funded resource allocation (Ly and Latimer, 2015; Parsell, Petersen, and Culhane, 2016). One authoritative analysis suggests that people who experience unsheltered homelessness – the very people mobile washing facilities target – can successfully exit homelessness, sustain housing, and for some of these people the costs of providing housing and support are offset by the reduction in their use of other publically funded services (Padgett *et al.*, 2016). Though such cost-benefit reasoning might be judged to be dispassionately economistic, it is in fact far from it. It reflects an attempt to ensure that resources are directed most effectively to address life-limiting and indeed life-threatening forms of disadvantage. Even in the absence of clear cost-benefit reasoning, there are compelling arguments for housing-solutions focused responses to homelessness: as Kertesz *et al.* (2016) argue, even in cases where providing housing will cost more than 'maintaining' a person in homelessness on the street, housing remains the clear route to that individual's future wellbeing and participation in society.

Seen in this light, dedicating time, resources, and money to models that simply ameliorate homelessness, looks increasingly like a distraction from the substantial evidence now available demonstrating how homelessness can be effectively prevented and resolved. Those intending only to ameliorate the suffering of those on the street should face legitimate questions about their poverty of ambition, not uncritical praise. Providing mobile washing facilities to people who are homeless risks shifting the debate away from different forms and models of housing, and other evidence-informed responses. When we provide people who are poor with the means to temporarily wash themselves and their clothes in public spaces we are not thinking through, much less lobbying for, the necessity of housing as part of the solution.

(No) Harm Done

In response to our position that effectiveness and efficient use of scarce resources should be at the front of the minds of donors, commissioners and social entrepreneurs, defenders of interventions like mobile washing facilities and other such novel services might make several arguments. They may concede that mobile washing facilities do not contribute in any substantial way to resolving homelessness, but nevertheless do no harm. They are benign, well-meaning interventions, which leave experts working in commissioned services to get on with the real job of tackling homelessness. It might be added that public donations accruing to these interventions do not really have an 'opportunity cost', in that if they weren't given to these charities, they would not be invested in alternative evidence and housing-led responses to homelessness. Defenders may claim that interventions like mobile washing facilities have positive consequences for those sleeping rough that while falling short of resolving homelessness are nevertheless significant, including not only the health and self-esteem related gains associated with being able to maintain personal hygiene, but also perhaps opportunities for social interaction and empathic connection with those running the facilities and others using it. These social gains might be seen to have intrinsic value quite separate from their impacts on homelessness.

We consider there to be a number of reasons to be cautious about these 'no harm' and 'marginal positive benefit' arguments. First, there is a possibility of genuine harm resulting from these kinds of interventions. An ongoing and highly polarised debate of relevance here surrounds the distribution of free food to those on the streets, e.g. via soup kitchens (Shelter, 2005; Watts *et al.*, 2017). Those involved in such interventions see them as offering a highly vulnerable population the means of survival, as well as empathic care and support. Critics, however, argue that such 'subsistence provision' enables highly vulnerable individuals to sustain damaging, even life-threatening, patterns of behaviour, and thus represent abnegation – rather than a realisation – of moral responsibility. An example of the potential harm of such interventions played out in Belfast, Northern Ireland in the winter of 2015/16. Public dismay in response to a series of deaths among the city's street homeless population prompted spontaneous community-led provision of food and other assistance. This, however, was claimed by local stakeholders to have had the unintended consequence of drawing vulnerable individuals away from existing specialist outreach and support services that could offer more substantial assistance (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016b). Similar risks might well be associated with mobile washing facilities, particularly in cities where washing machines and showers are already provided by specialist support organisations. The actual impact of these kinds of interventions requires empirical investigation. These are not matters that can be settled 'a priori' or with reference to the intentions (however noble) of those running, investing in or otherwise

supporting them. In a recent article, Watts *et al.* (2017) propose a normative framework intended to aid the robust and dispassionate assessment of the ethics of varied responses to rough sleeping. They argue that even seemingly benign interventions like soup kitchens must be assessed in relation to the legitimacy of their aims and their effectiveness in achieving legitimate aims.

Second, it is not at all clear that mobile washing facilities offer the 'added extra' to homelessness provision that might optimistically be claimed, but rather that they draw both attention and money directly away from demonstrably effective services. Such headline-grabbing but non-evidence informed ventures often seem to grab public attention and in doing so can also attract the attention of not just big business and celebrities, but also politicians (for example, see Watts, 2016). With such notoriety, there is a concern that hype, rather than robust evidence and expert (academic and practice) opinion, will begin to exert an influence over the direction of public policy and investment. Indeed, in several Australian states, mobile washing facilities are enabled through philanthropic donations, which are tax deductible (and thus result in a loss of tax revenue), as well as through funding from direct government grants. This charitable response is therefore funded with money that could have otherwise supported housing and evidence-led responses to homelessness. In addition to these financial and policy impacts, we would add that such ventures may have a concerning psycho-social impact, in not just *normalising* but encouraging a *celebration of* responses that soothe rather than solve homelessness. When confronted with the individuals providing free access to washing machines, the response appears to be a warm-hearted endorsement of the good intentions of the 'provider' of these services, rather than horror that the 'beneficiaries' are forced to rely on the benevolence of strangers for access to the very basics of survival and dignity.

Third, the view that mobile washing facilities and other such interventions offer dignity and meaningful social connection to the vulnerable individuals who use them, neglects the reality of relationships structured by charitable giving/receiving. Homelessness is often experienced as reliance on the benevolence of others, especially where people lack any entitlement to the assistance they receive (Watts, 2014), and can thus subvert a person's capacity to take control of their lives, leading to a feeling of life 'being on hold' during homelessness. For example, without the material resources that housing provides, people are not only exposed to social conditions that cause ill-health (Marmot, 2005), they are unable to take control of their healthcare (Parsell *et al.*, 2017) and are reliant on emergency and crisis health systems that are both expensive and ineffective at promoting positive health (Kertesz, 2014). The provision of mobile washing facilities is likewise a form of reliance directly caused by exclusion from the resources required to act autonomously. Exclusion from housing forces people into a position of dependence on the

hospitality and benevolence of altruists, and in so doing denies them not only autonomy, but the makings of self-worth, given that those in receipt of charity are rarely able to honour the highly valued social norm of reciprocity (Spicker, 1984; Watts, 2014). It is these considerations that lead the critics of charity to ask whether in fact the 'givers', rather than the 'receivers', benefit most from the charitable interventions (Allahyari, 2000). In 1920, the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee raised exactly these concerns as Britain abolished the Poor Laws:

The evil of charity is that it tends to make the charitable think that he has done his duty by giving away some trifling sum, his conscience is put to sleep, and he takes no trouble to consider the social problem any further... Very many do not realise that you must be just before you are generous (Attlee, 1920, cited in Dickens, 2017: 9)

Watts *et al.* (2017) remind us that our assessment of the appropriateness of charity is mediated by whether we identify most with the receiver or giver: if the former, we are confronted with both their material deprivation and their experience of being reliant on charity to fulfill their basic needs; if the latter, we may be buoyed by the display of virtue and good intentions, regardless of the consequences. In the case of mobile washing facilities, it is reasonable to ask whether the warm glow of 'making a difference' and the esteem of onlookers have had more lasting effects on the wellbeing of those responsible for this intervention than the temporary impacts on rough sleepers benefiting from clean clothes that soon become dirty again.

Rather than mobile washing facilities, people experiencing homelessness require housing in which they can decide when and how to wash themselves and their clothes. When people who have exited homelessness describe their housing as home, home is described as a place of privacy (Parsell, Petersen, and Moutou, 2016); they articulate one small constitutive component of which the independence of having the means to wash their clothes and themselves away from the public gaze (Parsell, Petersen, and Moutou, 2016). Deborah Padgett's (2007) work with people who exited homelessness found that the routine and control over life that housing enabled constituted a marker of ontological security. Housing not only meant that people achieved safety and control, but it promoted conditions for people to develop self-narratives and identities that extended beyond their former state of material deprivation (Padgett, 2007). Housing is a means to construct, and have socially validated, an identity distinct from one's former housing status i.e. homelessness.

The Role of Charity

Our argument is not a universalised position against charities, social entrepreneurs, community, and faith based groups responding to homelessness *per se*. On the contrary, there are many examples of such groups meaningfully contributing to society, and specifically to the wellbeing of people who are homeless. William Beveridge (1948) advocated for the continued role of charity when designing the modern Welfare State:

Voluntary action is needed to do things which the State is most unlikely to do. It is needed to pioneer ahead of the State and make experiments.

Charities are well positioned to push new boundaries and innovate and can be at the vanguard of developing effective interventions, in particular when they take into account and build upon existing lessons from past forms of provision. Providing a service that washes people's clothes on the streets, by contrast, reflects neither a pioneering attempt to better respond to homelessness, nor an attempt to step in where the state is failing its citizens. The latter would surely require a higher level of ambition than the provision of showers and washing machines. It reflects instead a poverty of ambition for the lives of the group it targets, only possible when people who are homeless are seen as limited, deficient or (at the very least) not the same as 'us' (Lister, 2004).

Celebration of these kinds of interventions arguably reflects an acceptance that those who are homeless are simply the embodiment of their deprivation (Parsell, 2010), so justifying this low bar of resource provision. 'We', the 'normal housed people', would after all never tolerate the idea of having to wash ourselves and our clothes at mobile washing facilities provided by charities; this response can only be justified as appropriate when we perceive homeless people as less than us, as 'other'.

Support, especially through taxes, for social interventions that enable people who are homeless to be clean, but still homeless, endorses homelessness as a social fact. Mobile washing facilities send the message that there will always be people in society who will be without their own housing, and that society's responsibility is only to ensure that they have the immediate and highly limited dignity of being clean. We can only conclude that individual donors and supporters of such programs, and (more worryingly) governments directing public money to support mobile washing facilities or similar ameliorative interventions, have accepted the social injustice represented so starkly in homelessness as normal. We can and should hold ourselves to higher standards.

Doing Good, Better

'Effective altruism' offers one answer to the question 'how can we help others?', and one that is directly applicable to both individual and policy responses to homelessness. Both an ethical framework and now a social movement, the ideas associated with effective altruism force an examination of the impact of our charitable efforts, and importantly, direct these efforts only to initiatives that concretely and profoundly improve people's lives. These ideas provide a helpful corrective to the intuition that altruistic intent in and of itself deserves praise. Singer (2015) reminds us that many (perhaps the majority of) people who give to charity do so for the 'warm glow' that giving entails and because of the emotional lure of responding (somehow, anyhow) to suffering when confronted with it (see also Bloom, 2017). The ethical response, however, is to direct these empathic motives effectively, not only to a good cause, but to an effective solution (MacAskill, 2015; Pummer, 2016).

Support for mobile washing facilities conflates the unambiguous need for access to resources to promote hygiene, with an uncritical assumption that any charitable response is desirable and advantageous for the recipient. Through government grants, philanthropy, awards, and media coverage, the social position of the provider of mobile washing facilities – and the fundraisers that support them – are lauded and given precedence. The short and longer term impacts on the homeless individuals using these facilities do not receive attention, despite being a crucial arbiter of whether these programs are a helpful addition to the landscape of homelessness services or not. Relentless attention to understanding the experiences of people who are homeless, and crucially the trajectories that allow some individuals to escape homelessness, forces a focus that extends far beyond mitigating the symptoms of this particular injustice. The innovation that Beveridge was optimistic charities would drive does not involve celebrating and funding activities that tolerate and normalise the highly inequitable distribution of one of the core the building blocks of a well-lived life: housing.

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Why We Need to Change the Way We Talk about Homelessness

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► **Abstract** *This paper discusses findings from the first ever large-scale study on public attitudes to homelessness in the UK. While experts believe that 'homelessness' encompasses a wide range of insecure housing situations and some groups are at higher risk of homelessness than others, public attitudes and action towards the issue do not appear to follow suit. The research used four sources of data – 15 expert interviews; 20 in-depth cultural models interviews and 30 on-the-street interviews; and media content analysis of a sample of 333 organisational and media materials about homelessness – to examine how we can communicate in a way that deepens public understanding, attracts new supporters and builds demand for change. Findings reveal that public opinion tends to overlook the relationship between homelessness and poverty or other structural causes in favour of a more fatalistic view that blames individual circumstances and poor choices. Implications for communications are discussed and what the sector needs to do to convince people that homelessness is an issue that can be tackled. The paper's overall conclusion is that organisations or campaigners need to adopt a more strategic approach to communications – too often we concentrate on raising awareness without translating that awareness into action.*

► **Keywords** *Homelessness, rough sleeping, strategic communications, reframing, poverty, UK*

Introduction

In 2017, homelessness has finally returned to the political agenda in the UK, and with 160 000 households still experiencing the most acute forms of homelessness across Great Britain (Bramley, 2017), it's not a moment too soon. But the British public generally views homelessness as almost impossible to solve – it is seen as a pernicious problem that money, government policies or charity can mitigate but not cure. This year, Crisis turns 50 and we want to make sure we are not here in another 50 years. Part of this work involves correcting this fundamental misconception, as it is preventing our work from progressing.¹ If we are to end homelessness for good, we need the public's belief and support that this can be achieved. We know that people are more likely to engage and take action if they understand that not everyone is at equal risk of homelessness and policy choices make all the difference (see Fitzpatrick, 2017).

In response, Crisis, in collaborations with other organisations in the sector, set about trying to change how we talk about homelessness, to convince people that it is an issue that can be solved. To help inform our communications strategy we commissioned the FrameWorks Institute to examine public attitudes towards homelessness, to map what the landscape looks like and to give Crisis and others working in this space ways to make their communications more effective.

At Crisis, we believe evidence-based reframing is a tool for positive impact. Conversations can be designed; language can be productively repurposed to further our mission. But we know that changing the way we communicate about homelessness won't be easy. For those working to end homelessness, the first instinct is often to make sure that as many people as possible are aware of the problem. The success of coming efforts will depend upon two factors: first, shifting perceptions of the impact that policy and practice have on homelessness levels, and second, the development of a coalition of influential organisations and individuals, which begin to frame the issue in a new way.

This article reports findings from the first phase of a larger, multi-stage, project (O'Neill *et al.*, 2017). We asked ourselves – how might we talk about homelessness in a way that deepens public understanding and builds demand for change? How might we positively guide media reporting so that it encourages people to support systems-level change?

¹ For more information about the plan to end homelessness that Crisis is developing this year and is due to be published in Spring 2018, see <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/a-plan-to-end-homelessness/>

The FrameWorks Institute started by identifying the core (evidence-informed) ideas that people working in the sector should communicate about homelessness. They then set out to examine the patterns in public thinking, media and third-sector agencies' discourse that present challenges and the harmful effects it can have. The research concludes by putting forward a set of recommendations, which can be used to craft smarter campaigns and communications to create long-lasting change. In the next phase of the project, evidence-informed tools will be developed and tested, to help us identify the most effective ways to increase public understanding and drive support for the policies and changes needed to tackle and prevent homelessness.

Even though the UK is the focus of this research, we believe that its findings and recommendations are likely to be relevant to organisations and individuals in other European countries and beyond.

Methods

This paper presents results from the initial phase of the project. Its findings and recommendations are based on four sources of data:

- *Expert Interviews:* To explore and distil key messages on homelessness – the ideas that the third sector want to communicate to those outside the sector – 15 phone interviews were conducted with individuals who work on and study homelessness in each UK nation. The list of interviewees was designed to reflect the diversity of disciplines and perspectives involved in efforts to address homelessness.
- *Cultural Models Interviews:* 20 in-depth cognitive interviews with members of the public in London, Manchester, Glasgow, Belfast and Aberystwyth. Cultural model's interviews are one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with members of the public, to capture discourse that reveals shared patterns of reasoning, assumptions and implicit understandings (or 'cultural models') used to make sense of an issue.
- *On-the-Street Interviews:* Thirty 'on-the-street' interviews were conducted to supplement the cultural models interview data. These took place in London and Glasgow. Efforts were made to recruit a broad range of participants. Interviews included a series of open-ended questions to gather information about people's spontaneous thinking about homelessness, its causes and what should be done about it.
- *Media Content and Sector Frame Analysis:* analyses of a sample of 333 organisational and media materials about homelessness that appeared between October 2014 and October 2016, conducted using a statistical technique called Latent Class Analysis (LCA), a statistical method that identifies mutually exclusive subgroups or 'classes' within a large set of data.

The time to do it is now

Now that homelessness is near the top of the political agenda across the UK, we need to hold politicians to their promises and make sure they are carried through – and this work must include better public engagement to galvanise support. We still have a long way to go to end homelessness and the public's energy and support will be vital.

When you work on a cause you passionately care about, such as ending homelessness, the first instinct is often to make sure that as many people as possible are aware of the issue. If you care about the cause, it's natural to want others to care as much as we do. Because, we reason, surely if people knew that homelessness causes real suffering (Thomas, 2012), that it sets back the life chances of those affected, then they would be more likely to support policies that protect people from homelessness.

In communication theory, that instinct is described as the Information Deficit Model (Irwin and Wynne, 1996). The term was introduced in the 1980s to describe a widely held belief about science communication—that the public's scepticism about science was primarily rooted in a lack of knowledge. If only the public knew more, they would be more likely to embrace scientific information. That perspective persists, not just in the scientific community, but also in third sector marketing.

But to truly drive change, especially at a time when homelessness levels remains stubbornly high and are set to rise (Bramley, 2017), is it enough for people to simply know more about homelessness? Our research suggests that not only do campaigns fall short and waste resources when they focus solely on raising awareness, but they can actually end up doing more harm than good.

Because people who are simply given more information are unlikely to change their beliefs or behaviour, it is time for the homelessness sector to move beyond just raising awareness. Instead, we need to use evidence to craft campaigns and communications that use messaging and concrete solutions-focused calls to action that get the public to change how they think or act, and as a result create long-lasting change.

Speaking different languages

After 50 years of campaigning, services, and research, at Crisis we know that as important as it is to end homelessness one person or family at a time, unless we address the wider causes – such as a lack of affordable homes, welfare reforms, low wages and irregular work, and an inadequate safety net for people in poverty – new homelessness will continue to happen (Fitzpatrick, 2017).

Despite this, our study revealed that the public still incorrectly believe that individual factors such as a person's character and personal choices are largely to blame. It shows how the public sees the 'typical' homeless person as an outsider or victim – someone whose circumstances place them in a separate category of society. When asked about their expectations for the future, most see homelessness as an impossible problem that personal actions can do very little to solve. And this fundamental misconception may be preventing our work from progressing.

There is now a sense in which experts and the public are often speaking different languages. Experts bristle at arguments from people saying that 'anyone can become homeless', saying that anti-intellectualism and ignorance are to blame. Even if that is true, that way of thinking only serves to deepen the divide between the two camps.

We often make the mistake of assuming people's minds are empty vessels. Instead, our research suggests that we need to think about someone's mind as a busy city during rush hour. It is crowded with people everywhere trying to get home from work and school. There are already a lot of beliefs and ideas in there. Before exploring the most effective ways to talk about homelessness, it's important to understand what we are up against and the harmful effects that creating awareness can have.

Results

The study identified four specific challenges: There is a narrow definition of homelessness; people see homelessness through the lens of individualism; prevention is poorly understood; and fatalism limits solutions support and reduces issue engagement. We will examine each of these challenges in turn.

Challenge 1: There is a narrow definition of what homelessness is and who it affects

The public has a limited view of what homelessness is and who it affects. For experts, homelessness covers a range of insecure situations – e.g. people being shuttled between emergency hostels, expensive temporary accommodation, and bed and breakfasts, or overcrowded shared housing – and some groups at greater risk than others (see for example, Fitzpatrick, 2017).

Yet the public tends to equate homelessness with rough sleeping; when asked about it participants said things like '*People sleeping on the street*', or '*Not having anywhere to sleep. Being outside*', and '*Without a house, without shelter, living on the streets*'. And in the public mind, a street homeless person is a man, aged between 40 and 60, who has been living rough for a prolonged period of time and is thought to be homeless due to severe mental illness or addiction(s).

Participant: Some people cannot interact well. Some people might have mental health problems and never be able to have what is normal to society. They will always be at the fringe or they are at the fringe and nobody is looking out for them and then they end up homeless.

Researcher: Why do you think that homelessness is more prevalent amongst the older age group?

Participant: I think it's maybe alcohol, addictions, gambling. They've lost their job. They went bankrupt. They've just lost everything.

In our research, we call this the *Middle-Aged Man* prototype, and the fact that the public see the 'typical' homeless person in this way has deep implications about how those affected are perceived: as either outsiders or victims, as individuals who belong in a separate category of society. As a result, the public naturally struggles to understand his experiences and how they might be helped. And it also prevents them from seeing the issue in relation to broader socio-economic trends, so that links with poverty are by and large lost.

So how are we contributing to this as a sector? The research provides some uncomfortable home truths. It tells us that rough sleeping is by far the most frequently discussed type of homelessness in sector and media materials. Thirty-five per cent of the third-sector agencies' materials reviewed discussed rough sleeping, 14 per cent discussed sofa surfing and 6 per cent discussed squatting. The media is even more likely to discuss rough sleeping: almost half (48 per cent) the news stories analysed discussed rough sleeping, while only 11 per cent discussed sofa surfing and less than 5 per cent discussed squatting. Also, as this passage illustrates, media and sector materials present the *Middle-Aged Man* in ways that mirror and reinforce the prototype in the public mind.

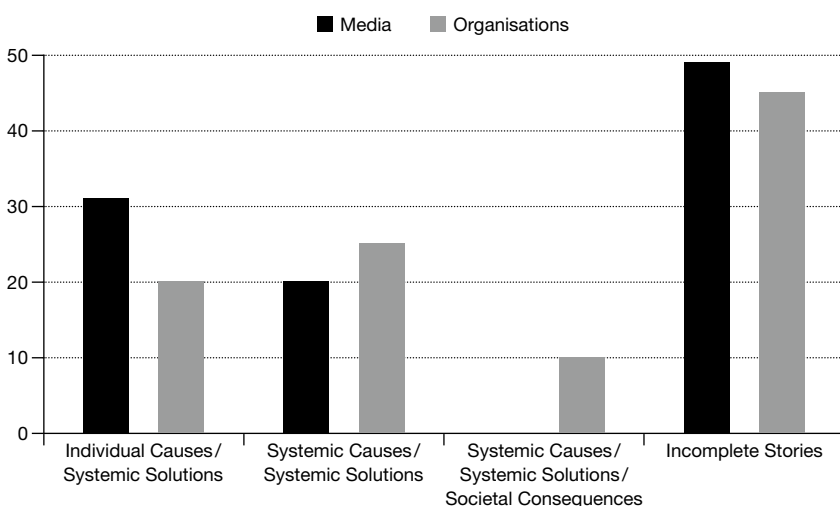
From a very young age I was in and out of care, and this was really difficult for me, as I was bullied badly there. From the age of nine I slept rough, mostly in shop doorways and sometimes in a lift in a car park until I got caught. Whilst sleeping rough I met two men who were homeless, and they became my friends. Unfortunately, this is when I started to drink and then later take drugs, glue and solvents mainly. This went on throughout most of my life. I had to shoplift to support my habit and to be able to eat, and I quickly became very streetwise, because this was my only way to survive. I got support from family housing after being told I had schizophrenia; after this my life started to change for the better. I met my partner who I adore, she makes my life complete.

Challenge 2: People see homelessness through the lens of individualism

Public thinking about homelessness is trapped by the idea that a person's circumstances are determined by their willpower, character and choices. And this view shapes how people make sense of homelessness – its causes, what should be done about it and who is responsible for taking action. This way of thinking goes largely unchallenged and existing stories often (likely inadvertently) reinforce it.

Our analysis identified four types of narrative in media and third-sector materials – the Figure below shows their prevalence.

Narrative Types in Media and Third-Sector Organisations' Materials



The *Incomplete Story* narrative was the most common type in both media and third-sector materials, appearing in nearly half of all materials (45 per cent and 49 per cent respectively). Messages falling into this category fail to answer essential questions like: what causes homelessness? What are its consequences? And what should we do about it? This piece is a typical example of this kind of story:

Forty cyclists will use pedal power to fight homelessness in a fundraiser for a large homelessness organisation this weekend. It's the third year of the Borders cycle challenge, which will set off from Kelso racecourse at 7 am on Sunday morning. The hardest of the riders will take on a gruelling 100-mile tour, which includes an ascent of almost 2 000 metres. For less experienced riders, a shorter race cuts out some of the hardest climbs, and everyone will get to enjoy some of Scotland and northern England's best scenery as they cycle through Border towns including Duns, Eyemouth and Coldstream. Both routes will finish back at the racecourse. The organisation's director said: 'I am in awe of the cyclists

who are taking on this challenge to help us ensure no one battles bad housing or homelessness alone. I'd like to wish them all the best for the event and give them my heart-felt thanks'.

We may not think of event announcements like this one as framing opportunities, but our research suggests otherwise.

The second most common was the *Individual Cause/Systemic Solutions* narrative. Thirty-one per cent of media materials and 20 per cent of third-sector materials tell this story. First, these stories zoom in on a person who is homeless and describe his or her living conditions. Then, they describe the individual-level circumstances (e.g. substance misuse) that led to the person's loss of housing. And the narrative concludes by advocating for more direct services or policy change to help the individual find stable housing. This passage exemplifies this narrative type:

Paul previously lived and worked legally in the UK for many years, but for the past 14 years he has been a visa overstayer. He has had 1 application and 2 appeals to stay in the UK on human rights grounds turned down. Paul does not want to return to his country because there is nothing for him there – his family are all in the UK. He has not accepted the offer of being returned voluntarily... Paul is 70 and destitute. He has deteriorating chronic health problems that have led him to be in hospital 4 times in the last 2 years. After one ITU (Intensive Therapy Unit) stay (for ketoacidosis), he was turned down by 4 GP practices, as he lacked a residential address, or adequate ID. Fortunately a mainstream practice well known for supporting homeless clients did eventually register him. [...] At the conference, we will be discussing how we can best help Paul. Should the Home Office take responsibility for people like Paul who have multiple health needs? What is the role of health care professionals? Where is the safety net?

The aim of this article and others like it is to build public support for solutions to homelessness, but our research shows that when we tell individual stories like Paul's, the public are likely to get stuck on the details of Paul's story: why did he make the poor decision to overstay his visa? Are his health problems a result of bad personal choices? In other words, we prompt the public to question whether the individuals profiled deserve support.

However, our research also identified two other story types, that align more closely with expert understandings of homelessness.

The *System Causes/Systems Solutions* narrative was present in both the media and third-sector materials (20 and 25 per cent respectively). These passages exemplify this story type:

Christmas is a mere one week away, so what timely gift should you panic-buy the politics and economics enthusiasts (yes, they exist) in your life? Fret no more: I've come up with the ideal present – a Build Your Own Housing Crisis kit. In the box provided, you'll find a city with rapidly growing research and medical industries; a large student population; a scarcity of unoccupied land to build on; a desperate homelessness problem; massive central government cuts to scupper planned housebuilding; and a green-belt encircling the city, strangling any hopes of expansion. Once you've followed the instructions, you may be surprised to learn you've built your very own Oxford, rather than London. The city is now the most unaffordable in the UK, with rents and house prices relative to earnings higher than even the overheating markets of the capital. The average house price in the city is 16 times the average wage, compared with London's 15.7. Even in the cheaper parts of the city, ignoring the north where it's common for houses to change hands for £1.2m, you're still unable to nab a house for less than seven times the average salary.

Whenever our staff support or visit families living in these conditions we witness the terrible toll it is having on their children – damaging their ability to learn and longer term life chances as they witness things they shouldn't, struggle to sleep, maintain their self-esteem, and lack the space to study and play.

What is missing from stories like this is a discussion of the societal consequences of homelessness. This matters because if the impacts of homelessness are only felt by individual people, then the public is less likely to engage in debates around the policy changes needed to prevent homelessness. They are also likely to fall back on punitive approaches to tackling homelessness if the potential recipient of support is deemed as undeserving of help.

Finally, 10 per cent of third-sector materials include a *Systemic Causes/Systemic Solutions/Societal Consequences* narrative (and is completely absent from the media). These stories explained how societal conditions and structural forces create homelessness, and how societal-level interventions can prevent and reduce the numbers of people affected. These stories also include discussion of impacts that go beyond the individuals affected and their immediate families. This excerpt exemplifies this type of story:

With cuts to public services, restrictions on welfare, rising housing costs and a lack of housing supply, there are real fears that homelessness will rise further. Women are likely to be particularly affected by the impact of welfare changes as they are more likely to be dependent on benefit income, including housing benefit. The concern is that we now face a 'timebomb' of women's homelessness. As homelessness rises, funding for support services is being cut. Overall, homelessness services reported a 17 per cent reduction in funding in 2013, with

the proportion targeted at women falling from 12 per cent to only 8 per cent in the last two years. This is very concerning considering women make up a quarter of people using homelessness services. The costs of women's homelessness can be devastating for women and their families. These high costs are also felt by the wide range of support services which women come into contact with during their experiences of homelessness.

This report and others like it focus on conditions that structure the prevalence of homelessness and highlight how societal changes have disparate impacts on different groups of people. Unlike the *Individual Causes/Systemic Solutions* narrative, this one does not link homelessness to an individual's choices. To achieve real change, we need to tell more stories that are solutions-focused and make a powerful case for the societal consequences of inaction. Homelessness affects all of us, not just those with lived experiences.

Challenge 3: Prevention is poorly understood by the public

Experts agree that steps can be taken to prevent homelessness, and call for bold action in this area. But the public struggle to see how steps that intervene in this context can prevent homelessness, because very little information is available about how prevention works. As a result, the steps to prevent homelessness that those in the sector recommend are simply off the public's radar and therefore hard for them to support.

Analysis of the media and third-sector frames helps explain the public's difficulty in engaging with the idea of prevention. Only 7.6 per cent of media articles and 24.2 per cent of third-sector documents dealt with the idea of homelessness prevention. Of the third-sector materials that did many highlighted its importance but very few explained how preventative approaches would work to address homelessness.

Third-sector agencies adopted one of two approaches in their prevention-focused materials. The first was to simply include the word 'prevention' without defining its meaning:

Preventing Homelessness

We support thousands of people at risk, who we know from our street work are at risk for rough sleeping. Our 2014 statistics of health reveal that:

27 per cent of our clients report physical and mental health problems and substance use issues

52 per cent of our clients use alcohol and/or drugs problematically
65 per cent of our clients report a mental health problem

70 per cent of our clients report a physical health need.

In this piece and others like it, the word 'prevention' is included but is thought to speak for itself. There is no discussion of what that means and who is at greatest risk.

The second tendency in third-sector prevention messages is to describe prevention by stating determinants ('if we do X') and outcomes ('we will prevent Y from happening'), but omit the processes or mechanisms that connect determinants and outcomes. The frequent use of 'return on investment' data was one way that third-sector agencies described prevention without explaining it:

I was particularly pleased by the announcement this week that that every £1 spent on services in Northern Ireland saves £1.90 for the public purse. This news holds powerful significance for the similar programmes in Wales – particularly when we ask ourselves how we can continue to campaign for the continued ringfencing – (and increased protection) – of this vital funding stream... [T]he report demonstrates that significant savings are delivered through the programme's focus on prevention and reducing the need for statutory services such as health, social care and the criminal justice system.

Challenge 4: Fatalism limits solutions support and reduces issue engagement

Experts in the sector emphasise that problems related to homelessness are complex, severe and large in scale. They are clear, however, that society can take actions to address homelessness and drastically reduce the number of people experiencing it. Despite this, there is a strong sense among the public – supported by media and sector stories – that homelessness is an intractable problem and an inevitable part of modern life in the United Kingdom.

The patterns of media and third-sector materials substantiate and contribute to fatalistic thinking. We saw earlier that structural *solutions* appear infrequently, especially in the media. In fact, many materials did not put forward any solutions: one-third of those produced by the media, and 17 per cent of sector materials.

Another way in which the sector likely increases the public's sense of fatalism about homelessness is through crisis messaging. In the following example, note how most of the story focuses on the problem rather than solutions:

The fact that there will be 626 more homeless children in ... this Christmas than last year – a 15 per cent increase – is simply not good enough and a badge of shame for such a relatively wealthy country. Our winter appeal aims to raise awareness of the plight of homeless children who will spend this Christmas living in temporary accommodation. The increased number of homeless children indicates a growing bottleneck of families stuck in temporary accommodation due to the major shortage of affordable housing across We are calling on all of ...'s

political parties to include ambitious targets for new affordable housing in their manifestos for next year's election campaigns and bring hope to the 150 000 families and individuals stuck on council waiting lists across the country.

When organisations and the media discuss the prevalence of homelessness or emphasise its urgency without offering solutions, they substantiate the public's fatalism about the issue. They inadvertently send out the message that homelessness is an unavoidable problem.

Conclusions

Finding common ground

Now we know what we are up against and how it affects the outcomes of our communications. The good news is that we have the power to change this by telling different kinds of stories. We need to become deep experts on public thinking and use this expertise to be strategic and proactive in how we frame messages.

Crisis hosted a series of workshops with other homelessness organisations over the past year. We brought together dozens of different organisations to agree on a core definition of homelessness to help create a common language that would allow us to work out how to move forward and implement the recommendations in the report.

The study suggests that we can collectively improve how we communicate about homelessness by following these simple rules:

1. Challenge the public's image of a 'typical' homeless person. We need strategies to disrupt the public's archetypal image of the homeless person: the middle age man who sleeps rough. This includes avoiding images that reinforce the public's stereotypes of homelessness;
2. Discuss the social and economic conditions that shape people's experiences, and avoid talking about personal choices and motivation (it may seem like a good idea but the study shows this strategy backfires);
3. Talk about the societal impact of homelessness as well as the individual. Highlighting collective solutions will help combat fatalism and encourage the belief that collective action can drive change;
4. Explain prevention and build a story that people outside of the sector can take up. The homelessness sector cannot end homelessness on its own – better collaboration with people in other related fields will help improve outcomes.

5. Talk about how systems are designed – and can be redesigned. The public should understand that the current situation is largely due to policy decisions and that we can change it by making different choices.

If we follow these guidelines and make sure we tell stories that are *concrete, collective, causal, conceivable, and credible*, then our communications will be fuller, more systems-oriented, and a lot more likely to build public support, both for direct services and social and policy change. Just as importantly, it will ensure that we are not reinforcing unhelpful attitudes and stereotypes.

This research was just a vital first step towards that goal. This is a long-term project and the next stage, which is already underway, involves developing and testing communications tools to help redirect public thinking so that it's more in line with expert views. These are being co-created with other sector organisations, and together we want to start introducing these evidence-informed communications tools into our working practices. Reframing homelessness will take effort, attention, and practice, but it will allow us to see the challenge ahead in a new light.

Moving forward together

We are in a place where we have to think about new evidence-informed ways of communicating, because the ones we have now just fail us. Currently, only one-third of the sector's communications applies a systems perspective on homelessness, suggesting that we are missing valuable opportunities to illustrate consequences and solutions, and to show how wider society benefits from collective action. Similarly, media stories tend to focus on the individual impact of homelessness to the detriment of its wider consequences.

The challenge, then, is how we change this while continuing to tell stories that people can relate to. We shouldn't omit individual circumstances, but we also need to show that homelessness has wider social causes and consequences that can be tackled. In short, we need to widen the lens, to challenge the 'typical' images and discuss the social conditions that shape people's experiences, as well as the collective solutions that deliver wider societal benefits. This isn't an easy task, but if we want to convince people that homelessness can be ended, we cannot afford to ignore these lessons.

This study and abundant research from other fields highlights that alarmist or fear-based communication is likely to undermine efforts to engage the public with homelessness and motivate individuals to change their behaviour. Fear can induce apathy or paralysis if not presented with an action strategy (and assumed self-efficacy) to reduce the risk (see Spence *et al.*, 2008; O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole,

2009). Not in the scope of this study, but also worth thinking about, is whether there may also be a need for more deliberative public engagement techniques in order to break down entrenched camps and seek common societal goals (Escobar, 2013).

Continuing to focus on raising awareness is the worst we can hope for. It is the least likely way that we are ever going to see change. Not only do our efforts fall short and waste resources when they focus solely on raising awareness, but they do more harm than good. The gulf between evidence that could help us avoid harm or increase the effectiveness of our efforts and practice is wide. To move the needle our research and experience both show that we must define actionable and achievable calls to action that will lead the public to do something they haven't done before.

Simply suggesting that somehow communications is 'the answer' to ending homelessness is of course wrong. Real lasting change won't happen until the welfare safety net, including access to genuinely affordable housing, starts to be restored. It is also time to use science to improve people's lives (though our services make a difference, their impact hasn't improved in 50 years).² But strategic communications—when approached thoughtfully, informed by data, and delivered with precision—is an important part of the solution.

² See Teixeira, L. (2017) 'The Next Big Thing in Preventing and Tackling Homelessness?' Crisis Blog: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/about-us/the-crisis-blog/the-next-big-thing-in-preventing-and-tackling-homelessness/>; and Teixeira, L. (2017) *Ending Homelessness Faster by Focusing on What Works*. Crisis and GHN: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/237356/ending_homelessness_faster_by_focusing_on_what_works_2017.pdf

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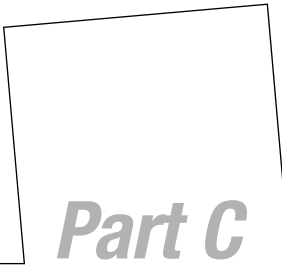
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Strategy Reviews



Part C

The Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016-2019: The Culmination of an Integrated Strategy to End Homelessness?

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➤ **Abstract_** *The integrated Finnish National Homelessness Strategy is often seen as the envy of the economically developed world. Challenges remain and progress is not always even, but Finland is approaching a point at which recurrent and long-term homelessness will be nearly eradicated and experience of any form of homelessness will become uncommon. The 2016-2019 Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland is the third stage of the implementation of an integrated homelessness strategy, which began in 2008. After setting the Action Plan in context, this review provides a critical assessment of the Finnish preventative strategy and considers some of the potential lessons for other European countries.*

➤ **Keywords_** *Homelessness prevention, homelessness policy, Finland*

Introduction

This paper begins by setting the 2016-2019 Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland, hereafter the 'Action Plan', in the context of the wider Finnish homelessness strategy. Following a summary of the Action Plan, the paper then undertakes a critical analysis of the preventative approach being taken, considering the strengths of the Finnish approach and the challenges that exist in reducing Finnish homelessness. The paper concludes with a discussion of the potential lessons from the Finnish model for other European countries.

The History of the Finnish Strategy

Finland began an annual point-in-time (PIT) count of homeless people in 1987, using a consistent methodology, which has allowed trends in the homeless population to be explored over time. There are some reports of variations in measurement techniques and the data are, in part, estimations (Busch-Geertsema, 2010) and the usual caveats about PIT data, as opposed to longitudinal data collection, apply. Nevertheless, the counts are comprehensive and have given Finland a broad picture of the nature of homelessness, which has been built up over three decades (ARA, 2017).

Homelessness had been highlighted as a social problem in the 1980s, which had led to the introduction of the count. In 1987, 17 110 single people and 1 370 families were recorded as homeless. Over the following decades, the social housing programme and the development of homelessness services had brought this number down considerably. In 2008, 7 960 single people and 300 families were recorded as homeless, in a country of some 5.3 million people (source: ARA <http://www.ara.fi/en-US>). The definition of homelessness used was broad, this was not simply people on the street or in homelessness services, hidden homelessness was counted too (i.e. individuals, couples and families staying with friends or relatives in the absence of any alternative).

Finland faces some housing policy problems; the lowest income households and younger people face housing market disadvantage at disproportionately high rates. Helsinki has a highly pressured housing market and, in common with many other European capitals, has an insufficient supply of affordable housing. However, Finland has recently been assessed as a country that experiences the third lowest level of housing stress in Europe. Housing cost overburden is comparatively low and Finland also performs well in respect of housing conditions, reflecting sustained programmes to develop affordable housing supply (Benjaminsen and Knutagård, 2016; Foundation Abbé Pierre/FEANTSA, 2017).

It is hard to be certain about the relative levels of homelessness across Europe, as measurement systems vary and data collection is inconsistent (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014). Some regional comparisons are possible, as all four Scandinavian countries have at least some data on homelessness, although the frequency, extent and nature of data collection vary. Historically, in relative terms, Finnish homelessness levels were close to Sweden, while levels in Denmark and Norway were lower (Benjaminsen and Knutagård, 2016). At pan-European level, Finnish homelessness appeared to be relatively low, i.e. similar to levels in other Scandinavian countries, which available data indicated tended to be amongst the lowest levels in Europe (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014).

Patterns in the homelessness data were a catalyst for what became significant changes in the Finnish response to homelessness. The annual counts of homelessness began to report, from 2004 onwards, that after initially falling quite steeply, the lone adult homelessness population appeared to have become static. Between 2004 and 2008, the annual counts reported a minimum of 7 400 and a maximum of 7 960 lone homeless people. Family homelessness had fallen to very low levels, but lone adult homelessness had apparently plateaued (source: ARA <http://www.ara.fi/en-US>).

The reason for this, according to the annual homeless counts, was that a group of long-term homeless people, with high support needs, were not exiting homelessness. As much as 45% of the total homeless population were in this long-term group (Tainio and Frederickson, 2009; Busch-Geertsema, 2010). Information from some service providers also indicated the presence of a long-term, high-need homeless population, whose needs were not being met by existing homelessness services (Pleace *et al.*, 2015). It was the presence of this 'long-term' population, on whom resources were being expended without resolving their homelessness that prompted the development of a new approach.

Paavo I and Paavo II

Paavo I, the first stage of the integrated Finnish national homelessness strategy was launched in 2008, with the goal of halving the level of long-term homelessness by 2011. The Paavo I strategy was designed to deliver 1 250 new dwellings and supported housing units in 10 cities, replacing emergency shelters and communal services with supported housing units that offered permanent tenancies. As has been noted elsewhere, Paavo I was distinguished as much by the political acumen with which the strategy was orchestrated, the bringing together all levels of government, quasi-governmental agencies and the homelessness sector, as it was by the adoption of a Housing First model (Pleace *et al.*, 2016).

Experience in the homelessness, mental health and drug and alcohol service sectors in Finland had shown that an emphasis on personalisation (consumer choice), a housing-led approach in which housing was provided first, rather than last, and a harm-reduction framework, led to better outcomes (Pleace *et al.*, 2015). The emergence of Housing First as a Federal strategy in the USA was in line with the approaches the Finns were adopting, and a decision was made to create links to those developing and advocating Housing First elsewhere in the world.

The decision to share their experiences and engage with the wider world enabled the Finnish strategy to draw upon North American experience, helping to refine their own ideas. The Housing First Finland network drew together international expertise as the Name on the Door programme, the development project for Housing First, became operational (http://www.housingfirst.fi/en/housing_first). Finland developed the first truly national-level homelessness strategy using a Housing First model (Pleace, 2016).

To meet the deadline set by Paavo I, Finland needed to deliver quite a lot of affordable, adequate and sustainable housing quickly. Converting existing, communal, institutional services into blocks of self-contained apartments – to provide congregate models of Housing First – made logistical sense in this context. This decision was to prove somewhat contentious, with some taking the view that this represented a ‘low fidelity’ version of Housing First that was likely to be less effective than replicating or closely following the original ‘Pathways’ Housing First model from New York (Tsemberis, 2011; Stefancic *et al.*, 2013; Busch-Geertsema, 2013). At the core of these arguments was the idea that social reintegration would be hampered by someone using Housing First not living in ordinary housing, i.e. being ‘separated’ from the community rather than a part of it (Quilgars and Pleace, 2016).

Debates about fidelity in Housing First had initially arisen because of inconsistencies in American interpretation of Housing First, which Federal Government had interpreted in quite broad terms (Pearson *et al.*, 2007). Some of the ‘Housing First’ provision in the US was – indeed is – in the form of congregate/communal services (Larimer *et al.*, 2009). Arguments began, which continue at the time of writing, as to whether this congregate/communal approach was as effective as the original, scattered housing, model, developed by Sam Tsemberis (Greenwood *et al.*, 2013). A perceived Finnish emphasis on congregate/communal models became part of European debates about Housing First (Busch-Geertsema, 2013).

In reality, Finland has never pursued a national homelessness strategy that was built entirely on congregate models of Housing First. Paavo I certainly incorporated the conversion of existing congregate and communal services into self-contained apartments for Housing First. However, the use of scattered housing models of

Housing First, housing-led (lower intensity, mobile support) services using scattered housing, and specialist, congregate and communal services, was also a part of the integrated strategy (Pleace *et al.*, 2015).

Equally, while there are those who assert that only high fidelity Housing First can be effective, the reality may be more complex. Congregate models of Housing First have encountered problems, including some Finnish services (Kettunen, 2012) and can perform less well than scattered site Housing First (Benjaminsen, 2013). Experience in Australia, with the Common Ground model, which has operational similarities with a congregate model of Housing First, has highlighted the challenges that can arise from accommodating a group of high-need formerly homeless people in an apartment block, on a single site (Parsell *et al.*, 2014). However, some recent results from Canada have cast doubt on the idea that congregate models of Housing First are – inherently – less effective than scattered site approaches (Somers *et al.*, 2017).

From a Finnish perspective, the strategy proved broadly effective. The original goal for Paavo I was not achieved, but while long-term homelessness was not halved, levels fell by 28% between 2008-2011, with 1519 housing units – more than the original target – being delivered (Pleace *et al.*, 2015).

The next phase of the strategy, Paavo II (2012-2015), brought a considerable shift in approach. The original goals in relation to long-term homelessness were extended, with targets to effectively eliminate long-term homelessness by 2015 and to make the use of social rented stock more efficiently to achieve that end. Housing First remained integral, but was one of an array of service models being used.

Importantly, Paavo II was clearly focused on homelessness prevention. Housing advice services and other preventative services had been in place for some time, but were now expanded. In 2012-2013, 280 evictions were prevented in Helsinki (Pleace *et al.*, 2015).

Paavo II was also notable in focusing on ‘hidden’ forms of homelessness, i.e. those living temporarily and insecurely with friends, acquaintances and family, because they had no home of their own. In Finland, these populations are defined and counted as being homeless, reflecting the ETHOS Light typology (Edgar *et al.*, 2007; Busch-Geertsema, 2014).

It is worth reemphasizing the strategic shift that had occurred in Finland. Paavo I focused on long-term homelessness. Paavo II continued the work undertaken under Paavo I, but was focused on homelessness prevention and hidden homelessness and incorporated new forms of service development. Finland placed Housing First at the forefront of Paavo I, but now Housing First, focused on long-term homelessness, was one aspect of a much broader strategic response to homelessness.

Long-term homelessness continued to fall according to the annual counts, which recorded 2628 long-term homeless people in 2012 and 2047 in 2016, a drop of 23%. Falls in long-term homelessness were reported year-on-year between 2013 and 2015 (source: ARA <http://www.ara.fi/en-US>).

Overall levels of homelessness also fell in the context of rising levels of homelessness almost everywhere else in Europe (Foundation Abbé Pierre/FEANTSA, 2017). In 2012, 7850 lone homeless people and 450 families were reported as homeless in the annual count; in 2016, the levels were 6684 lone homeless people and 325 families (source: ARA <http://www.ara.fi/en-US>).

Available data suggested 400 people had experienced recurrent homelessness, i.e. become homeless again after receiving a service, between 2012 and 2015, again suggesting low levels of attrition were being achieved by homelessness services. Estimates from a follow-up survey were that 5-10% of homeless people would experience recurrent homelessness from existing services (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016).

An international review of the Finnish National Homelessness Strategy, which involved academics from Finland, Sweden, the UK and the USA, reported that as at the end of 2015, the strategy was a success. Finland contrasted very positively with the policies and strategies employed in Sweden, the UK and the USA, through successful use of Housing First within an array of services to tackle long-term homelessness and through emphasising homelessness prevention and hidden homelessness (Pleace *et al.*, 2015).

Finland had not achieved a state of zero homelessness at the end of 2015. Levels of homelessness have been brought down, from something close to those experienced in Sweden, to the lower levels of homelessness in Denmark and Norway (Benjaminsen and Knutagård, 2016). The most recent Norwegian data, from the 2016 homelessness survey, also show a decline in homelessness, a 36% reduction reported between 2012 and 2016, (Norway Today, 2017). Denmark, by contrast, experienced increases in homelessness between 2009-2015 (Foundation Abbé Pierre/FEANTSA, 2017). Total homelessness in Finland fell by 16% between 2012-2016, at a faster rate for lone adults than for families (source: ARA, <http://www.ara.fi/en-US>).

While Finland does not have uniquely low levels of homelessness, it is clear that a great deal has been achieved in a short space of time. Paavo I and II have brought levels of homelessness down, particularly in relation to long-term homelessness among adults with complex needs and increased the level of homelessness prevention (Pleace *et al.*, 2015 and see <http://www.ara.fi/en-US>).

The extremes of homelessness, people living rough and in emergency shelters, are being dealt with. However, Finland is still wrestling with the issues of hidden homelessness and migrant homelessness.

The concept of hidden homelessness is not universally accepted, because for some European policy makers and researchers, the situation of an individual, couple or family staying with someone because they have nowhere else to go, is an issue of overcrowding and inadequate housing supply, not one of homelessness (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014). By some measures, for example, if homelessness is defined as only meaning people living rough and in emergency accommodation, Finland effectively has almost no homelessness whatsoever.

Yet, the Finns define hidden homelessness as part of the problem and, by that measure, there is still some work to do. In 2016, ARA reported that 82% of what the Finns define as lone homeless adults in Finland were living temporarily with friends or relatives. This included the bulk of the remaining long-term homeless population (1554 people out of 2047 lone long-term homeless people recorded, 76%, were living temporarily with family or friends) (source: ARA <http://www.ara.fi/en-US>). Most family homelessness was also hidden homelessness (Pleace *et al.*, 2015).

The dilemmas around migrant homelessness are those faced by most of the more economically prosperous parts of Europe. In Finland, as in other EU Member States, humanitarian concerns must be balanced against both popular politics and practical considerations in respect of border control. The issues in relation to asylum seekers, economic migrants from outside the EU and economic migrants from within the EU all being to some extent distinct. Here, Finland is faced with complex questions that are not easily or quickly addressed (see Pleace *et al.*, 2015 for more discussion on migrant homelessness in Finland).

The successes in Paavo I and II flowed from developing a political consensus, coordination of local, regional and national policy, and bringing together all the key organisations. Building agreements was as important as the pursuit of specific innovations, including various housing-led and Housing First service models and innovation in, and intensification of, preventative services.

Equally importantly, Finland did not attempt to bring an end to homelessness without thinking about housing supply. The international review also highlighted the Finnish strategy as incorporating a clear role for social housing which incorporated an expansion in supply. By contrast, Sweden, the UK and the USA were all attempting responses to homelessness that paid relatively little attention to obvious gaps in supplies of affordable, adequate housing which offered reasonable security of tenure (Pleace *et al.*, 2015; Pleace *et al.*, 2016).

The Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016-2019

The Action Plan builds on Paavo I and II and also draws on the results of the 2015 international review (Pleace *et al.*, 2015). The Action Plan reports that Finnish housing, social, health care and employment services, as constituted in 2016, did not allow for the early identification and prevention of homelessness. A multidisciplinary plan, developed in tandem with a strategy to further increase affordable housing supply, including 2 500 new housing units (ordinary and supported housing), is the next step being taken to prevent and reduce homelessness (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016). Other issues highlighted in the Action Plan are:

- Gender
- Youth homelessness
- Migrant homelessness

Women's experience of homelessness is also mentioned in the Action Plan. This is an issue of growing concern across Europe as evidence mounts that definitions that exclude hidden homelessness have led to systemic underestimation of the extent of female homelessness and a consequent neglect of gender issues, both in terms of policy and service design, and also in terms of research (Mayock and Bretherton, 2016). ARA reported that 23% of lone homeless people in the 2016 homelessness count were women (source: ARA <http://www.ara.fi/en-US>).

Migrant homelessness is defined in terms of those people who have been given residence permits in Finland, i.e. it is homelessness among migrant people given leave to remain in Finland. As the Action Plan notes, youth and family homelessness are disproportionately experienced by migrants. There are specific measures in respect of both migrant, family and youth homelessness within the Action Plan (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016).

The Action Plan links to a broader strategy around socio-economic exclusion based on what is described as the Housing First principle. As the Action Plan notes:

In practice, this means ensuring that housing is secured whenever the client is met in the service system. The target group of the programme includes people who have recently become homeless and those who have been homeless for longer periods, as well as people at risk of becoming homeless, such as young people or families overburdened by debt or at risk of eviction, some of the young people leaving their childhood home for independent life, people undergoing mental health rehabilitation and substance abuse rehabilitation clients transitioning from institutions to independent living, child welfare after-care service clients and some of the young people whose child welfare after-care ends when



they become 21, asylum seekers who have received a residence permit but have failed to integrate, as well as homeless released prisoners or prisoners going on parole (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016, p.3).

The range of homelessness identified, within a broad strategy to provide housing as quickly as possible, illustrates that the Action Plan is highly ambitious. The Action Plan is the third element in an ongoing strategic programme, begun with Paavo I and II, designed to effectively eradicate all forms of homelessness from an entire society.

Known triggers and risk factors for homelessness are counteracted by a comprehensive preventative strategy, while a second tier of innovative services, including Housing First, minimise recurrent and sustained homelessness. The budget was announced as €78 million, of which €24 million was service development, the remainder being focused on housing supply (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016).

Integration and joint working across social work, health, welfare, employment and social housing services is highlighted as a means to identify and target potential homelessness, with encouragement at national level to develop best practice locally, which can then be shared. The Action Plan is not specific about what this means, but innovations around the development of housing 'social work' services which provide a package of support to potentially homeless people, were already well underway under Paavo II, and were described as a key element in future strategic planning (Pleace *et al.*, 2015).

The Action Plan draws on research in Finland indicating that cost savings can be generated by homelessness prevention and by ending long-term homelessness. Rather than using these savings to lessen public expenditure on homelessness – which is very much the agenda in countries like the UK or USA – the Action Plan requires any savings to be invested in expansion of preventative services (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016). The emphasis on actually delivering an end to homelessness, evidenced in the spending on increasing suitable housing supply, is again shown by the decision to reinvest any efficiency savings from the Action Plan into further efforts to reduce homelessness.

The Action Plan presents a considerable number of specific objectives, beginning with the development of 2 500 new housing units, concentrated on Helsinki but also extending to other cities and specific provisions for developing housing units for young people. The Action Plan also notes an intention to build housing for asylum seekers with residence permits and develop support systems designed to ensure transitions between reception centres and housing do not raise the potential risk of migrants – with residence permits – becoming homeless.

Cities participating in the Action Plan are required to have a strategy in place by 2017, including preventative services, the use of affordable housing stock and plans for the use of Housing First and other support services. It is noted that services will need to include what are termed 'location-specific special measures' to prevent homelessness and recurrent homelessness, which means cities' plans should reflect any local issues and challenges (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016).

There is a broad emphasis on strengthening and extending 'housing guidance' (the Finnish term for housing advice services), including making housing guidance available to low threshold services, which are designed to be accessible to groups like vulnerable young people, who may be intimidated or find it challenging to seek help from mainstream services. There will also be a focus on preventing eviction, with a specific concern to prevent eviction among younger people (aged under 25) and the use of 'Pienlaina', which are small loans, intended to prevent low-income households being overwhelmed by debt. This will work in combination with existing social lending by the municipalities, enabling debt management to prevent eviction for financial reasons. The Action plan also includes a commitment to explore improving interagency working between mainstream agencies, including debt recovery and welfare agencies, again with an emphasis on preventing eviction (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016).

A history of rent arrears, where debts are comparatively minor and a repayment plan is in place, should not be a barrier to accessing housing, according to the Action Plan, with new agreements and working arrangements being put in place. A new project, 'Riskivakuutus' (risk insurance), led by the Ministry of the Environment, will enable provision of cover similar to household insurance, for people who have lost their credit rating.

There are a range of measures specifically targeted on preventing homelessness among young people, including housing guidance, the specific support around eviction just mentioned and the provision of integrated support services. Services to prevent homelessness among asylum seekers with a residence permit and quota refugees are to be enhanced, with transitions to independent housing being facilitated by support services. There will also be provision of help and support with managing independent living, including supporting young people and migrants with residence permits to live independently in their own housing (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016).

In relation to recurrent and sustained homelessness, reforms to mental health, substance abuse and social welfare laws and practices are intended to enhance joint working. This is intended to promote 'seamless' coordination between drug/alcohol, mental health, housing and housing guidance services. Alongside this, 'at risk' groups, transitioning from institutional settings such as long-stay hospitals,

psychiatric wards and facilities and prison, will be managed through a combination of social worker and peer worker support. Although Finland is a country in which harm-reduction services are in the mainstream of provision, the Action Plan nevertheless requires comprehensive availability of services that follow Housing First principles in relation to drugs and alcohol. Specifically, this refers to extending these services outside the Helsinki metropolitan area (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016).

Education and employment services focused on formerly homeless people, including provision of work-related and 'meaningful' activities (an example would be using art-based projects as a means of learning about structure and working with others), will also be promoted. This is another dimension of the broad emphasis on multidisciplinary joint working across the Action Plan.

As noted, the Finnish Government estimates an attrition rate of between 5-10% from existing homelessness services, i.e. up to 10% of people having contact with current services, may not exit homelessness on a sustainable basis (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016). The importance of interagency working and a multidisciplinary response is also noted, including an ACT team, which is active in Helsinki.

Other innovations include the 'pienet tuvat', which is not described in detail, but appears to mirror the Danish Skaeve Huse model (Meert, 2005). Skaeve Huse, represents an alternative to models like scattered-site Housing First, providing a permanent, small, congregate home, with on-site staffing, which may suit the 10%-20% of homeless people with high and complex needs, for whom Housing First can be unsuccessful (Pleace, 2016). An emergency accommodation service for young people in Helsinki that will triage young people into appropriate support and housing services is also being developed.

Experts by experience, i.e. people who were formerly homeless, feature quite heavily in the Action Plan. Their roles include consultation about how services should be designed and run, through to direct provision of services as peer support workers. This incorporation of service user representation is widespread in the delivery of health and social services, in some economically developed countries (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016).

As with earlier stages of the strategy, delivery is based on a series of formal agreements between the cities, municipalities and various governmental, quasi-governmental and non-governmental agencies. These agreements spell out what is required from each party, ensuring there is clear involvement from the required parties and that there is consistency across Finland. There is some reorientation of services, not least in respect of collaborative working to deliver better homeless-

ness prevention. The Action Plan spells out which agencies are involved in each aspect of this phase of the homelessness strategy, including the lead agency or agencies in each aspect of service planning and delivery.

Strengths, Challenges and Key Lessons

Clearly, the Action Plan is being introduced by a prosperous society, with relatively low levels of housing stress, and a relatively small homelessness problem. This is not to suggest there are not challenges; there can be shortages of affordable housing supply and there is still a homelessness problem. However, Finland is approaching a point where the overall level of homelessness and the rates of recurrent and long term homeless are becoming very low.

Achieving what is sometimes called 'functional zero' in homelessness is a relative concept. This is because definitions of homelessness vary and in the Finnish case, the persistence of 'homelessness' is, in part, because Finland includes concealed or hidden homelessness as part of the problem. As noted, by some other definitions, such as when homelessness is regarded only as people living rough and in emergency accommodation, Finland has almost no homelessness. Progress in tackling Finnish homelessness is being tested against a higher target than is used in some other European countries.

From an external perspective, the most striking aspects of the Finnish strategy are the ambition and breadth of the approach being taken. A key point here, which again relates to the debates about Finnish use of Housing First, is that the Finnish strategy is not a 'Housing First' strategy; it is an integrated strategy. The strategy began with a focus on long-term homelessness, but has broadened into a systematic attempt to prevent homelessness and to reduce hidden homelessness.

Another point, which has not been discussed thus far, is the openness to ideas that characterises the strategy. Finland consulted with experts across the world about how to tackle long term homelessness, involved Sam Tsemberis in discussions of Housing First, and continues to interact with the wider world. When the impact of Paavo I and II was evaluated, three of the four academics involved were brought in from outside Finland (Pleace *et al.*, 2015).

The Action Plan does not presume homelessness is structural, or individual; instead, it attempts to make provision for every type of homelessness. There is as much emphasis on homelessness caused by low income and debt – and nothing else – as there is on homelessness associated with being a former offender, or homelessness associated with a mix of complex drug, alcohol and mental health

needs. Preventative services range from quite simple systems designed to stop eviction linked to debt and low incomes, through to social work and peer support targeted on specific, high-need, groups like vulnerable young people.

The Action Plan clearly incorporates primary, secondary and tertiary prevention (Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick, 2008). Primary prevention centres on general housing policy, welfare safety nets and health and other services, i.e. on public services for the entire population that should – at least in theory – stop someone becoming homeless because they have no money, or because they develop a support or treatment need like a mental health problem. If these systems are working properly – which they appear to be in Finland – the inflow into homelessness will be less than countries where these services are limited, dysfunctional or not provided. Secondary prevention is focused on high-risk groups, ranging from those with high support needs through to those facing homelessness due to eviction or relationship breakdown, while tertiary prevention is essentially focused on stopping recurrent homelessness.

The Action Plan reflects much of the state of the art in terms of the understanding it shows of homelessness and in what is effective in ending homelessness (O'Sullivan, 2008; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2010). In many senses, Finland is the example that should be referred to when considering how to tackle homelessness at the strategic level.

It is important to note that the Action Plan is still in the process of implementation, which will not be complete until 2019. The Action Plan is not described as the final stage in the strategy (although homelessness is becoming very low), and the Finns may introduce a new action plan, from 2020 onwards, if thought necessary to complete the homelessness strategy.

The Action Plan is not, of course, perfect, any more than the Finnish strategy is perfect. Finnish achievements are not unique in the context of Scandinavia, although it is arguable that the emphasis and speed with which homelessness is being attacked since the advent of Paavo I, may be unique.

In considering the limitations, one point, which is carried over from the international review of Paavo I and Paavo II, relates to the nature and extent of data on homelessness in Finland and the recording of service activity and outcomes (Pleace *et al.*, 2015). Finland has a strategic overview of homelessness from its annual count, providing sufficient data from which to plan the interventions in Paavo I and Paavo II. The scale of long-term/recurrent homelessness, shown in the count, was a driver for restructuring homelessness services around tackling long-term homelessness, in much the same way as evidence of 'chronic' homelessness fuelled the development of Housing First in the USA (Pleace, 2011).

Yet the Finnish data are not yet all they could be. In part, this is because of the inherent problems with PIT methodology and due to some of the data being estimated, but also because those data are not very fine grained. There are clear benefits in being able to combine administrative data and track patterns of service use, service outcomes and the characteristics of potentially homeless and homeless people at national scale. Service and strategic level effectiveness, alongside the costs of homelessness and the potential cost benefits of homelessness prevention and ending long-term/recurrent homelessness, are best understood by tracking people using those services over time, to ensure everything is working and that exits from homelessness are sustained. The benefits of data merging and longitudinal tracking are evident in the US and, particularly, Denmark (Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2015).

One, rather obvious, point is that there may be more homelessness, or a greater experience of homelessness than the Finns realise, because data are PIT-based rather than derived from longitudinal monitoring. In terms of the other, largely qualitative, evidence around levels of homelessness in Finland, this seems unlikely, but the Finnish data are not as accurate as they could be.

There is not a single approach to data collection and analysis that provides a perfect solution. Being able to 'flag' homeless people as they use services is clearly very useful in terms of understanding the patterns and costs of homelessness, and also in terms of fine-tuning the targeting of preventative and homelessness services. Equally, sharing data across homelessness services themselves, so that there is a picture of who is using prevention, Housing First and other services, how often and with what outcomes, clearly facilitates planning and targeting.

However, such data are not perfect, there are homeless populations who are not in touch with homelessness services, nor necessarily engaging with welfare, health or other publicly funded systems. Recent American research has highlighted the risk in reading too much into administrative data on service use by homeless people, as that homeless population may not be the whole population (Metraux *et al.*, 2016). This shows the value in the Danish practice of combining administrative and survey data on homelessness (Benjaminsen, 2016), which may be one way forward for Finland. Data on patterns of service use are of considerable potential use as Finland attempts to further integrate service responses to homelessness, which is a central element of the Action Plan.

A criticism that can be directed at some homelessness strategies, services and policies is their reliance on assumptions about the nature of homelessness. Linear residential treatment or staircase services are posited on the idea that homeless people have a shared pathology that is the cause of their homelessness. The

staircase model presumes a standardised process of behavioural correction and treatment compliance, to make someone 'housing ready', is required, because it has operational assumptions about the nature of homelessness.

Failure in staircase services is relative, there are successes, but there is also clear evidence that such services do not end homelessness at the same rate as Housing First and similar services. The relatively poorer performance of staircase models appears linked to this presumption that each homeless person has broadly the same characteristics and that they have to be required to reorient themselves and/or comply with treatment in set ways. Housing First and related services, by contrast, deliver a bespoke service centred on understanding individual needs and following individual preferences (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013). This seems to be the reason why Housing First is markedly more effective at ending homelessness than staircase services, albeit that the evidence is less conclusive in respect of other outcomes, such as health and social integration (Quilgars and Pleace, 2016; Somers *et al.*, 2017). One caveat to note here, is that is a behavioural modification element, a recovery orientation, within some North American models of Housing First, which also seeks to promote behavioural change, albeit in a quite different way from staircase services (Hansen-Löfstrand and Juhila, 2012).

Oversimplifications about homelessness arise from data limitations and from cultural, historical and ideological images of who homeless people are. Part of the reason why some homelessness services have met with limited success in the past, and why research has sometimes missed the true nature of homelessness, is because a mishmash of partial data, ideology and culture – a false, or at best only partially accurate, construct of 'homelessness' – has been wrongly assumed to be an accurate picture of homelessness.

This relates to the Action Plan in the sense that, where data are patchy or not complete, the Action Plan does sometimes lapse into using quite broad assumptions about homeless populations. There is sometimes a tendency to assume 'clusters' of similar homeless people exist, when they may not, and occasional ascribing of presumed characteristics to certain groups. The brief discussion of gender is the strongest example of where this happens:

The work on homelessness supports gender equality and taking the special needs of both women and men into account. Home and its environment are usually understood in different ways in the experiences of women and men. Women clients, on one hand, need and value in particular one-to-one conversations, support in learning everyday life and domestic skills, and taking advantage of the competences and talents obscured by the[ir] problems. Men, on the other hand, emphasise the importance of offering work activities and activities with a low threshold as a part of housing services (Ympäristöministeriö, 2016, p.3).

There are a couple of issues here. The evidence base that is available indicates that three key issues are: that the causation of women's homelessness is strongly linked to male (domestic) violence, that family homelessness is highly gendered (disproportionately experienced by younger lone women parents with dependent children) and that women tend to seek shelter from relatives, friends and acquaintances when they become homeless. Women may avoid homelessness services and only use them when informal options have been exhausted. Hidden female homelessness may also be sustained and recurrent, with a high human cost for the women experiencing it (Mayock and Bretherton, 2016). The Action Plan does not, at present, reflect this kind of evidence, appearing to assume differences exist that are linked to traditional gender roles, women are identified as needing to learn about 'domestic skills', while men are linked to needing to learn 'work activities'. In reality, meeting the needs of homeless women is likely to involve understanding of the needs that arise from experiencing domestic violence and in understanding and responding to women's broad tendency to take particular trajectories through homelessness, i.e. relying on friends, relatives and acquaintances to a higher degree than formal services.

It is worth asking whether all the needs identified in the Action Plan do exist in quite the way they are presumed to. It may be that low- and no-need groups, whose homelessness or potential homelessness is related to low income and debt, and the high-need groups, in which morbidity rates of severe mental illness and problematic drug/alcohol use are high, are much more significant than whether someone is young, or an ex-offender. Of course, the need for distinct services may well be there, but before creating anything new, or expanding existing provision, it is important to be clear that doing something distinct for a specific population is necessary. Equally, as with gender, where there is evidence that distinct patterns exist – for example, women will need support around gender-based/domestic violence at far higher rates than men to avoid and exit homelessness – it is vital that the right services are in place.

No one data source can answer every question, administrative data can be invaluable in understanding pathways through services and barriers to services, but it does not cover those homeless people who do not engage with services, which can include women and young people experiencing hidden homelessness, as well as groups like long-term rough sleepers or squatters. Surveys can answer some of those questions, but again there are limits to what can be achieved. However, as the Danish example shows us, while no data source is entirely reliable, it is possible to arrive at a very detailed understanding of the nature of homelessness and the needs of the people who experience homelessness (Benjaminsen, 2016).

Levelling this criticism feels a little harsh in the light of what has been achieved in Finland. The criticism is also made in the knowledge that work is ongoing in respect of service and strategic development; the Action Plan is a work in process, being adapted and refined as it is implemented. There is oversimplification about gender in the Action Plan, but during the time this paper was being written, the author was contacted by Finns seeking to learn about the UK's experience of developing and delivering services for homeless women.

The other area for potential criticism is the use of experts by experience. Again, this is a question of precision, about what consumer choice, co-production or asset or strength-based service design mean in practice. Involving experts by experience raises questions about who those people are, how representative they are, how many of them should be involved and on what basis. Clearly, there is evidence, not least from Housing First, that the more choice and control homeless people have, the more effective services tend to be, at least in terms of reducing experience of homelessness, even if the evidence is still a little ambiguous in terms of other outcomes (Quilgars and Pleace, 2016). However, the practicalities of implementation, i.e. what this involvement means and what it can deliver, need to be carefully planned. Housing First, which includes elements of peer support, has been interpreted as a user-led model, with formerly homeless people delivering support, but it has also been implemented as a service that just consults with homeless people (Pleace, 2016).

Again, making this criticism does feel a little harsh, in this instance because the meaning and nature of strength-based and consumer-led homelessness services – and indeed the use of experts by experience in homelessness strategies – is arguably not very clearly defined anywhere. The intention to involve homeless people is both laudable, because it recognises both the validity of their opinions and their status as citizens, and practical, because there is evidence that enhancing the power of service users improves homelessness services. The Action Plan could, however, be more detailed in its consideration of what involving experts by experience means in practice.

Finally, there is the question of what other countries can learn from Finland. Clearly, Finland has made a considerable investment available and there are questions about how transferrable this kind of approach is in practice to some of the poorer European countries. Finland also has a level of investment in social housing, both in a financial and also political sense, that is not widespread in Europe.

The evidence is not conclusive, but there are data indicating that where welfare systems and social housing are well developed, homelessness levels are lower. In practice, what this may mean is that Finland has been dealing with a particular sort of homelessness problem, i.e. a relatively small population containing high rates of complex needs, which may not exist in countries without equivalent levels of social

protection. To put this another way, Finland could be seen as having an 'easier' (or at least smaller) target in respect of tackling homelessness, because its welfare, health and housing systems, in and of themselves, already stop a lot of potential homelessness (Benjaminsen and Andrade, 2015).

So what can we learn from Finland? Yes, Finland may be comparatively rich, yes its welfare and housing systems may stop a lot of potential homelessness from happening and yes, it is not without parallel when you contrast it with wider Scandinavian experience. However, two points can be made here. The first is that Finland has gone further and faster in tackling homelessness than equally, or more, prosperous European countries. Look at French, German or Swedish homelessness policy, or that of the UK, or indeed the experience of America, and they do not compare well with Finland (Pleace *et al.*, 2015; Foundation Abbé Pierre/FEANTSA, 2017). The second point is that the strategy borders on being audacious, Finland has pursued a hugely ambitious response to homelessness, and that ambition is paying off.

The Action Plan represents further refinement and expansion of a successful strategy, a strategy that has been thought through, that has considered local and global evidence, drawn on experience and recognised the need for political and interagency coordination. It is also a homelessness strategy that is broadly defined, tackling all aspects of homelessness and, perhaps crucially, which does not neglect the essential role of housing supply. Finland is dealing with homelessness and there is every reason to expect that levels will continue to fall during the course of the Action Plan. The key lesson for Europe, as a whole, is that homelessness can be stopped.

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Ending Homelessness Together in Northern Ireland: A Unique Challenge

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► **Abstract_** *The new Northern Ireland (NI) Homelessness Strategy Ending Homelessness Together represents a welcome fresh start on homelessness in NI given the challenges associated with implementing the previous strategy. This paper reviews the new strategic document, placing it in the context of recent trends in homelessness. A key focus is on the continuities and discontinuities between NI and the rest of the UK. The introduction and roll-out of the Housing Solutions and Support model will finally bring NI closer in line with the heavily prevention-focused approaches pursued for some time now in England, Wales and Scotland, where striking an effective balance between prevention and ensuring that people's entitlements under homelessness legislation are met has proved an ongoing challenge. The new strategy's emphasis on better addressing hidden homelessness is, by contrast, unprecedented and highly ambitious in the UK context, while its failure to fully endorse the Housing First model for the 'complex needs' group it targets is likely to be a disappointment for the sector. Several contextual factors will be key in influencing the implementation and impacts of the new strategy, not least that it will be implemented at a time of gridlock and immense uncertainty in Northern Irish politics and at the same time as the introduction of the UK Government's welfare reform programme, which has driven increases in homelessness in England.*

► **Keywords_** *homelessness strategy; policy change; prevention; welfare reform; Northern Ireland*

Introduction

Northern Ireland is unusual in a UK context in having had a rolling sequence of national homelessness strategies in place since 2002. Though Wales published a ten-year homelessness plan in 2009 (Welsh Assembly Government, 2009), no such strategies are in place in England and Scotland, albeit that there have been recent calls for them to be developed (Shelter Scotland, 2016; House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2016). Despite Northern Ireland's apparent advantage in this regard, levels of official homelessness increased significantly during the period of the last homelessness strategy (2012-17), and population rates of recorded homelessness are higher in Northern Ireland than elsewhere in the UK. This review¹ of the *Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2017-22: Ending Homelessness Together* begins by exploring trends in homelessness over the last decade or so, and explaining why these contrast sharply with those seen elsewhere in the UK. After a brief review of the focus and implementation of the previous strategy, the core components of the new strategy are considered, including: prevention; accommodation and support; chronic homelessness; and oversight, delivery and monitoring. Particular emphasis is given throughout to the parallels and divergences with broader UK homelessness policy and practice.

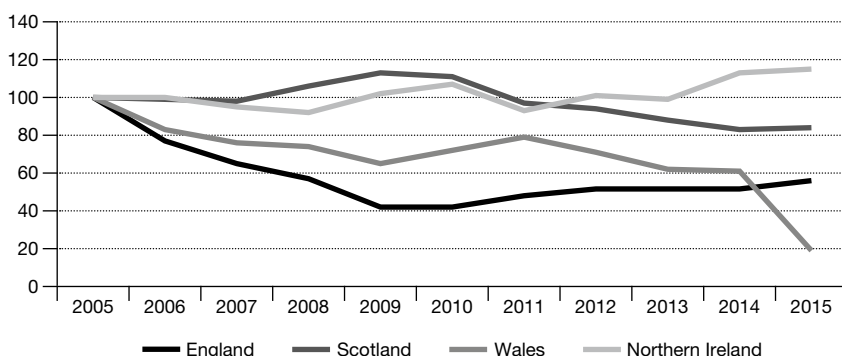
The Westminster government-led welfare reform programme well underway in England, Scotland and Wales, but only now being implemented in Northern Ireland, is identified as a key context in which the strategy's likelihood of 'ending homelessness together' must be understood. Also important is the unique social, political and policy context that pertains in Northern Ireland, notably: historical legacies heightening the sensitivity of housing policy reform; the political impasse that has left the jurisdiction without a functioning executive since January 2017; the particularly consequential likely impacts of the UK's exit from the European Union in Northern Ireland; and the recent 'confidence and supply' deal reached between May's Conservative Party and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in Westminster to secure a parliamentary majority in exchange for gains for Northern Ireland.

¹ Parts of this review draw on analysis previously published in Fitzpatrick *et al.* (2016) and Wilcox *et al.* (2017).

Homelessness in Northern Ireland in a UK context

In the UK, there are legal duties placed on local authorities to rehouse certain 'priority need' homeless households, mainly families with children but also vulnerable adults.² Those accepted as owed the 'full rehousing duty' are described as statutorily homeless. Levels of statutory homelessness in Northern Ireland increased rapidly in the early 2000s, and have remained at historically high levels of between 18 and 20 thousand presentations to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) since 2005/6. The number of applicants owed the main rehousing duty under homelessness legislation stood at 11 200 in 2015/16, a 13% increase on 2012/13 levels. These homelessness trends are in stark contrast to those seen elsewhere in the UK (see Figure 1). Furthermore, rates of statutory homelessness acceptances are considerably higher than in other UK nations at almost 15 per 1 000 of the population, compared to 11.7 in Scotland, 3.6 in Wales and 2.3 in England (see Figure 2). Reflective of this, 80% of annual NIHE (the main social housing provider) lets are allocated to households owed a duty under the homelessness legislation,³ a proportion very much higher than is seen in England (around 20%) and Wales (18%), or even in Scotland (37%) where the priority need criterion that limits access to the main rehousing duty has been abolished.⁴

Figure 1: Homeless acceptances in the UK 2002-2015



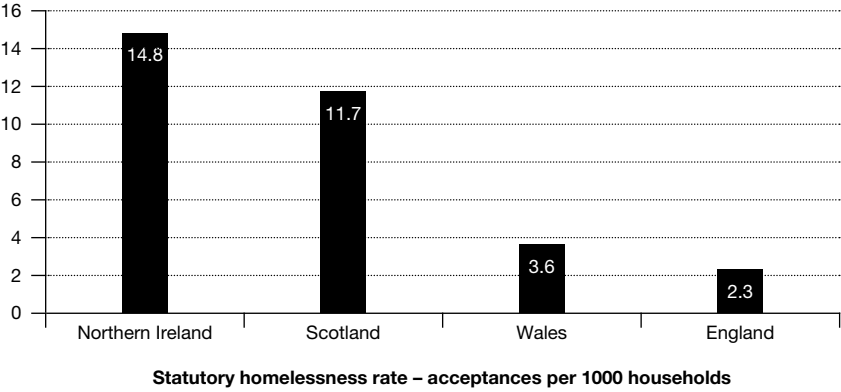
Source: UK Housing Review 2017

² In Scotland, the 'priority need' category was fully phased out in 2012, meaning that virtually all homeless households are now owed the full rehousing duty.

³ Table 105 in UK Housing Review, 2017 Compendium <http://www.ukhousingreview.org.uk/ukhr17/compendium.html>

⁴ Tables 98b, 99, 103 and 204 in UK Housing Review, 2017 Compendium <http://www.ukhousingreview.org.uk/ukhr17/compendium.html>

Figure 2: Statutory homeless rates across the UK, 2015



Source: UK Housing Review 2017

Every UK nation except Northern Ireland has seen significant drops in statutory homelessness as a result of the introduction of a preventative ‘Housing Options’ approach (see Figure 1). These falls were most dramatic in England where a proactively preventative model was first adopted (in 2003). Since 2010, however, the combined impact of housing market pressures and the UK Government-led welfare reform programme (involving severe and ongoing cutbacks in benefits, particularly housing allowances, largely concentrated on working age households) have reversed these trends. Official homelessness now stands at 44% above 2009/10 levels, with other measures of homelessness showing the same pattern (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2017). In Scotland, gentler falls in homelessness associated with a less aggressive and later adoption of preventative approaches in 2011 have slowed in recent years, likely as a result of the diminishing returns of prevention efforts in the context of the impacts of Westminster-led welfare reforms (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015). In Wales, reductions in homelessness associated with the preventative ‘Housing Options’ approach have rapidly accelerated following the introduction of a radically revised legal framework introducing new ‘prevention and relief’ duties on local authorities (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2017b).

The uniquely high and stable levels of homelessness seen in Northern Ireland reflect several factors. First, certain groups in housing need in Northern Ireland (namely, older people whose housing is no longer suitable for their needs) have historically been rehoused via the statutory homelessness route, as opposed to the rest of the UK where they are rehoused via mainstream social housing allocations. Second, while homelessness in England was falling as a result of preventative measures in the 2000s, it was rising fast in Northern Ireland linked to affordability pressures associated with a housing market boom underway north and south of

the border with the Republic of Ireland. Third, levels of homelessness have remained high in the absence of the firm shift to preventative responses to homelessness seen in every other UK nation. Significant shifts in several of these and other areas are now underway or expected imminently.

Reforms to social housing allocations policy have been expected for some time. Progress has been slow, in part due to the extreme sensitivity surrounding this issue relating to the segregation of housing stock along religious lines and the challenges this poses for developing fair allocation policies. If taken forward, proposed reforms – including a reduction in the number of ‘reasonable offers’ to which statutory homeless households are entitled and changes to how older people whose accommodation is no longer suitable are dealt with – could result in a fall in statutory homelessness, as well as in the proportion of social housing lets allocated to homeless households (Gray *et al.*, 2013; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016).

Of huge potential import regarding anticipated trends in homelessness is the implementation of the UK-led welfare reform agenda in Northern Ireland over the lifetime of the new homelessness strategy. Reforms limiting the level of housing allowance to which low income households are entitled were introduced in 2008 and 2011 on the same timetable in Northern Ireland as the rest of UK, and have already led to substantial gaps between ‘Local Housing Allowance’ levels and actual rents paid by recipients, a major concern across the UK, including Northern Ireland (see Beatty *et al.* 2012; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016). Subsequent UK government-led welfare reforms have been highly controversial in Northern Ireland, however, leading to prolonged gridlock during attempts to pass relevant legislation in Stormont, Northern Ireland’s devolved legislature. As such, the majority of this welfare reform programme is only now being introduced, much behind the timetable in England, Scotland and Wales and with some significant exceptions and modifications (Evason, 2016) described by sector key informants as the ‘envy’ of the rest of the UK (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016).

Under the agreed approach, some elements of the reform programme (the overall benefit cap and controversial ‘Bedroom Tax’)⁵ will be fully mitigated until 2020. Other elements (the introduction of Universal Credit, a single benefit replacing existing social security benefit, including housing allowances) will be phased in on a later timetable than seen elsewhere in the UK, with the final reform slightly softened compared to the wider UK policy. For example, claimants in Northern Ireland will benefit from fortnightly payments (rather than the monthly payments that will apply elsewhere) and out of work claimants who fail to adhere to work-

⁵ The overall Benefit Cap limits the total amount of benefit any out of work household can receive. The so called ‘Bedroom Tax’ limits the level of housing allowance payable to social tenants deemed to be under-occupying their home (see Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016).

related conditions will face a maximum sanction length of 18 months, compared to 3 years in the rest of the UK. The manner in which more recently announced cuts to young people and social tenant's entitlements to housing support (both associated with major homelessness-related concerns among local authorities and homelessness experts) will apply in Northern Ireland is not yet clear (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016), though relevant here is the expectation that the DUP's strengthened negotiating hand post the 2017 UK election will bolster Northern Irish leaders' ability to secure further concessions.

The delayed timetable and modifications to the welfare reform programme in Northern Ireland are highly significant for homelessness given very strong links between these welfare cuts and rising levels of homelessness, particularly in England (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2017a). Also relevant is that the Supporting People budget (which provides support to vulnerable individuals including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness) in Northern Ireland has been frozen at 2008 levels. Though an increase in this budget has been the focus of intense lobbying (Spurr, 2016), the status quo leaves Northern Ireland in a more advantageous position than England, where such budgets have been cut by 67% (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2017a). Nevertheless, those in the Northern Ireland homelessness sector remain greatly concerned about the homelessness impacts of the welfare reform programme. Some have voiced concerns that there is insufficient understanding of the likely homelessness impacts of these changes (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016).

Homelessness Strategies in Northern Ireland

Though Northern Ireland's first homelessness strategy was published in 2002, it was in 2010 that legislation introduced a statutory duty on the Housing Executive to produce such a strategy (every five years) and a requirement on a wide range of public bodies to take these strategies into account in the exercise of their own functions. The 2012-17 strategy (NIHE, 2012) thus sets the immediate context for this review of the new strategy released in May 2017. The 2012-17 strategy identified as its vision to ensure that "long-term homelessness and rough sleeping is eliminated across Northern Ireland by 2020" (p.7). It aimed to do so via four strategic objectives: placing homelessness prevention at the forefront of service delivery; reducing the duration of homelessness (time spent in temporary accommodation); removing the need to sleep rough; and improving services to vulnerable homeless households.

This substantive focus commanded a great deal of support from those in the sector (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2014; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016; NIHE, 2017). There has however been considerable disappointment about the implementation of the strategy. An independent evaluation found that the majority (32 of 38) of actions specified within it

had been completed by 2016, but also that “Gaps remained in service provision and progress in delivering the Strategy had not always been rapid”, including in relation to the strategy’s core aim of developing preventative services (Boyle and Pleace, 2017, p.5). This conclusion regarding the limits of the strategy’s achievements is echoed – though more strongly – in the perspectives of key informants interviewed for the independent *Homelessness Monitor* (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016), who identified two key issues that curtailed its effective implementation: first, substantial internal changes and staff turnover in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive following a wide ranging review of its functions (Department for Social Development (DSD), 2012), and second, a failure to achieve effective inter-departmental buy-in and coordination, despite this being a core priority of the strategy.

With this as its backdrop, the new 2017-22 homelessness strategy orients around an overarching vision of ‘ending homelessness together’ – both less specific and more ambitious than the vision of the former strategy. This formulation combines the now fashionable, but also conceptually slippery focus on ‘ending homelessness’ (O’Sullivan, 2016), with explicit acknowledgement that progress requires the action of a number of key players across the statutory and voluntary sectors, not just the Northern Ireland Housing Executive which has statutory responsibility for homelessness. In pursuit of this vision, the strategy identifies five objectives:

1. To prioritise homelessness prevention.
2. To secure sustainable accommodation and appropriate support solutions for homeless households.
3. To further understand and address the complexities of chronic homelessness across Northern Ireland.
4. To ensure the right mechanisms are in place to oversee and deliver this strategy.
5. To measure and monitor existing and emerging need to inform the ongoing development of appropriate services.

These objectives are to be achieved via a series of specific short (year 1), medium (year 2/3) and long-term (year 4/5) actions. Notwithstanding the political gridlock that has left Northern Ireland without a functioning executive from January 2017 to the time of writing (September 2017), the strategy explicitly seeks to compliment the 2016 draft Programme for Government’s ‘outcomes-based approach’ and, specifically, outcome 8 in this framework – that “we care for others and we help those in need” (Northern Ireland Executive, 2016, p. 31). In so doing the strategy pursues three outcomes – ‘we have support that prevents us from becoming homeless’, ‘we live in suitable homes’, and ‘we have the support we require to

access and/or sustain a home' – to be measured via four indicators: homelessness presentations; average length of stay in temporary accommodation; 'full duty applicant' duties discharged; and levels of repeat homelessness.

The new strategy appears to also benefit from the widespread sector support that surrounded the substantive content of the previous strategy. According to the Housing Executive, over 90% of respondents to the consultation on the draft strategy endorsed its vision and objectives (NIHE, 2017). The primary challenge will be overcoming the implementation issues that vexed the previous strategy's progress. With this in mind, the next sections discuss the specifics of the strategy under four themes mirroring its objectives – prevention; accommodation and support; chronic homelessness; and oversight, delivery and monitoring.

Prevention

The centrepiece of the new strategy is its focus on prevention and the roll out of the long anticipated 'Housing Solutions and Support' approach. This will involve a re-orientation of frontline staff, who will be trained to take a problem solving and holistic approach to assessing and addressing the needs of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness, with appropriate advice on realistic housing options provided rapidly at the first point of contact, and with case managers 'sticking with' more complex cases until their homelessness is resolved and support in place to meet their wider needs (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016). In 2016, the Housing Solutions and Support model was piloted in three areas, and is being rolled out to the rest of Northern Ireland during 2017. Complementing this move is a commitment in the new strategy to 'identify pre-crisis "homeless indicators"' (p.26) – on which there is an already substantial evidence base (Bramley *et al.*, 2015; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015; Watts *et al.*, 2015) that those implementing this action can immediately employ – and commission training for relevant frontline workers to use those triggers to inform prevention work.

In addition, and uniquely in a UK context, the strategy commits to the development of an "effective communication strategy to ensure that households approaching crisis can access the right support quickly" (p. 26). This is framed as an explicit attempt to "reduce instances of hidden homelessness" (p.7), a problem foregrounded within the strategy. Recognition of the issue at this level, and such a clear commitment to proactively address it, marks Northern Ireland out from its UK counterparts and is laudable given the highly damaging experiences that can be associated with hidden homelessness (Reeve, 2004), in particular for young people (McCoy and Hug, 2016). This approach to addressing hidden homelessness may

therefore provide a model for other UK nations to consider. That being said, this element of the strategy is very ambitious given the potential for it to increase demand for services just as the impacts of welfare reform begin to be felt.

The overall move towards a prevention-focused response to homelessness brings Northern Ireland closer to approaches already adopted elsewhere in the UK. The Housing Solutions and Support model specifically takes inspiration from the Scottish variant of homelessness prevention (Mahaffy, 2013), a 'lighter touch' and more cautious approach than that seen in England in the early 2000s. There was not an appetite to pursue the more 'aggressive' (Wilcox *et al.*, 2010) approach to prevention seen in England, likely in light of associated concerns that in some cases prevention amounted to 'gatekeeping' (i.e. the illegal practice of not allowing homeless households to access their statutory entitlements under homelessness legislation) (Pawson, 2007). Scotland has not escaped the tension between effective and appropriate prevention and gatekeeping, however. A Scottish Housing Regulator inquiry identified over-zealous prevention practice in some local authorities (Scottish Housing Regulator, 2014), which appears to have reinforced the more cautious application of preventative measures (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015). This in turn has led to calls for Scotland to be more assertive in its homelessness prevention work (Watts, 2017).

These tensions underline the very difficult balance to be struck between the effective pursuit of non-statutory prevention efforts of the kind now being rolled out in Northern Ireland and ensuring that people's entitlements under homelessness legislation are met (see Pawson, 2007; Dobie *et al.*, 2014). This balancing act in part prompted recent and radical legislative change in both Wales (via the Housing (Wales) Act 2014) and England (via the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017), which have brought prevention work inside the statutory homelessness system by introducing duties on local authorities to take reasonable steps to prevent and relieve homelessness (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2017a; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2017b). In Northern Ireland, where (unlike in Scotland) the priority need test still operates, there may be a strong incentive for Housing Solutions and Support teams to focus their non-statutory prevention efforts on 'priority need' households who will be owed the full rehousing duty if preventative interventions fail. This leaves Northern Ireland as the only UK jurisdiction still offering single 'non priority' homeless households limited help.

Accommodation and Support

The core actions identified in pursuit of the strategic objective to 'secure sustainable accommodation and appropriate support solutions for homeless households' are a review of temporary accommodation and a continuation of efforts to use the private rented sector to assist homeless households.

The commitment to review current temporary accommodation provision, and – linked to the Supporting People review published in 2015 (DSD, 2015) – develop a temporary accommodation provision strategy on that basis is a welcome, albeit onerous, aspect of the strategy for several reasons. First, there has been concern in the Northern Irish homelessness sector about a failure to link the review and design of Supporting People programmes to homelessness strategies (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016). Second, the damaging impacts of poor quality temporary accommodation (for instance, Bed and Breakfast accommodation and large-scale hostel-like provision) on vulnerable homeless people in relation to negative peer effects, violence and abuse in such contexts, as well as benefit traps and employment disincentives associated with rent levels etc. is now well understood (Johnsen and Watts, 2014; Watts *et al.*, 2015; Fitzpatrick and Watts, 2016). Alternative 'housing-led' and non-institutional approaches are now accruing an increasingly impressive evidence base (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2010; Fitzpatrick and Watts, 2016). This review of temporary accommodation thus gives policy-makers in Northern Ireland an opportunity to engage with this evidence base and the full range of alternative forms of temporary accommodation available, with the Supporting People strategy's emphasis on moving towards floating-support provision (as opposed to accommodation-based models) a positive foundation on which to build. The development of the Temporary Accommodation Provision Strategy is anticipated to happen in the last year of the current strategy (2021/22). These long timescales may reflect that a significant change in the kinds of services commissioned, and how these are commissioned (i.e. via competitive tendering) is likely to be sensitive and controversial, despite having been on the cards for some time already (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2014; DSD, 2015; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016; NIHE, 2017).

The homelessness strategy's emphasis on continuing to focus on the private rented sector (PRS) as a resolution to homelessness goes with the grain of both existing practice in Northern Ireland (where a payment by results PRS access scheme was established in 2014, see Chartered Institute of Housing *et al.*, 2011) and elsewhere in the UK, where there has been a focus on using the private rented sector as a preventative measure (helping those at risk of homelessness access or maintain PRS accommodation before becoming homelessness) and a resolution to homelessness (Clarke and Monk, 2013; Reeve *et al.*, 2016). Pursuit of this agenda is all the more essential in Northern Ireland given its lower proportion of social housing

stock than elsewhere in the UK (Wilcox *et al.*, 2017); the declining number of social sector lettings available to new tenants annually; the very high proportion of these lets that go to homeless households; and the fact that the tenure is less prone to levels of spatial religious segregation than social housing in Northern Ireland (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016). As elsewhere in the UK, Northern Ireland's PRS has grown exceedingly fast in recent years, quadrupling in size in the last 14 years (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016). There are, nevertheless, some concerns about the capacity of the PRS to play an expanded role in homelessness in light of the prevalence of small-scale reluctant landlords and the consequential fragility of supply (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016) and welfare reform measures that may reduce the willingness of private landlords to house those who are homeless (Reeve *et al.*, 2016).

The actions concerning accommodation and support identified in the homelessness strategy and described in this section are fairly narrow. This must be understood in the context of the strategy's focus on accommodation-related issues only, and the complimentary work being led by the Department for Communities on an inter-departmental homelessness action plan. This will focus on *non*-accommodation services required to meet the strategy's aims and will be developed via co-production with key partners. As no substantive work on this action plan is yet in the public domain, it cannot be included in this review, but its contents will be fundamental to achieving the aim of 'ending homelessness together'.

Chronic Homelessness

Chronic homelessness and rough sleeping are a sensitive issue in Northern Ireland in the aftermath of the multiple street deaths in Belfast during winter 2015/16 (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016), albeit that a street needs audit conducted during summer 2015 identified low levels of rough sleeping in the city (NIHE, 2016). It is therefore fitting that better understanding and addressing chronic homelessness is a core objective of the strategy. The actions associated with this objective are to review and implement Rough Sleeper Strategies in Northern Ireland's two major cities; to identify need outside of these urban areas and devise an action plan to address them; and to ensure appropriate housing models for this group.

The rather open nature of this third action is likely to be a disappointment for those in the sector who were hoping for an explicit endorsement and 'mainstreaming' of the Housing First model in the new strategy (Housing First offers rough sleepers with complex needs immediate access to mainstream housing and the supports to maintain it, see Padgett, Henwood and Tsemberis, 2016). While the body of the strategy does record an intention to develop this approach (p.23), the commitments to action are very muted, extending only to examining "the potential for other Housing

Led Pathway Models for chronic homeless clients (subject to available funding)” (p.27). This is in contrast to the enthusiasm for and apparent momentum around Housing First articulated by sector key informants quoted in the 2016 Homelessness Monitor, who described a ‘big push’ around Housing First and voiced strong support and optimism regarding the Depaul Housing First pilot underway in Belfast at the time (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016). The evaluation of this pilot has since been published, demonstrating (in line with a now overwhelming body of international evidence) high tenancy sustainment rates and good value for money (Boyle *et al.*, 2016). Nevertheless, the limited strategy commitments in this area – and some notes of caution from sector key informants in the Homelessness Monitor – indicate that financial considerations are likely to have been the central factor preventing a more enthusiastic commitment to expanding Housing First provision as part of the homelessness strategy. This change of tack puts Northern Ireland at odds with recent developments in England where, for instance, several major political parties included commitments to Housing First in their manifestos for the June 2017 Westminster election.

Oversight, Delivery and Monitoring

The new strategy includes a strong focus on delivery mechanisms, data gathering, monitoring, review and evaluation processes, likely reflecting both the outcomes-framework adopted in the draft Programme for Government, and a recognition of the implementation challenges that vexed the previous strategy, in particular concerning cross-departmental and inter-agency working. An inter-departmental, multi-agency Homelessness Strategy Steering Group will be “tasked with ensuring the strategic delivery of the Strategy... [and] will ensure strategic direction and accountability... is shared across all relevant agencies” (p.24). The Group will be chaired by the Department for Communities, the successor (established in May 2016) to the Department for Social Development (responsible for progressing and monitoring the previous strategy, see NIHE, 2012), but incorporating a wider range of functions, including around employment, enterprise and local government.

The broader remit of the newly formed Department brings together a number of “critically aligned functions” relevant to homelessness that may help to foster a more joined-up approach (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016, pp.32-33). In addition, the size of the Department may bring positive benefits as regards departmental funding. Further still, the ambitious focus on data collection, impact monitoring, reviews and evaluation processes within the strategy will, if taken forward and sufficiently resourced, offer a clear route to identifying implementation issues early and provide considerable intelligence regarding whether interventions are working, as well as shedding more light than existing data allows on the profile and number of people experiencing homelessness in Northern Ireland.

On the other hand, the large size of the newly established Department for Communities may mean that homelessness struggles for profile and funding in the context of this wide portfolio, in particular given that it is this department that will shoulder the burden of managing the implementation and impacts of the welfare reform programme. Furthermore, one of the key failures of inter-agency working effecting the previous strategy concerned the lack of commitment from the Department of Health on homelessness, with very important impacts in relation to access to detoxification facilities for those with serious substance misuse problems (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2016). It is not clear that the new delivery arrangements are any better placed to ensure a change in this regard, and there are no specific commitments in the main strategy in this area. Lastly, though there is a strong and welcome emphasis on data, monitoring, evaluation and review processes in the strategy, the specifics of this are not clear. Moreover, of the four overarching indicators identified – homelessness presentations; average length of stay in temporary accommodation; ‘full duty applicant’ duties discharged; levels of repeat homelessness (p.17) – the baseline position is provided for only the first two of these. Getting these monitoring systems right, and establishing a clear baseline position against which to judge progress, will be crucial to establishing an effective incentive structure to support delivery of the strategy.

Successful implementation of the strategy will also depend in substantial part on the buy-in and will of the yet to be formed Northern Ireland Executive, and specifically, Minister for Communities, and on the implications of a new government for the future of the Housing Executive, the recent history of which has been tumultuous and disrupted. Continuation of the current political stalemate in Northern Ireland, or a return to direct rule by Westminster, are likely to considerably constrain progress on the homelessness strategy, as well as in other policy areas.

Conclusions

Given the challenges associated with implementing the previous strategy, *Ending Homelessness Together* represents a welcome fresh start on homelessness in Northern Ireland. The focus on homelessness prevention serves to catch Northern Ireland up with developments that have paid dividends and reduced levels of homelessness elsewhere in the UK. The impacts of prevention however, particularly in England, have sometimes been controversial (Pawson, 2007) and a key challenge will be ensuring that the Housing Solutions and Support model is effective at genuinely preventing homelessness, rather than merely making it harder for homeless households to access their entitlements under the homelessness legislation. As the last UK nation to adopt the model, there are lessons to be learnt on how this balance can be struck: in England and Wales, difficulties striking this balance

have ultimately led to legal reform and the integration of prevention work with local authorities' other statutory duties on homelessness. In Scotland, this challenge has curtailed the assertiveness of prevention efforts.

In other ways, the new strategy stands out from developments seen elsewhere in the UK. First, the focus on hidden homelessness – and a communication strategy to address it – is a distinct and ambitious approach in the UK context. This reflects evidence of relatively high rates of hidden homelessness in Northern Ireland, and the willingness to address this directly is to be applauded. Whether this generates increased demand for support, and how that is addressed in the context of limited resources and the impacts of welfare cuts, will be an important question going forward. Second, the strategy appears to represent a reining in (apparently due to concerns over cost) of previous enthusiasm for Housing First as a mainstream solution to chronic homelessness. This is to be lamented, given the very strong evidence base on the effectiveness of the model, including in Belfast specifically, and the controversy surrounding street deaths in Belfast. It also stands in contrast to the direction of travel now underway in England.

The key question raised by this review of the new strategy is whether it can be implemented effectively. Apparent sector buy-in to the substantive content of the strategy will no doubt help in this regard, as will the built-in focus on oversight and delivery arrangements and monitoring and evaluation. The broader context faced by the Housing Executive and Department for Communities, however, is extremely challenging: implementation of the strategy will run alongside the extension of most aspects of the UK-wide welfare reform programme to Northern Ireland, the considerable negative impacts of which on homelessness are now very clear, especially in England. This challenge will need to be navigated in the wider context of uncertainty around Brexit – and its complex and particular implications in Northern Ireland given its shared border with the Republic of Ireland – together with a domestic political crisis that has left Northern Ireland without a functioning executive for most of 2017, albeit with some Northern Irish political leaders now being in a highly privileged position to negotiate with the UK Government. The evolution of these unique political factors is likely to have significant implications for the homelessness strategy one way or another, in relation to the finances available to pursue its objectives, the buy-in and will of the Minister for Communities and wider executive, and the next chapter in the story of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's fortunes. There is a considerable task ahead therefore in ensuring that the new homelessness strategy achieves real positive impacts for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Northern Ireland.

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A Flemish Strategy to Combat Homelessness

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► **Abstract_** *In December 2016, the Flemish government approved an 'Integrated Plan Against Homelessness 2017-2019'. This regional action plan focuses on four strategic goals: (1) the prevention of evictions, (2) the prevention of youth homelessness, (3) the reduction of chronic homelessness, and (4) an integrated governance approach. In this contribution, a short overview of homelessness policies in Belgium and Flanders is provided and available indicators concerning the homeless population are presented. The actions proposed in the new plan are discussed and their strengths and weakness are analysed.*

► **Keywords_** *Homeless strategy, Flanders, Belgium*

Homelessness Policies in Belgium and Flanders

Belgium is a federal state consisting of regions and communities. The first two state reforms which were enacted in 1970 and 1980 resulted in a complex state structure consisting of a federal level (responsible for social security, national defence, internal and external affairs, justice and most of health care), three Communities (based on language and responsible for culture, well-being, social services and education) and three Regions (responsible for economic and labour market issues as well as housing policies). The federal level is responsible for social security (apart from child benefits since the last reform in 2011), health care and justice.

Until 1993, a Belgian law dating back to 1891 prescribed that all “vagrants” who were sleeping rough or begging and who did not possess a basic sum of money were arrested and placed in ‘colonies’ in the rural periphery of the country. These institutions had an explicit moral function: homeless persons had to learn the

necessary social norms and values to behave properly in society. More specifically, they had to work to earn some money and to make a life outside the institution. However, even if they were released, most “vagrants” returned voluntarily to these institutions. By 1930, in Antwerp as in other European cities, charitable organisations for homeless persons were established, mainly providing night shelters (bed, bath, bread). This represents the start of a ‘freely accessible’ homelessness sector in Belgium. In 1968, a Belgian federation of residential centres was founded, as a consequence of the growth and the professionalization of this sector. At the end of the 1980s, critique of the law regulating vagrants surged, mainly as a result of a study into the living situation of homeless persons in the colonies (Neirinckx, 1989). As a consequence, in 1993, the law on vagrants was abolished and a new federal law mentioned for the first time ‘a homeless person’ who was defined as: *‘A person who does not have his own housing, who does not have the resources to provide this on his own and therefore is residing or staying temporarily in a home until housing is made available’*.

As a consequence of various state reforms, a complex division of competencies is established in relation to homelessness. The federal state is still responsible for the law on the ‘Public Centres of Social Welfare’ (PCSW), which are present in each municipality and have the legal obligation to implement the right to social assistance to guarantee human dignity. The concrete interpretation of this right is decided at the local level by the board of the PCSW, consisting of local politicians. The PCSW can also supply night shelters and temporary transitional dwelling for homeless persons, but these are decided and mainly financed at the local level. The PCSW also implement general minimum income legislation (‘the right to social integration’), which guarantees a minimum income to every adult (from 18 to 65 years), who has insufficient means of existence and who shows willingness to work. The guaranteed minimum income is partially financed by the local community and partially by the federal government. If a former homeless person signs up to a personalised social integration project, the guaranteed minimum income is paid by the federal state for two years. The federal level is also responsible for health care and more specifically, mental health care and the organisation and financing of psychiatric hospitals.

The Communities are responsible for and finance social care services, such as youth care, social services for the disabled and the elderly and also the ‘General Centres of Social Welfare’ (CAW). These CAW are regional network organisations (as a result of different phases of scaling up local small initiatives often started as citizen initiatives), which offer different kinds of social services for specific psychosocial problems such as relational problems, domestic violence, and debt. Residential services, transitional housing services, crisis centres and day care centres for homeless persons are also part of the CAW. The main changes in the

homelessness sector in Flanders is the reversal in emphasis between residential services and transitional housing and the breakthrough of prevention. The total amount of beds in residential centres only increased from 1 553 in 2000 to 1 661 in 2010, while the transitional housing capacity increased from 970 persons and families in 2000 to 2 565 in 2010 (Vlaamse Woonraad, 2016). During the last 15 years, outreach services have also been developed to avoid evictions, mainly in the social housing sector. These services have a success ratio of 70%, but they only reach a small number of the total amount of those threatened by evictions (Lescrauwaet and Van Menxel, 2011).

The Regions are responsible for the main elements of housing policy. Historically, housing policies in Flanders mainly encouraged private ownership. In the private rental market, there is a lot of competition between tenants to find an affordable dwelling. In Belgium, approximately 10% of the total population and 27% of all tenants pay more than 40% of their income towards their housing costs. The social housing sector is relatively small (about 8%). Social housing companies are the largest actor (almost 150 000 dwellings) supplemented by social rental agencies, which offer 8 000 dwellings (Vlaamse Woonraad, 2016).

The allocation of social dwellings by social housing companies is complex and influenced by various criteria. Local municipalities can develop local regulations in which the allocation criteria are made explicit. Five percent of all allocations by social housing companies can be allocated more quickly and targeted to specific groups such as young care leavers, psychiatric hospital leavers or homeless persons. Social rental agencies (SRAs) are recognised and subsidised in each Belgian region, and are non-profit housing institutions that deal with the housing problems of poor and vulnerable people (De Decker, 2009). A SRA contacts a private landlord and offers to rent his or her property. In this way, the landlord gets an official tenant, which ensures the payment of rent and the practicalities of letting are transferred from the landlord to the SRA without any risk. SRAs choose the tenant, deal with any paperwork (including providing descriptions of the dwelling and registering the contract), organise collection of the rent, arrange fire insurance and organise repairs and maintenance. In exchange for agreeing to a lower rent, the landlord's revenue is guaranteed. The Flemish region created a housing benefit, but only for specific target groups or specific situations, such as persons and families leaving a dwelling that is inappropriate, uninhabitable or too small, homelessness or a relocation to a dwelling administered by the SRA.

In 2014, a cooperation agreement was signed by the federal state, the communities and the regions to coordinate policies of the different policy levels to prevent and to combat homelessness. This cooperation agreement used the ETHOS-definition as the guiding framework and consists of a description of all competencies of the

different policy actors and as such, it can be considered as the Belgian national action plan to combat homelessness. However, this agreement does not stipulate specific and measurable goals. It agrees to collect data and to coordinate the monitoring of homelessness policies. However, since signing the agreement, no specific implementation steps have been taken. Different policy actors have nevertheless launched new policy measures. The most innovative of these measures was the launch of Housing First in the five largest cities. In conclusion, during the last 15 years new policy measures at the federal and regional level were implemented, but in spite of different attempts a more coordinated approach or a national action plan consisting of measurable goals and specific actions and instruments failed to appear.

Homelessness in Flanders

In spite of the large battery of measures and initiatives to prevent and combat homelessness, the baseline measurement of homelessness in Flanders shows some significant policy shortcomings (Meys and Hermans, 2015). A count was executed in the whole of Flanders during two weeks in January 2014 to identify the total amount and profile characteristics of specific categories of ETHOS. More specifically, the study focused on the users of winter shelters, residential centres, transitional housing supplied by the PCSW and the CAW and persons who are threatened by eviction.

During the two-week period of this study, 711 adults and 53 children made use of winter shelters in the larger cities. On 593 occasions, individuals were refused access to a shelter (mainly because there were no beds available). Sixty percent of all users were situated in the two largest cities (Antwerp and Ghent). Eighty percent were male, 10% under 25 years old, 40% had no income and 17% were undocumented migrants. During the month before the count, these users stayed with friends, in squats, slept rough or stayed in a residential centre. Twenty percent were homeless for less than three months. There is probably an important 'dark number' concerning category 1 and 2 of ETHOS, given the lack of winter shelters in less urban areas.

Over the course of the study, 1 132 adults and 364 children stayed in residential centres. Half of the children were younger than 6 years old. Sixty-five percent were male, 20% under 25 years old, and only 10% had a job. The main triggers of their homelessness were relationship difficulties (30%), eviction (20%) or family conflict (15%). Forty percent has previously stayed in a residential centre, 29% stayed in a psychiatric institution before, 14% in a correctional institution and 13% in a youth care centre. Based on the responses of the social workers in these centres, for just

20% of users, a residential centre is the most appropriate form of help. The vast majority would be best helped in transitional housing or even independent housing. The lack of affordable housing is the main reason people remain in these centres.

During the study period, 1 127 adults and 732 children made use of transitional housing supplied by the CAW. Fifteen percent were in employment, 50% had previously stayed in a residential centre for the homeless, 30% had stayed in a psychiatric institution, and 20% in a youth care institution. According to the social workers, transitional housing is not the most appropriate form of help for 1 in 3, who are capable of living independently. 580 adults and 579 children made use of transitional housing supplied by the PCSW. Only 10% had previously stayed in a psychiatric institution.

The study also paid specific attention to eviction claims. Based on data from 179 of the 308 PCSW, we established that during those two weeks of January 2014, 599 eviction claims were sent to the PCSW (who have a legal obligation to undertake some action to avoid eviction). In 25% of the claims, children are involved. Eighty percent of the evictions are from the private rental market, however the outreach services mainly reach tenants in the social housing market. PCSW is informed about the eviction claim 2.5 months after it has been made, and in 60% of all claims cases the centres have not been aware of the situation of the threatened tenant.

About the same time, a qualitative study was conducted on the housing pathways and the experiences of persons leaving a psychiatric institution, a correctional institution or a youth care institution (De Decker *et al.*, 2014). These qualitative interviews indicate how difficult the search for an affordable dwelling can be, the discrimination experienced in the private rental market and a social housing sector that makes the offer of a social dwelling conditional. For example, if the person in housing need does not agree to be supported by the CAW (to help them to 'learn to live independently'), they do not get access to the social dwelling.

Both studies illustrate some of the difficulties of exiting out of homeless services, the representation of previous users of residential services among the homeless, the structural problems of the housing market, the discrimination of vulnerable tenants, the large amount of children in the homelessness sector, the large amount of evictions claims (mainly on the private rental market) and the vulnerable situation of persons who have stayed in different kinds of care institutions. The new Flemish Integrated Plan Against Homelessness consists of different actions and goals to address these shortcomings.

A Flemish Integrated Plan to Combat Homelessness

At the end of 2016, the Flemish government approved an Integrated Plan Against Homelessness. This plan emerged for various reasons. First, during the last 10 years, the homelessness sector itself has called for a coordinated action plan. More specifically, Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk, an umbrella organisation of the homelessness sector, produced yearly reports on the numbers of users of services and brought into light the recent trends in the user population (such as the feminisation of the users, the increase of migrant users and institutional care leavers). This organisation was also an ardent supporter of the FEANTSA policy goals to end homelessness.

In the past, there were several political attempts to launch an action plan at the Flemish level, but it remained difficult to reach a consensus between the two Ministers (Housing and Well-being) and between the social care sector and the housing sector to reach an agreement on the goals and instruments of such a plan. Second, the baseline measurement brought into light specific problems, such as the relapse of users of residential services, the large extent of children in the homeless population and the need for more preventive measures. There was a lot of media attention for the study, and members of the Flemish parliament asked for a more coordinated approach to fight homelessness. Third, the Flemish housing council, which consists of all relevant housing actors, launched a report in May 2016 to encourage the Minister of Housing to launch a more coordinated approach.

Building explicitly on the five goals to combat homelessness as defined by FEANTSA, the Flemish action plan, a common initiative by the Minister of Health, Well-being and the Family and the Minister of Housing and Poverty Reduction, formulates four strategic goals: (1) the prevention of evictions, (2) the prevention of youth homelessness, (3) the reduction of chronic homelessness, and (4) an integrated governance policy approach.

Concerning the prevention of evictions, no specific goal is set. Although the preventive effects of housing subsidies are confirmed in the plan, no specific actions or future measures are described. Only better use of the current housing subsidies is mentioned. More attention is paid to persons and families threatened by evictions. For example, one action is to create a regional hotline where owners can signal problems with tenants. Another action is an evaluation of the juridical eviction procedure. A third action is that local advisory commissions that deal with payment problems concerning water and energy also strengthen the link with preventive outreach services. The most concrete action is the expansion of the capacity of outreach services to prevent evictions, paying specific attention to the private rental

market. The plan also aims to strengthen the cooperation between different social services for specific target groups (persons with disabilities, persons with mental health problems) who execute home visits.

The prevention of youth homelessness mainly focuses on young people who leave youth care. In the summer of 2016, the dramatic case of Jordy who died because of starvation in a public park in Ghent was a central topic in all national media. Jordy had stayed in a residential youth centre since he was a young child, left this centre when he turned 18, but didn't get the help he needed to survive. The main action of this part of the plan is to stimulate better cooperation between youth care services and social services for adults. For every 18 year old who leaves youth care, a roundtable between all relevant and related services will be organised to develop a support plan.

Concerning chronic homelessness, the two main actions that fit a housing-led approach are: (1) an increase of the accessibility of the housing market, and (2) more Housing First initiatives. Concerning the housing market, the Flemish government had already formulated general targets to increase the number of social dwellings by 2025. These ambitions are confirmed in this plan. In addition, the social rental agencies will be strengthened. Remarkably, the action plan also names discrimination as one of the causes of housing exclusion. To fight discrimination, a public system of loans to pay for the rental income guarantee will be developed and an action plan was announced. Also, the fast allocation of social dwellings for specific target groups such as homeless persons will be evaluated and experimental housing solutions will be stimulated (such as co-housing).

The action plan accentuates more Housing First initiatives, since the Housing First experiments in Belgium had very positive results: 90% of all homeless persons in Housing First projects still have their dwelling two years later. In addition, their health and self-image is significantly higher than users of residential services (Housing First Belgium, 2016). However, the actions mainly focus on support services and less on the availability of housing solutions. First, there will be a shift in emphasis from residential services to housing support services, which will be combined with housing solutions. In addition, new 'dedicated teams' will be developed, consisting of social workers of different social services (PCSW, CAW, mental health services and services for persons with disabilities), which will be responsible for an integrated approach in combination with a housing solution.

Concerning governance, the plan opts for a regional governance structure. Currently, nine regional networks of actors and municipalities are already working together to combat homelessness, but they do not cover the whole of Flanders. Other regional actors and municipalities will be encouraged to create similar networks. These regional networks have to develop a regional action plan to realise

the four strategic goals. They will develop their own programs, be responsible for monitoring and financial management, and make plans to prevent people having to sleep rough in the winter.

The action plan recognises that monitoring is an essential part of a successful approach and formulates four rather general indicators: (1) the total amount of evictions claims and realised evictions, (2) the total number of homeless persons, (3) the amount of families receiving outreach services and the success of these outreach services in terms of the avoidance of evictions, and (4) the users of housing benefits.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Plan

This action plan has strengths and weaknesses. First, a common approach of the Ministers of Housing and Poverty Reduction and the Minister of Health and Well-being is an important signal, since in the past the relationship between the social service sector and the housing sector was always difficult. The action plan also chooses a housing-led approach, since a reform of residential centres is proposed, though without a fixed date as is the case for instance in Finland. However, this housing-led approach is emphasised less for young persons than for chronic homelessness.

This action plan also recognizes discrimination in the housing market as an important obstacle to homeless persons finding suitable housing. At the same time, no concrete action to combat discrimination is formulated, although a recent study financed by the City of Ghent and based on the methodology of 'practice tests' (Van der Bracht *et al.*, 2015) shows that a third of owners discriminate against persons with a non-Flemish name and more than half discriminate against persons with a social security benefit. During parliamentary debates concerning this study, the right-wing New Flemish Alliance, the largest political party of the current government, has been an outspoken opponent of specific measures such as mystery calls and practice tests to detect discriminating owners.

The governance structure is also an important innovation, which makes tailor-made solutions possible. Supralocal networks will be established, mainly around the 13 larger cities in Flanders. These networks will be responsible for the implementation of the goals and they are also responsible for the monitoring of these goals. At the same time, the composition of the network is decided on the supralocal level. This means that necessary partners such as mental health services or youth care services can opt to not join the network. Especially since care leavers are an important risk group, a more enforceable measure is necessary to make them part of these networks. In addition, psychiatric hospitals are not financed by the regional

level, which makes it even more difficult for these networks to convince them to join. Until recently, compared to other countries, Belgium had one of the highest numbers of psychiatric beds. In 2011, a reform of the mental health sector was launched by the federal Minister of Public Health. Its central idea is to substitute institutional care by floating support. However, the social care sector is rather critical of this reform, because the new floating support teams or mobile teams are not sufficiently accessible for the most vulnerable groups such as the homeless.

Despite its strengths, the 2016 plan is not that ambitious. There are no clear and measurable goals and a lot of actions remain rather vague. A common monitoring system has not yet been developed. The baseline measurement study is already four years old and in the meantime no new homelessness data has been collected. This means that there is no valid and reliable information concerning the different ETHOS categories.

Concerning youth homelessness, the focus is rather limited to care leavers, although international research shows that welfare state retrenchment is a growing cause of youth homelessness (see for instance Benjaminsen, 2016). No specific evidence in Flanders is available, but more and more young people are applying for a guaranteed minimum income (one in three applicants are younger than 25 years), youth unemployment is high in the larger cities (up to 25%) and rules for unemployment benefits have become stricter and more conditional during the last five years.

An important success factor will be the availability of affordable housing. As stated in the plan, the Flemish government has never invested as much in social housing as during this period, but also waiting lists for a social dwelling have never been as long (more than 100 000 families are waiting for a social dwelling), resulting in harsh competition between vulnerable groups to gain social housing. There are no formal commitments in the action plan to allocate more social dwellings to homeless persons although the plan calls for a more accessible housing market.

Lastly, although the plan chooses Housing First as a solution for chronic homelessness, there is no formal financial commitment yet to expand these projects. In addition, it is not clear if housing will be unconditional or coupled to social support offered by a team. The Minister of Housing and Poverty Reduction has indicated in the Flemish parliament that she is in favour of Housing First but that it has to be coupled by social support.

Conclusion

The Belgian and Flemish policy approach to homelessness is incremental rather than ground-breaking. In the last 15 years, various policy measures have been launched to fight against homelessness (such as the growth of social rental agencies, the improvement of the accessibility of the social housing sector, new preventive actions to avoid evictions, the Housing First experiment), but a more coordinated approach was rather missing, despite a cooperation agreement by all policy actors signed in 2014. In December 2016, a Flemish Integrated Plan Against Homelessness based on a housing-led approach was launched. The plan recognises that prevention and the availability and accessibility of housing are key ingredients to diminish homelessness, but remains rather vague concerning the specific actions to ameliorate the current housing crisis (more than 100 000 persons and families are waiting for a social dwelling). In addition, the complex division of competencies between the federal, regional and local authorities concerning homelessness impedes a coordinated approach. This new action plan will not solve institutional problems, but chooses a more bottom-up approach. While this makes a tailor-made approach possible, at the same time it fails to give answers to those cities or regions that are not convinced to develop new policies and actions. A uniform and common monitoring strategy combined with a data collection strategy is a necessary condition to improve the likelihood of success of the plan, but is missing at the moment.

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Research Notes



Part D

Evictions from Primary Residences in Greece: Methodological Concerns Regarding the Collection of Data from Civil Courts' Records for Tenancies

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➤ **Abstract_** *The extent of evictions from tenancies has never been surveyed in Greece. Given the acute economic crisis and harsh austerity measures experienced for almost a decade, the present paper is an initial attempt to conduct such a survey and to address the methodological issues concerned in the Greek context. It is based on wider research conducted on the dimensions of evictions in European member states for the European Union in 2014 (see Kenna et al., 2016). In the absence of any available data on evictions in Greece, the current research attempts to a) identify the sources from which we may collect relevant data and b) inform and guide the methodological approach of future studies on this topic. A pilot and main study were carried out in 21 civil courts. Despite the limitations of the survey, it offers not only a picture of the situation for the first time but also a stepping-stone for future research.*

➤ **Key words_** *Eviction, rented accommodation, primary residence, economic crisis, civil courts' records*

The Context

This research note is based on research funded by the European Commission on the issue of evictions. Its aim had been to assess the extent of evictions from a household's principal primary residence, whether owner-occupied or rented, and included evictions from unlawful occupancy as well as any kind of forced eviction of a person or household from whatever form of habitation had been utilized as a dwelling before.

Despite experiencing economic crisis for almost a decade, little research has been conducted on evictions in Greece. Because of a moratorium that protected debtors with mortgage arrears, the extent of evictions of households from primary residences may have been underestimated. Unlike other European countries with a developed system of social welfare, households in Greece have generally tended to access housing based outside of any mechanisms of local or central government support. In this way, securing a home in Greece appears in keeping with the Southern European paradigm of kinship. For decades, the contribution of the Greek state to the issue has been targeted either towards the housing needs of specific groups like expatriates and disaster-stricken households or through relatively indirect policies involving planning instruments and tax reliefs (Economou, 1988; Emmanouil, 2006).

Home-ownership has tended to be as high as 80% of the total housing stock (Maloutas, 1990), among the highest in the European Union before its eastward enlargement in 2004 (Eurostat, 2014). Such high levels of home ownership stem from the fear of losing one's home and has traditionally led Greeks to secure a dwelling of their own regardless of its size, age or status. This strong desire for home that is eviction-resistant is a symbol of mistrust in the country's administrations since the establishment of the modern Greek state in 1830.

It is important to note that the private rental sector has not been traditionally developed in Greece, nor has it been supported by statutory policies (Emmanouil, 2006). The private rental sector emerged from strong urbanization trends of the post WWII period which gave rise to the private housing construction sector. Eventually, the available housing stock in the largest cities expanded exponentially, mainly through self-housing and the system called 'antiparohi' in which small scale developers cooperated financially with small property owners to develop the land (Antonopoulou, 1991).

According to the latest available statistics on the share of the rental sector per region in Greece, in 2011, 29% of Athens was comprised of private rental accommodation, 25% in Piraeus and 23% in Thessaloniki, while the percentage for Central Athens was 36%. At the same time, the country's average was 20%, rural areas

demonstrating higher levels of owner occupation, as in the mountainous region of Evrytania, where the percentage of the rental sector was as low as 6%. Areas that depend on tourism tend to show figures on the higher end of the scale, for example 42.2% and 32.4% of accommodation is private rental in Mykonos and Santorini respectively, which appear to provide a measure of the housing needs of the workforce in the specific islands (Ellstat, 2011).

The dependence of fairly large social groups on the private rental sector is mainly due to the fact that no socially supported rental sector exists in Greece. Social housing has never been implemented in the form of rented accommodation of the social sector but has mainly been provided by the Workers' Housing Association (OEK) in the form of ready-made dwellings distributed to its beneficiaries through a lottery system or housing loans in favourable terms (Sapounakis, 2000). Yet even this type of housing provision along with the rent subsidy for beneficiaries who rented their dwellings in the private sector also provided by OEK, was only offered until the beginning of 2012, after which the organization ceased to operate.

Housing in Greece and the current economic crisis

The loan boom of the late 1990's changed the pattern of housing in Greece. In a country in which the share of housing loans had been minimal before 1995, the percentage of owner occupation housing supported by a loan rose from 11.8% of the total number of households in 2007 to 17.5% in 2010, dropping to 15.2% in 2012 due to the economic crisis (Eurostat, 2014).

Furthermore, the recent economic crisis is reflected in the country's increasing levels of unemployment, poverty, and households facing threat of eviction from their primary residences. Greece had the highest overall unemployment rate in the EU in 2013 (27.5%), dropping to 24.9% in 2015 (Eurostat, 2017; OECD, 2017). Total disposable household income in Greece dropped by one third between 2007 and 2012, with average losses of some €4 400 per person (OECD, 2017b).

In 2014, more than a third of the country's population (36%) was classified as at risk of poverty, with Greece ranking third from the bottom among EU Member States in this category, after Romania and Bulgaria (Eurostat, 2015). Severe income losses reflect the unprecedented deterioration of the labour-market conditions across large parts of the population, and particularly among the young. The youth unemployment rate was 49.5% for the first two quarters of 2016, ranking after South Africa and the second worst position among all OECD countries (OECD 2017a). In 2015, 63.8% of young adults aged 18-34 lived with at least one of their parents, compared to the EU (28 countries) average 47.9%. This figure in Greece is persistently growing while that of the EU average tends to remain constant (EU-SILC, 2017).

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Data on loans further elucidates the overall economic and housing condition in Greece. The economic recession influenced heavily borrowers' ability to manage their outstanding mortgage debt. As a result, the share of non-performing housing loans increased steadily to 10.0% in 2010, 14.9% in 2011, 21.4% in 2012, 26.1% in 2013, 28.6% in 2014 and 29.7% in the first quarter of 2016 (EMF HYPOSTAT, 2015). Commercial banks are in the process of restructuring housing loans in order to avoid new capital losses, still without managing to settle the majority of cases. Property prices rose by 87.5% between 2000 and 2008, only to drop by 42% between 2008 and 2015 (Bank of Greece, 2017). Nominal residential property prices declined by 4.7% on average in 2010, by 11.7% in 2012 but in 2014 registered a more modest drop of 7.5%. House prices fell at a total rate of 40.2% in nominal terms since the beginning of the current financial crisis between 2008 and the second quarter of 2015 (EMF HYPOSTAT, 2015).

Organising the Survey – Methodological Concerns

The main issues in organising a survey that assess the dimensions of housing evictions in Greece are: a) the lack of relevant research in the Greek context and, b) the existence and access to relevant data. Regarding the former, despite its importance, there has been no research in the field and hence there is no reference point. Therefore, this research note has had to explore and examine the relevant information in that vacuum. As for the latter issue, there is no register or systematic list of the overall number of the housing evictions at a national or local level. Therefore, the biggest challenge was to identify from where to draw the relevant data.

The number of households in rented accommodation who have been obliged to vacate their residence following an eviction decision may not be easily traced at all as there are no records of the precise phase of the eviction process. Neither the courts of justice and district attorneys, nor bailiffs or lawyers keep records of the cases in which evictions from primary residences have been actually executed.¹

The research team had to apply to the Ministry of Justice for information concerning eviction decisions, which are issued by its courts of justice. Nevertheless, it became apparent that the Ministry neither collects data relevant to evictions nor is interested in doing so.²

¹ Interviews with bailiffs and lawyers in Athens and Volos, March 2014

² Interview with the Research Department of the Ministry of Justice, March 2014

In view of the above, the only way to assess the number of cases which led to households having to vacate their primary residences in the private rental market in Greece is by inquiring to the records of the country's civil courts. Thus, we decided to organise a survey across the Civil Courts of Justice. Due to the number of Civil Courts of Justice (more than 400), and time limitations of the research, it would have been impossible to conduct a survey in all of them. Therefore, the survey was based on an initial sample of 61 courts. The rationale for selecting the courts is described below. Given the lack of other relevant research in the field, a pilot study was conducted to examine the relevance and feasibility of the survey. The main survey pertaining to evictions from private rented primary residences in Greece was carried out over a ten-week period between February and May 2014.

Two types of courts issue decisions on evictions from tenancies in Greece, the 'Protodikeia', meaning 'First Instance Courts' and the 'Eirinodikeia', i.e. 'Peace Courts'. With reference to cases concerning leases, the first deal with contracts in which the rent is higher than 600 euro per month, while the latter deal with lower rents. Until 2010, there were some 55 Protodikeia and 360 Eirinodikeia in Greece, which have now been, rearranged to 60 Protodikeia and 154 Eirinodikeia. The first are generally established and operate in the capitals and the main urban centres of regional prefectures while the latter relate to smaller catchment areas.

As only one of the courts, the Protodikeio of Thessaloniki, keeps a webpage with statistical data relevant to evictions, data collection may only be accomplished by approaching the Courts individually. However, surveying the records of 214 judicial institutions typically dispersed across the country exceeds the resources of this specific research. For this reason, an initial inquiry, in the form of a pilot survey, was undertaken to determine which courts were more relevant and capable of disclosing reliable data in relation to evictions. Furthermore, the pilot survey might reveal the courts that may provide a characteristically paradigmatic picture of evictions from primary residences in the private rental accommodation market in the country. The pilot survey across a characteristic selection of Greek courts also served to outline both which courts should finally be contacted and the content of the questionnaire they ought to complete.

It must be noted that no court, other perhaps than the Protodikeio of Thessaloniki, appeared to be prepared to communicate electronically. Thus the courts had to be contacted either in person, by fax, or by telephone communication.

Selecting the Sample and Setting Up the Pilot Survey

The assessment of each court's capacity to provide relevant and reliable data had to be based on a number of criteria, derived from the characteristics of the catchment area of each court and the population it serves. These criteria were the following:

- (a) the size of the population that corresponds to each court;
- (b) the level of urbanization of the area;
- (c) the relative share of owner-occupied residences in relation to rented ones; and
- (d) the standardization of data already collected.

The first three criteria are expected to provide a reliable picture of the relevance of each court with the phenomenon of eviction from primary residence. The size of the population served by the court is directly relevant to the court's significance as it is evident that larger courts involved larger population cross sections.

The second criterion focused on the level of urbanization for the specific area covered by each court by comparing tables of urban densities between the various regions examined, as higher density figures are expected to correspond to lower income groups and hence higher degree of eviction incidence.

Thirdly, the area's tenure status shows the relative percentage of rented accommodation as opposed to owner occupied residences, and consequently provides a measure of the households that may be threatened by eviction. It is interesting to note that tenure status although relevant, does not necessarily follow the urbanization pattern. In Crete, for example, rented accommodation in Heraklion, the largest urban centre of the island, is only 24.2% as opposed to 27% of Chania, Crete's second biggest city (Ellstat, 2011). Still, the main trend is that owner occupation is a phenomenon that is much more common in rural rather than urban areas and for this reason evictions from the private rental market are expected to be minimal in civil courts in the countryside.

In addition to the above, standardized data is needed so that the research team may arrive at concrete conclusions. Indeed, the inadequacies of data collection from court records were more significant than anticipated.

With the above considerations in mind, the pilot survey involved the Protodikeia of Athens and Volos and the Eirinodikeia of Athens, Nea Ionia, Volos, Chania, Korinthos, Florina and Almyros. Although only nine, these courts comprised all the required characteristics, i.e. size, urban and rural character as well as type of tenure. In this manner, the criteria of population, urbanization, tenure status as well as that relating to the type of data already collected by the courts were met.

Results of the Pilot Survey

The pilot study found that the size of the population covered by the court did matter. Larger and busier courts issued many more eviction decisions than smaller courts. For example, the Eirinodikeio of Athens issued 4501 court decisions on evictions for the year 2013, i.e. 2.86 per 1 000 inhabitants, whereas the Eirinodikeio of Chania for the same year issued just 86 decisions, i.e. 0.6 per 1 000 inhabitants.³ At the lower end of the scale, the Eirinodikeia of Florina and Almyros, each covering 34 441 and 18 614 people respectively, issued 10 and 0 decisions in 2013. overall, the most important result of the pilot survey was that evictions from primary residence were much more persistent in densely populated urban zones than scarcely populated rural areas with very few, if any, cases of evictions decisions per year.

Thus, in as much as the first three criteria are concerned, the pilot survey had shown the need to contact the densely-inhabited courts of the medium to large urban centres and those of the Athenian suburbs in particular as the problem was mainly there. The combination of the size of the population, the level of urbanization and the tenure status has shown that the households who had problems with their tenancies are mostly those who reside in the medium sized to big cities, where the income is lower, employment based on wage or salaries and the share of owner occupation of housing is lower. On the contrary, households who rely on the primary residence not only tend to live in dwellings they own but also appear to be safer in terms of employment and available income, at least in as much as the threat of being evicted from rented accommodation is concerned. It appears that this trend is generally stronger so that it counteracts the sizeable fraction of higher incomes that are found in the large urban centres.

Regardless of the limitations that are presented in the following section, the outcome of the pilot survey has been to indicate the courts that must be contacted for the main survey, the response rate and the quality of data collected.

Limitations of the pilot survey

The pilot survey indicated that the standardization of data may present serious problems to the survey and for this reason had to be dealt with caution. For a start, not all courts were prepared to provide comparable data, often despite their intention to cooperate. The records of some courts, such as the Eirinodikeio of Korinthos, did not distinguish payment orders between rents or other causes. However, the most significant problem encountered was that court records do not differentiate evictions from primary residences from evictions from businesses. The

³ In both cases, decisions on evictions include orders to reposess property without a court hearing

cases of the Protodikeio of Volos were carefully examined one by one for the years 2010-13. This court had been chosen as being characteristic enough to combine the physiognomy of both a medium sized city as well as a tourist area. Decisions on evictions for businesses were roughly 40% of the total number of eviction decisions issued by the court.

Evidently, this inability to arrive at conclusive figures concerning evictions from private rented accommodation in Greece may not be easily addressed. As courts, not only in Greece but in the European context as well, have been prone to categorize decisions by type rather than by subject, it is impossible to understand the exact characteristics of those obliged to leave the premises unless one reviews the documents of each different case. As this exceeded the scope of the specific research, one may only arrive at tentative rather than definitive statements regarding the dimensions of the phenomenon of evictions in the private rental sector. This assumption may be based on the division of cases found in the Protodikeio of Volos mentioned above. Thus, even though the percentage of dwellings compared to businesses in a country like Greece may vary largely geographically, one may assume that the approximation of 0.6 of rented homes as a share of the total number of evictions is sufficient to portray the dimensions as well as the trends regarding the specific phenomenon.

Lastly, an additional element that may confuse the findings of the research must be stressed. According to the Greek legal framework, the procedure leading to an eviction from privately rented property in Greece may follow two different paths:

- (a) The procedure leading to an order for the tenant to submit the property to the owner (Article 662 of the Code of Civil Procedure), and
- (b) What is known as the 'special procedure' (Article 66 of the Introduction of the Code of Civil Procedure).

The first procedure is faster as it avoids a proper trial, which would normally take time and money. The owner must inform the tenant, through a proper request delivered to the tenant by a bailiff, to pay the money due or to leave within a period of 15 working days. Following the owner's application to the court, the demand for the tenant to leave the property is normally delivered within one or two weeks depending on how busy the court is. Within 15 working days, the tenant may legally object to the order, thus leading to a hearing that must take place within 50 working days. If he/she does not legally object, the eviction is executed within 20 days from the days the order was issued.

The second procedure is much slower than the first as it involves a court hearing. According to this procedure, the owner files a lawsuit against the tenant who either has not paid rent or has damaged the property, asking him/her to leave the dwelling

as well as to pay the money for the rent and bills that are already due. As courts in Greece are very busy, it often takes more than a year to set a date for the trial, which may again be easily postponed.

The methodological issue regarding the present research is whether there has been overlapping data due to the cases in which the tenants' objections to a proper order to repossess property, i.e. under procedure 1, have led to a hearing that had also been registered in the records of procedure 2. It must be acknowledged that in the present context the narrow period of data collection did not allow a thorough cross-checking. Nevertheless, both lawyers and the courts' administration officials believe that there are few tenants who object to the eviction order, mostly because of the costs involved and for this reason the overlapping of data is likely limited.

The main survey

After the completion of the pilot survey and the finalization of its outcome, the main survey was conducted. This survey involved the collection of data via structured questionnaires addressed to the courts that needed to be contacted according to the findings of the pilot survey. The object of the main survey was to collect data from the larger courts in areas that are essentially urban in character, thus examining records from courts that are larger than the threshold of 270 000 inhabitants in the case of Protodikeia and 140 000 inhabitants for Eirinodikeia respectively. Apart from the courts already contacted, the main survey required data from the Protodikeia of Thessaloniki, Piraeus, Patras, Heraklion, Larisa, Trikala and Kavala and the Eirinodikeia of Thessaloniki, Piraeus, Heraklion, Halandri, Larisa, Patras, Amarousion, Ilion, Kallithea, Nikaia, Ioannina, Hania and Peristeri and others, reaching a total number of 61 courts spread across the country.

All chosen courts were contacted via fax and telephone, and when possible by the physical presence of an interviewer from the research team, who often had to review the court records personally.

Some of the difficulties that had been evident even during the pilot survey persisted while collecting data for the main survey. For example, it has been impossible to collect a sizeable portion of data, among other courts, from the most important Eirinodikeio of Thessaloniki because payment orders concerning rents are listed in the same manner as in the court of Korinthos mentioned earlier, i.e. along with all other types of payment orders such as wages and other debts of the private sector. Thus, out of the 61 civil courts contacted, reliable and comparable data were collected only from the records of 21 courts. The records of almost all courts concerning evictions mix residential uses with businesses. To address this shortcoming, figures in the main survey are reduced to 60% of the total. Furthermore,



some of the targeted courts never managed to produce the required answers to the questionnaire, an additional difficulty relating to the fact that courts at the time were responsible for organizing the voting lists for both local and European parliamentary elections held in May 2014. Still, it must be acknowledged that officials from many courts, as in the case of the Eirinodikeio of Athens, the largest court in the country, were particularly helpful in supporting the causes of the research, even doing the counting needed in their spare time.

The total number of households for which landlords have applied in court or filed a lawsuit in order to repossess their property and the total number of households for which an order to vacate the property they rent has been issued per year is presented in Table 1. The table relates to data sent by 21 out of 61 civil courts in Greece, which according to the pilot survey conducted earlier were characterized as being highly representative with reference to evictions from primary residences.

Table 1: Data from court records on evictions

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Applications in courts	10861	11 034	11 140	8758
Issued orders for evictions	9084	8815	9394	8586

Source: research team based on the data sent by 21 Greek Courts, May 2014

After estimating the share of the rental sector and the degree of urbanization for the catchment area of the various courts, we arrived at a tentative estimate of the aggregate of eviction procedures instigated during the years 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013. This estimate depicted in Table 2 is derived from the number of eviction cases collected from the representative sample of the courts surveyed.

Table 2: Projection of data on evictions nationwide

	2010	2011	2012	2013
Applications in courts	16000	17500	20000	16500
Issued orders for evictions	11000	13000	16000	14500

Source: research team based on data sent by Greek Courts, May 2014

However, as noted earlier, this aggregate may only be an estimate for a number of reasons. Firstly, because data were given as a mixture of residences and businesses; secondly, because there have been cases in which tenants objected to the eviction order issued against them and followed the special procedure of a proper court hearing thus being double-counted; and thirdly, because in many cases data include orders of other payments, sometimes including rents, but without an eviction requirement.

There is no available information on the number of evictions on rented accommodation that were actually executed.

Apart from the figures on court decisions in absolute terms, which as noted earlier may only be indicative, it is interesting to observe the yearly fluctuation of the number of court cases leading to evictions in the courts contacted. As expected by the context of the country's mounting economic crisis, most courts show a constant increase in court decisions on evictions for the years 2010, 2011 and 2012. However, in almost all courts, the demand drops suddenly in 2013.

This trend may be attributed to several factors:

- (a) By 2013, landlords are getting used to the idea that property values have dropped and are prepared to negotiate the rent with their tenants. A few years before, this would have been unlikely, as most landlords have tended to evaluate their property higher than expected. It has become apparent that the recent dramatic drop in the demand for property does not ensure that the property will readily be re-rented. Moreover, owners of vacant tenements are obliged to pay for public utility costs themselves.
- (b) The actual cost of an eviction for the landlord is around €1 000 per case, a figure that includes the fees for the bailiff and the locksmith. As Greece is characterized by excessive fragmentation of property, most landlords are poor people themselves, almost as poor as their tenants, and €1 000 equal in many cases more than two monthly rents that they may not afford to lose.

Conclusion

This research note is the first research on evictions from primary residences in the rental sector in Greece. Apart from the findings, its contribution to research on the issue concerns the methodological difficulties involved and the identification of the limitations that may restrict future research. Therefore, this paper may stand as a basis for similar future studies not only on the issue of evictions but also on a number of issues relevant to the loss of a household's primary rented residence.

It is evident that time limits as well as the manner in which civil court records are kept have posed serious obstacles to data collection. Ideally, the survey would have involved the examination of the records of all civil courts in the country. Still, 61 out of the more than 200 courts in Greece were approached and 21 provided the information required. The results are tentative, yet the trends are clear.

It is important to note that the threat of eviction from privately rented housing has been growing steadily for the years 2010, 2011 and 2012 only to drop decisively in 2013. The reason behind this phenomenon may relate to the depression in the real estate market, the relatively high costs of eviction in Greece and the consequent tendency of owners to negotiate the rent at a lower price.

The phenomenon of evictions from rented primary residences in Greece is a very important issue that needs particular attention by policymakers at different levels. In view of this, there are several recommendations in relation to data collection from the records of the Greek civil courts of Justice. For a start, evictions from homes ought to be listed separately from evictions from businesses. Furthermore, orders for payment regarding rented accommodation must be listed differently than other types of payment orders. Lastly, it would be useful if the courts registered the evictions that are finally executed. This data should inform a registry in a relevant central agency and ought to be readily accessible.

Despite the decreasing rates of eviction decisions, it appears that the recent economic crisis has had a significant impact on security of rented housing in Greece. Based on the survey presented in this research note and the worsening condition of the rental sector in the country, the need for further research on the issue is surely pressing.

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Experiencing a Stay in a Shelter in the Context of a Lack of Social Housing

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➤ **Abstract_** *This article is a response to the concept of shelterization and anchors it in the absence of systemic solutions in responding to homelessness in the Czech Republic. The article also discusses the experience of staying in a shelter in the context of the lack of social housing in the Czech Republic. Data from the research entitled Reintegration of Single Mothers Living in Shelters has been used for the analysis and description of the experience of a stay in a shelter. Views on staying in shelters are presented through three main lenses: Invisibility, Housing, and Empowering. On the basis of the data obtained in the context of the discussion, we have provided recommendations for the practice of social work in shelters.*

➤ **Keywords_** *shelter, shelterization, social housing, client expectations, housing, empowering, invisibility*

Introduction

Using data obtained from the *Reintegration of Single Mothers from Shelters into Permanent Housing*, this paper builds on the article by Arapoglu *et al.*, (2015), *Revisiting the Concept of Shelterization: Insights from Athens, Greece*. Together with the authors of this article, we support the thesis that shelters form an integral part of an emergency model for managing the loss of housing. The authors state that in 2013, 514 000 persons could be considered to be living in insecure and/or

inadequate housing in Greece. In the Czech Republic, there were 119 000 persons living in insecure and/or inadequate housing in 2015 (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2015).

Arapoglu *et al.*, (2015: 140) note that shelterization is conceived of as follows: “a type of institutionalisation specific to homelessness, which refers to the effects of prolonged dependency on institutional regimes that tend to colonize a homeless person’s everyday routines in ways that render long(er)-term life paths and objectives impossible even to contemplate.” At the same time, the authors state that they perceive shelterization as a “structural condition rather than a personal, subjective state of apathy and resignation” (Arapoglu *et al.*, 2015: 140). This paper also identifies with this perception, in particular, in the absence of legislation in the Czech Republic on social housing. Assistance to persons in need of housing is provided mostly by shelters, run by non-profit organizations. This system can be considered part of the Housing Ready concept, however, continuity of individual degrees of housing may appear problematic (see for example, Kocman and Klepal, 2014).

In relation to the absence of social housing and the frequent lack of continuity in transition from a shelter into permanent housing (see e.g. Kocman and Klepal, 2014; Glumbíková, 2017), it also becomes a common practice in the Czech Republic that shelters have to continue to “endlessly prepare people for reintegration.” As described by Arapoglu *et al.* (2015: 141), “both providers and ‘clients,’ the servers and the served, unable or unwilling to consider pathways to exiting homelessness other than a gradual trajectory along a continuum of care that aims to build ‘housing readiness’.”

While homeless shelters in the Czech Republic are included in social prevention services, they are closely tied to addressing visible aspects of homelessness. In the Czech Republic, as, for example, in Greece, there is no systemic tool to address the invisible dimensions of homelessness and thus are only targeted at the population in insecure and inadequate housing. Providers of social services for the homeless have called for system solutions by the Czech legislation to address this issue.

The conditions for the provision of social services are defined and enforced in the Czech Republic in considerable detail, both in terms of the range of activities that homeless shelters can provide to their clients¹ and the qualifications that they can use while providing these services. Many of these conditions also contribute to

¹ In Act No. 108/2006 Social services, Section 57 a shelter is described as follows: “*Shelters provide temporary residential services to persons in unfavourable social situations associated with the loss of housing*”. The law on social services for shelters lays down the following basic (mandatory) activities: a) *the provision of food or assistance in catering*, b) *accommodation*, c) *assistance in the application of the rights, legitimate interests and in obtaining personal affairs*. “The law on social services (108/2006) further provides that “*the provision of social services in shelters shall be done by payment...*” The stay in a shelter is limited, most often for a period of one year.

raising the threshold of shelters. Long-term below-average wages for social care services workers simultaneously have led social work professionals to relocate to work in other fields with higher salaries and limits the ability of social service providers to employ high-quality professionals. The current legislative setting also leads to “excessively bureaucratic management and monitoring structures” (similarly, see Arapoglu *et al.*, 2015: 109).

This research aims to contribute to existing knowledge of homeless shelters by getting the view of shelters from the perspective of their residents.

Methodology of Research

The presented data comes from research on the reintegration of single mothers from shelters into stable housing. This research was carried out in the years 2014-2016 in five shelters in the territory of the city of Ostrava.² The research was conducted using a qualitative research strategy, using a participatory research approach. A participatory approach to research was chosen to bring new perspectives through direct work with people from the research environment; it makes it possible to overcome the tension between the “*relevant*” and “*experts*” and it is focused on the specific needs of participants of research. Participatory research, therefore, not only brings knowledge, but insight (Schuman and Abramson, 2000).

Two peer researchers co-operated on the research of mothers taking long term stays in shelters. The main research question was focused on finding barriers and accelerators in the process of reintegration of the single mothers from shelters into stable housing. In the course of the research, 33 interviews were carried out with three groups of research participants, 1) mothers repeatedly alternating stays in shelters (a minimum of three consecutive stays), 2) mothers leaving the shelters (departure is planned within a maximum of 10 days), and 3) research participants reintegrated to stable housing (living in an apartment for at least 18 months outside shelters and hostels and who have signed a tenancy contract there). The research participants were obtained using a deliberate selection through shelter and snowballing. Six focus groups were also carried out (one of which was with significant other people who have identified as central to the research participant for its reintegration into permanent housing). Peer researchers were involved in all steps of the research, from coming up with questions for the semi-structured interview, through participation in the interviews and focus groups to the analysis of the data.

² Ostrava is the third largest city in the Czech Republic. It is an industrial city that is affected by depopulation. Ostrava has been selected because it constitutes a highly dynamic and complex environment as far as the exclusion from housing goes; there are 15 socially excluded localities, 42 hostels and 12 shelters.

The data was analysed using the constructivist grounded theory of Charmaz (see for example Charmaz, 2006). The research emphasis was on three “basic” rules of participatory research: respect for the person, the principle of justice and the principle of benefit (see Kindon *et al.*, 2010).

Analysis

Three lenses of dealing with staying at the shelter

Analysis of the data is presented using three lenses, through which the shelter can be seen from the women’s perspectives. The first lens is *Empowerment*, whereby the shelter is seen to help people in housing need to promote active solutions to their current housing situation. The second lens is *Invisibility*; according to this perspective, the cause of and the actual stay in the shelter itself is a form of oppression. In this perspective, the shelter is perceived as a place where homeless people are concentrated, to be separated from the public and the public from problems related to their life situations. The third lens is *Housing*, that is, the prospect of securing accommodation within the meaning of the crisis “a place to go”. Three themes from the data will be addressed: 1) what is the shelter? , 2) regime of the shelter, and 3) relationship with the social worker. Each theme is addressed using the perspective of the people living in the shelter and the perspective of providers of social services.

What is a shelter?

The research participants themselves emphasised the importance of expectations in relation to the shelter,

I think it is also important to know what you want from this asylum... I asked one of the social workers and it was good, because I didn't expect any help then as the other girls here. (KP11)

It seems to me, that one of the girls, especially the new ones are waiting, God knows, what the shelter will do for them, they do not understand that the shelter is there mainly for housing and then they're waiting for help and when they don't get it, so they are insane and think they should get it, they're complaining and so... and they do not understand that the shelter does not work this way. (PV1)

I actually did not expect anything from the shelter than the roof over your head, and that is what I got. (KPR33)

The first lens, through which we look at the data, is *Housing* in the sense of “a place to go”, when it is perceived as a place of shelter crisis. “*I had nowhere else to go... and I'm learning here to save...it's good that there is the sort of things here.*” (KP18).

"But it's great that there are shelters, it helps mothers, and they are more favourable than the hostels" (KP11). Most of the women in the shelter who participated in the research had experience with domestic violence. The shelter therefore served as "a place to go" and the possibility "to take a breath" after the often very traumatic experiences. The research participants reflect that they perceived this option as a preliminary stage to the future *Empowerment* (the second lens),

I don't want to talk about anything at all, I don't want to remember how I ended up here, it just happened, and now I won't dig up of it. (KP19).

I don't want to talk about how I got here, it hurts me all the time for hearts, you know... just it is too much for me now and I don't want to... (KP18)

I endured that for 18 years... I can't even talk about it... I take the pills, I go to a psychologist... I can't. (KP27)

The third lens is *Invisibility*. The perceived "imprisonment" falls in this perspective; it often appeared in the research participants alternating stays in the shelter,

You know, I understand, that for moms that are here for the first time, it may be fine, what they are doing here... those cooking classes, hygiene, and then there's the investigation... but for me it makes no sense... I have no spare money and they just prove that to me all the time. (KP5)

I was here for the third time in the shelter, so it really didn't make sense... I couldn't learn anything new or anything... just survived here and there. (KPR33)

In this perspective falls in the perceived stigma, that is connected with a stay in the shelter,

You know, I sometimes think that they are happy that we have closed somewhere and they would like to see us, as far as possible from each other. (KP25)

It is said that there was a large petition composed so that the shelter is not here... so that there wouldn't be a place for moms. (KPR32).

KPR29 responds to the previous claim, 'On the one hand I can understand them, I wouldn't want to have as neighbours some dirty ones... but we're normal people'.

People normally don't know what a shelter is, they think it's for punishment, not to help... also I didn't know something like this is... a lot of people probably don't know, until they don't start living here...(PV2)

In the context of *Invisibility*, homeless mothers are facing oppression and they are subject to various labels such as "homeless", "bad mother", "unable to take care of", "sneak thief", "dirt", "gipsy" or "the black sheep of the family". The experience

of homeless women cannot be explained by just one form of oppression, but her intersectionality; mutual crossing of different forms of oppression (see for example, Grillo, 2013; Graham and Schiele, 2010).

Regime of the shelter

From the perspective of the residents of the shelter, the regime of the shelter can be viewed under the *Housing* lens.

Well, I understand that there are such rules, but it doesn't make sense this... why do we get paroled, I'm not sick, or somehow defective not to be able to leave the shelter. (KP5)

The visit must be reported, they can go out, sometimes into the kitchen, but not in the room or so... those hours there are limited...it's like visits in the hospital. (KP15)

The unavailability of social housing makes it impossible for some clients to move to normal housing after a certain stage of adaptation or improvement of the social situation, and therefore the shelter remains in a mode that is designed just to adapt to “take a breath”, the solution to other problems, not only to provide housing. Many of the residents of shelters, in a situation where anything other than housing needs is necessary, are experiencing the frustration of collective coexistence and its conditions, and the rules that the shelter requires.

The regime of the shelter can also be seen as *Invisibility*,

Well, we have to be here to six, we can no longer go out. When we, moms, want to go out at night, so we get paroled into eleven o'clock a week. Well, and if someone comes in and we can't handle it within the hour, they shall be deducted from those paroles. Only when I go on a small purchase, so it is all reported, even couple of minutes. When it's the afternoon lull, so they keep yelling at us to be quiet, and we have to be in the house, or outside it. It's from twelve to three o'clock. (KP5)

The regime of the shelter can also bring a perceived *Empowerment* of the ability to take care of oneself,

You know, I understand, that for moms that are here for the first time, it may be fine, what they're doing here... those cooking classes, hygiene, and then there's the saving... (KP5)

In this context, the Empowerment can be related to the limited visits and fencing area of the shelter providing the possibility to “take a breath”,

He kept yelling under the window, still kept standing in front of the door. Perhaps because of the people like him, here it is fenced. (PV2)

The Relationship with the Social Worker

A social worker is seen as a representative of "Accommodation" to the residents of the shelter. His job is to move the residents of the shelter into stable housing. The question, however, is whether he has the tools to do that, and whether there is, in a non-existent system of social housing, somewhere to move the clients,

She sends me all the time on pointless meetings, now I had to go to report to shelter, where I didn't want to go at all, but I have to have it cleared at Mrs. social...(KP8)

We're doing this whole session just what she wants, why ever not she asks if I want to discuss something. (KP5)

It seems to me, that it is sometimes too difficult for them... they have to watch you over here, take care and probably the supervisor evaluates them according to some tables around, ain't it?... They must know that the relationship between us is not good and he doesn't know what to do... or the boss should be forcing them to treat us that way (PV2).

Social workers are also perceived by the residents of the shelter through the lens of *Empowerment*,

There are some good social workers in the shelters, like the supervisor here is nice, really cool, it makes you feel that she is really interested in your problems. (KP17)

The good social worker will support you but the bad one not... in the shelters I met the good ones... it seems to me, however, that there are less of them than the others... it's not easy but not everyone can do this kind of job. (KP24).

In the context of *Invisibility*, the social worker is seen as the guardian of the order of the facility,

She's not even trying...to discuss the issue with you... not trying to help... still just gives orders, it's useless... I go see her once a week for an hour and a half... just because I have to. (PV1)

The set of rules here is a nonsense... I wonder if we must do all these things they want us to do... instead of asking you how you are, so they only want to see the receipts of everything you have bought in a month and the reason for that is that you don't have enough money which you will never have and you were to ask them for lentils... (KP3)

Discussion

The research participants perceive the role of shelters in various ways – *Housing*, *Empowerment* and *Invisibility* so we consider the shelters to be providers of shelters and social work, which may be supportive within the solution to the current life situation. Therefore, in order to fulfil these shelters optics, we consider it important to reflect on the challenges that derive from them. This research indicates a conflict between the mission of a shelter housing service (the provision of emergency housing) and the expectation of “having a home” by the users of the facility.

This expectation should be contextualised in the virtual absence of social housing in the Czech Republic, where homeless people often do nothing else than alternate between shelters because they cannot access stable housing. Many clients, thus, find themselves in conditions that respond to different levels of needs, with a restrictive regime, collective coexistence adapted to the environment of people, some of whom may or may not need to stabilize, to learn certain competences, but do expect to have an accommodation.

The research shows that the shelters are often seen through the lens of *Invisibility*, when it is perceived as a shelter for “*unadaptable people*”, raising fear for the homeless person. The research participants in this context also mention fears of stigma and labels (“*homeless*”, “*bad mother*”...), which are often associated with a shelter. This illustrates the need for improved understanding of homeless shelters and homeless people, for example, by accentuating the structural causes of homelessness.

The data also indicates that shelters could better accommodate individualized, non-routine provision of needs of the residents in shelters (similarly see Padgett *et al.*, 2006; Tischler, 2007; Cooper *et al.*, 2009; Walsh *et al.*, 2009; Dashora *et al.*, 2012). It is necessary to reflect on the fact that the needs of homeless people are multi-dimensional, complex and heterogeneous. This reflection could take various forms one of which is research in shelter facilities. Participatory action research allows us to gain insight into the situation of the residents of shelters and suggest possible changes in the facility (see for example, Kindon *et al.*, 2010).

In narratives of research participants, it has also been repeatedly pointed out that social workers in shelters have multiple roles (the role of the adviser, the guardian of order, etc.) and the need to divide these roles. From the reflection of the research participants, the social worker in the facility is into the dilemma of helping versus control, both of which are in a certain way institutionalized (similar to for example, McLaughlin, 2005). The research participants also reflect on the burden on social workers in the shelters. They argued that the social worker is “*caught*” in the regime of a particular institution, in which he has to work, and often this work is not posi-

tively evaluated, which is burdensome for him. Ferguson and Lavalette (2004) and Gojová and Glumbíková (2015) describe in this context the powerlessness of the social workers, stemming from a lack of tools provided by social work for the solution of social problems and the inability to participate in the construction of their solutions. Shier and Graham (2014) state that social workers may feel helpless (in the system) and so it is often difficult for them to look at oneself as a professional. Grant and Kinman (2014) describe the increasing work-related stress with social workers, which stems from the standards laid down for social work.

Recommendations can be made as a result of this research: greater reflection on the roles of social workers in shelter; increase the number of social workers in shelters; ensure the education of social workers, for example, in access-oriented trauma or in crisis intervention so that social workers are able to respond to the needs of clients of the service; strengthen their legal security in a meaningful, unambiguous and less “bound” system.

Conclusion

In the Czech Republic, shelters form an integral part of an emergency model for managing housing loss. The shelterization concept is considered, in accordance with the statement of the research participants (and in accordance with Arapoglu *et al.*, 2015), to be a structural phenomenon due to the lack of a systematic solution to homelessness in the Czech Republic. In the absence of the Social Housing Act, the Czech government seems to have shifted responsibilities onto social service providers.

This situation contributes to shelters being adversely perceived by the public as “facilities for the socially maladjusted”. People living in the shelter are aware of the impossibility of these facilities to meet their long-term housing expectations or actual relocation of the service users to permanent housing. Nevertheless shelters are often perceived by the clients as a source of empowerment and recovery.

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Book Reviews



Part E

John Sylvestre, Geoffrey Nelson and Tim Aubry
(Eds.) (2017)

***Housing, Citizenship, and Communities for
People with Serious Mental Illness. Theory,
Research, Practice and Policy Perspectives.***

Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 395, £41.49

If you would like to read just one comprehensive, well-written book to get a good understanding of current research and discussions dealing with housing in the community mental health field, I strongly suggest “*Housing, Citizenship, and Communities for People with Serious Mental Illness. Theory, Research, Practice and Policy Perspectives*”. As the editors state, the book takes housing as a point of departure and combines it with crucial themes concerning living in the community with serious mental illness: “Housing is a start, the key concern is how it leads to social integration, community participation, recovery and citizenship” (p.xxiii). The book approaches homelessness and housing at the margins in the framework of community mental health and community psychology. It offers a multidimensional, research-based overview of the practice, policy and research in the field. The authors have reviewed a fair amount of previous and current research.

The book includes five sections that generate an educative and interesting journey through various housing solutions, social theories and research methods, perspectives on international housing policies and views from the frontline. The tour ends by summarising conclusions and reflections. The structure of the book makes visible how the academic housing discourse commonly discusses either theories, research methods and results, macro-level policies and housing models or micro-level experiences of the grass-roots level actors such as homeless persons, tenants and the workers providing the support and housing services. These different levels and perspectives demonstrate the multidimensionality of housing and living in the community. The structure is informative and well-functioning, yet it differentiates the macro from the micro. It would be more fruitful to construct the macro and the micro as intertwined and influencing each other – views from the frontline reproduce, put into practice, reflect and resist the current politics and research and vice versa.

Next, I will briefly introduce the main themes of the book as well as my perceptions and experiences. For me, reading the book was a journey to housing and living in the community in the twenty-first century Western world.

The first section begins with a historical grand story of deinstitutionalisation: how custodial facilities were developed first (from the 1960s to 1980s) and were followed by then single- and scattered-site supported housing (from 1990s to today) in the community. Knowing the grand story gives good grounds to continue the journey towards adopting more complicated terminologies of different housing approaches (Chapter 2). The authors introduce a three-step process including key criteria for differentiating various housing approaches from each other. However, although the chapter offers a useful roadmap, I still recognise the feeling of getting lost. What's more, this feeling followed me when reading the final two chapters of the first section that describe the ambiguity of the cost-effectiveness of community-based housing and support. The chapters offer a comprehensive review of the research findings and research deficiencies related to various comparisons of different housing and support models regarding housing outcomes, service use, clinical functioning and community integration (Chapter 3) as well as cost-effects (Chapter 4). As a summary it is stated that, although the findings are in many ways mixed, there is a quite solid consensus that "[...] the combination of scattered-site supportive housing with ICM [Intensive case management] and ACT [Assertive community treatment] yields better housing outcomes than standard care in the community or residential continuum housing" (p.94).

I became especially excited when I reached *section two* "Housing theory and research methods" that deals with theoretical concepts and thinking, and indeed the section demonstrates well the fruitfulness of combining various social-theoretical and community mental health concepts and frameworks to studying homelessness and housing. As it is of special interest to me, I will introduce this section in greater detail as it widens the scope of current housing (first) practice, policy and research by, for instance, introducing recovery, empowerment, integration and citizenship within the frame of community mental health research.

During my journey through the chapters in section two my thinking was stimulated by conceptualisations like 'program theory' that comprises assumptions about "[...] how programs are intended to have beneficial impacts on program participant" (p.155) and 'theories of change' (Chapter 5) that make sense of what is needed to achieve positive housing, clinical and integration outcomes in the micro-environments of different housing settings. In addition, the section offers various conceptualisations that perceive individuals within wider, interactive and social contexts. Chapter 6 demonstrates well how housing issues at the margins are not to be dealt with in isolation from the wider context of neighbourhoods, informal and formal

networks, 'geosocial environments' and political planning and decision-making. Chapter 7 "discuss[es] the contributions that the concept of citizenship can make to practice, policy and research on housing for people with serious mental illness" (p.212). It takes as a starting point Hall and Williamson's (1999) tripartite perspective on citizenship: 1) legal citizenship, 2) normative citizenship, and 3) lived citizenship. Approaching living and housing in the community as having, gaining and strengthening citizenship makes it a reciprocal social-political issue. The authors make a crucial closing remark (p. 229) that reminds us how serious mental illness and housing in the community are related to social exclusion:

An inherent risk in a continued emphasis on a therapeutic perspective on housing is that the causes and solutions to problems of isolation and social exclusion will only be found within individuals. [...] It takes attention away from the fact that exclusion is the product of others, of groups, of systems that exclude, and that passivity and isolation are the products of hopelessness and fear that come from poverty, lack of opportunities, or experiences of rejection. The inclusion of citizenship agenda within and complementary to our current efforts in housing practice, policy, and research provides a complementary focus that draws attention to both the means and opportunities for supporting the agency of people who wish to obtain or who live in the community housing [...]"

Chapter 8 leads me to ponder the various methods of doing citizenship agenda-driven research on the lives of people experiencing serious mental health in the community. The chapter provides introductions to various research approaches including participatory action research (PAR), narrative approaches, visual methods, walking tours, mapping and geographic information systems. As the authors state (p.250), these methods both challenge and complement more commonly used (quantitative) methods in housing research. I was delighted to bump into these qualitative, inspiring methods but missed an introduction to ethnographic and discursive research methods that also have much to offer homelessness and housing studies. What is notable in the introduced methods is that they aim at giving "[...] more agency, control, and voice to participants in research and providing a better understanding of the social ecologies and context in which people participate" (p.250). Accordingly, they may be utilised in strengthening the citizenship agenda in mental health and housing practice, policy and research.

Section three addresses the "International perspectives on housing policy for people with serious mental illness". It very much tells the system-level story of how Housing First has been accepted, adapted, applied and critically reflected on as the most researched, effective and consumer friendly housing philosophy in times of austerity, in the rise of neoliberalism and decline of the welfare state in the United State (Chapter 9), Canada (Chapter 10), the European Union (Chapter 11) and

Australia (Chapter 12). The chapters also reflect the claimed 'revolutionary change' and uniqueness of Housing First. As the authors remind in Chapter 11, most of its core principles such as empowerment, integration, recovery, consumer choice, person-centred planning and harm reduction have been mainstream in community mental health and at least in Northern Europe homelessness services long before Housing First made its breakthrough (e.g. p.292). It can also be questioned "[...] how important detailed fidelity actually is (i.e. near-replication) for reducing homelessness among people with high support needs" (p.293). I found these discussions valuable contributions to current housing and homelessness studies.

The *fourth section* offers "views from the front line" by concentrating on tenants', service providers', practitioners' and landlords' viewpoints. The rise of the tenant view is said to reflect the strengthening of the consumer movement, peer-led groups and services that call for the same rights, responsibilities and housing options for citizens with special mental health needs as other citizens have in the community (Chapter 13). Service providers' and practitioners' views are approached in the context of single-site (Chapter 14) and scattered-site supportive housing (Chapter 15). These views comprise justifications for different models of supportive housing: the first model refers to congregate housing and the latter to dispersed housing. Service providers and practitioners describe the provision of tenant-centred supported housing services with limited financial resources as a complex task, thus "ultimately, housing programs are not just about buildings but more importantly about people" (p.336). Furthermore, the important role of frontline providers in putting the Housing First principles into practice is discussed as well as the challenges and rewards they experience in their everyday work. Landlords' views are scrutinised from the sparse literature on scattered-site supportive housing. Landlords are seen to get novel roles as caretakers, site managers and superintendents and confront conflicting demands such as securing the condition of the apartments and providing housing to a tenant that potentially may damage the dwelling (Chapter 16).

The *last section* "Conclusions and reflections" brought my rewarding journey to an end. It gathers the viewpoints that are widely shared among the majority of the stakeholders, and thus it pinpoints the progress and achievements made in living and housing in the community since deinstitutionalisation took place 40 years ago. The last chapter reminds that although there has been great progress, there is no reason for complacency as poverty, lack of opportunities and choices, social exclusion, poor housing, limited citizenship, inadequate support and treatment are still commonly experienced among people with special mental health needs living in the community. Thus, my journey does not end; we all need to retain our enthusiasm and move forward in our thinking and actions for making living in the community satisfactory and safe for every citizen.

Throughout my journey, I have learned about the obvious gaps, deficiencies and limits of current homelessness and housing research: how there is a need for more research using various research methods to explore the unexplored themes and views at the margins. This can be seen as one of the major messages and closing remarks of the book. In the last chapter, the citizenship agenda is provided rightfully as a promising signpost for better practice, policy and research in the future. The book demonstrates as a whole how research develops through dialogues between different disciplines and through innovative crossing of the boundaries of research fields. In a peculiar way, it can be read as both an interdisciplinary and profound compilation of housing in the community and as a forceful promotion of Housing First. Maybe this is why the book seems to offer something insightful for every reader for various purposes.

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Paula Mayock and Joanne Bretherton (Eds.) (2016)

Women's Homelessness in Europe

Palgrave Macmillan, pp.295, €96.29

Women's Homelessness in Europe is an edited collection of chapters by leading housing and homelessness scholars across Europe. It emerged from the Women's Homelessness in Europe Network (WHEN), established in 2012 to promote and develop academic scholarship about women's homelessness. Both the network and the book are a response to the pitiful state of academic and policy knowledge about women's homelessness, the resultant ungendered approach to understanding and responding to homelessness, and the ramifications for women's housing situations and experiences.

The book aims to assess the 'state of knowledge' on women's homelessness in Europe. It is based entirely on existing published evidence but the expertise with which this evidence base is synthesised, framed, and critically analysed by each author does extend our knowledge and understanding by some degree.

The collection broadly takes an intersectional approach to understanding women's homelessness. Although not always explicit, intersectionality provides a framework of sorts. The contributors do not, for example, simply represent what is known about the population of homeless women (characteristics, life experiences, trajectories into homelessness and suchlike) although it is here that existing evidence is probably richest. Rather, the authors typically consider how and why women's homelessness (or the specific dimension they are exploring) interacts with, and is informed by gender roles, institutions, power structures and (gendered) forms of disadvantage. It would, perhaps, be better described as a book about *gender* and homelessness, rather than homeless *women* and is all the stronger for it.

The collection is split into two parts: Part I, comprised of three chapters and entitled 'Historical legacies, cultural images and welfare states', provides contextual underpinning for the remainder of the book, while Part II, entitled 'Issues, Challenges and Solutions', comprises six chapters, each focused on a specific dimension of women's homelessness.

The first substantive chapter – Chapter 2 (O’Sullivan) – offers an historical perspective on women’s homelessness and is an excellent contextual opener, introducing the reader to themes that become increasingly familiar as the book progresses. It explores how women’s homelessness has been historically framed by ignorance and normative assumptions about gender roles, providing a fundamental challenge to the notion that women’s homelessness is a relatively new phenomenon. Rather, it is argued that historical constructions of homelessness, and the methods of enumeration arising from these, have allowed such a perspective to prevail. Although drawing on rather limited European evidence, the chapter highlights how dominant approaches to investigating homelessness have rendered women variably invisible or deviant with ramifications for homeless women today. Chapter 3 picks up a theme raised in Chapter 2 and interrogates the way in which cultural images of women impact on homelessness policy and practice. Taking a feminist constructivist approach, Löfstrand and Quilgars consider how women’s socio-economic position, gender expectations, cultural images and the intertwining of categories of home, woman, and family impact on their access to housing in different European countries. Chapter 4 diverges from discussion about constructions of homelessness, but, like the previous two chapters, demonstrates how the absence of gendered understandings of homelessness produces knowledge that does not stand up to scrutiny once analysis of women’s homelessness is incorporated. In this chapter, Bretherton, Benjaminsen and Pleace utilise a version of Esping-Andersen’s typology of welfare regimes and critically assess the argument put forward by some scholars that the extent of homelessness is influenced by welfare state regimes. They argue that this hypothesis ignores gender differentials and that many of the key influences on women’s homelessness may be independent of welfare state regimes.

The first chapter in Part II (Chapter 5, Pleace) explores and critiques approaches to statistical measurement of homelessness in different European states. Echoing a theme in Part I, Pleace argues that the way in which homelessness is defined, measured, and recorded renders women invisible in the homeless population, for example by defining homelessness in ways that inadvertently fail to capture women, or through active decisions not to record gender that are rooted in assumptions about women’s absence from certain forms of homelessness. Chapter 6 represents the first of a series of ‘issue’ based chapters, presenting a nuanced understanding of the relationship between domestic violence and women’s homelessness. It moves beyond recognition of the role of domestic violence as a cause of women’s homelessness and asks more searching questions about the intersection between domestic violence and homelessness. As with many chapters in this collection, the specific theme under discussion is understood and discussed in terms of gendered power relations that impact on women’s housing. Chapter 7 (Wolf, Anderson, van

den Dries and Filipovič-Hrast) considers the relationship between health (physical, mental and substance misuse) and women's homelessness, while Chapter 8 explores the relationship between motherhood and homelessness. Both are relatively descriptive chapters, synthesising European evidence, but are thorough, interesting and well written, providing the reader with an excellent picture of what is known on these important themes. Returning to themes of misconceptions and invisibility, Chapter 9 (Pleace, Bretherton and Mayock) questions the received wisdom that women rarely experience long-term or recurrent homelessness, uncovering and discussing evidence that suggests otherwise. Again, the ways in which homelessness is conceptualised and measured are explanatory factors in this potential misconception about entrenched homelessness. Chapter 10 focuses on a particularly invisible and disadvantaged population – homeless migrant women – and is an excellent example of a chapter that critically examines the multiple layers of disadvantage affecting this group, and the processes and institutions that influence their housing and homelessness situations.

Although each chapter is focused on a distinct issue or population group, the book coheres around a series of recurrent themes, narratives and arguments that emerge in each chapter. For example, the way women are categorised and the implications for access to housing, support, and recognition (i.e. literally being 'counted') is a prominent theme. We see how categorisations have been important historically in developing definitions and conceptualisations of homelessness, for example women as domestic, homemakers etc. and as 'deviants' when failing to adhere to these normative categories (Chapter 2). We see how categorisations – for example as 'immigrant', or as 'family' and 'single' – determine eligibility for or deservedness of support (e.g. Chapters 8 and 10); and how women are rendered invisible through alternative categorisations such as 'victim of domestic violence' rather than 'homeless' (see Chapters 5 and 6). The invisibility of women's homelessness is also highlighted in every chapter. But discussion does not merely note homeless women's absence from research and national statistics, it seeks to explain how and why women remain invisible – e.g. through conceptualisations that foreground spaces and situations in which men predominate; techniques of measurement; and women's own practices and strategies to manage homelessness. And several chapters reveal how current understanding crumbles once a gendered analysis is applied to subjects about which existing evidence is comfortably consensual (e.g. Chapters 4 and 9).

The volume spotlights themes, issues, and sub-groups ignored in homelessness research. The only subject not covered that I felt warranted inclusion was rough sleeping. Like many of the other subjects discussed in the book, rough sleeping is conceptualised without regard for gender differentials. As a result, it is reinforced

as a male phenomenon yet researchers with an interest in women's homelessness know this is not the case. But it is easy to be critical about what is lacking when you are not the one subject to word limits or working with scant evidence.

I concur entirely with the editors when they conclude that '... the contributions in this book provide a comprehensive, contemporary assessment of the current state of knowledge about women's homelessness in Europe' (p.282). This was the stated objective of the book and it is certainly fulfilled. Ideally, I would have liked a more ambitious objective to make inroads into some of those gaps identified. All these scholars do primary research and it was frustrating at times that no new evidence was presented. Similarly, there was much well-argued and interesting critique of the way in which homelessness has been conceptualised, but little offered by way of reconceptualization, other than by implication. But perhaps all that is for a Volume 2. I certainly hope there will be one.

As a whole, the volume successfully highlights the way in which gender expectations intersect with power structures to inform women's vulnerability to and experience of homelessness, producing a convincing and coherent argument as to the gendered nature of homelessness and the urgent need for academics and policy makers to understand it as such. As such, it would be of great value to scholars with an interest in housing, homelessness, or gender.

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Kate Moss and Paramjitv Singh (2015)

Women Rough Sleepers in Europe: Homelessness and Victims of Domestic Abuse

Bristol: Policy Press, pp.224, £56.00

Despite a proliferation of homelessness research over the past decades, the knowledge base on women's homelessness remains weak in most European countries and policy has only recently begun to engage with the notion that women who experience homelessness have distinct needs that warrant specific attention and service responses. This book – which focuses on the experiences of women rough sleepers in four European countries, including the UK, Hungary, Spain and Sweden – makes a strong case for undertaking research into the characteristics and needs of women who sleep rough, rightly referring to the paucity of research and scholarship on women's homelessness and to a broader lack of engagement with the notion of gendered homelessness. From the outset, the authors highlight the extent of the problem of rough sleeping among women, the significance of abuse in these women's lives and their separation from their children. The book does not simply aim to advance a detailed understanding of women rough sleepers but also promises a theory of women's homelessness.

In the early chapters, the rationale for the study's focus is provided, alongside a review of relevant research literature, focusing in particular on the prevalence and predictors of women's homelessness and the legislative frameworks guiding responses to homelessness in the four participating countries (Chapter 3). The study's methodological orientation and its commitment to grounded theory is presented in Chapter 1 and what is referred to as a qualitative ethnographic approach is further elaborated in Chapter 4. While the reader certainly gains the sense that the women's narratives are placed centre stage, alongside a strong commitment to allowing women to relate their 'stories' in their own way and on their own terms, there is in fact no evidence of ethnographic engagement on the part of interviewers in any of the four countries. There is also inconsistency in how the interviewing approach is presented: on page 10, it is described as "semi-structured", but with reference also to a "life story" approach, while the term "ethnographic interviewing" is used on page 79. The authors explain that the intention was to recruit "a maximum of 27 key informants and 20 women rough sleepers in each country" (p.79), although some

challenges did arise in meeting this target and this is perhaps to be expected. More problematically, it is not clear how many people (women or key informants) were in fact interviewed in the end. Crucially, in relation to the recruitment of women rough sleepers, 'snowball' sampling was used to generate "the sample of women who have been abused and suffered violence" (p.10). It is perhaps unsurprising given the sampling approach adopted – described somewhat confusingly elsewhere in the text as "theoretical" (p.80) when it seems clear that a convenience sampling method was used – that domestic violence/abuse was found to be the leading cause of homelessness among the women interviewed.

In Chapter 2, the authors propose a 'social dysfunction theory' of women's homelessness located within late modernity's 'anomic social change', which they propose has resulted in no "clear ideology of women's roles in society" and enabled women to "become more independent of men in terms of income and property" (p.30). Social dysfunction theory, explain the authors, is founded on 'why', 'what' and 'how' factors or "elements of our theory" (p.31). In answer to the 'why' or *causal mechanisms* of women's homelessness, domestic abuse is posited as the reason that a majority of the study's women became homeless. The 'what' factor, or *experience* on the streets, is claimed to involve (further) abuse, exploitation and violence while the 'how' or *impact* on women is determined by their lack of access to women-only services and a lack of appropriate accommodation more broadly. With domestic abuse advanced as a primary cause of women's homelessness, it is difficult to square this proposition with the conditions of late modernity, which have enabled women to become more independent of men and "thus have the choice to leave an unsatisfactory (and in most cases with the women in our study, abusive) relationship" (p.30). At any rate, this theory is not revisited later in the book nor is there any attempt made by the authors to illustrate, much less support, their theoretical propositions at the points when empirical data are presented and conclusions drawn.

Women rough sleepers' stories are the focus of Chapter 4, which starts by reiterating the study's commitment to a research approach guided by the aim of unravelling and understanding the personal narratives of the study's participating women. What follows, however, is something quite different and resembles an inventory of narrative excerpts that are essentially not analysed and, by and large, devoid of interpretation. Further to the lack of interpretative analysis, the findings are presented on a country-by-country basis, with little attempt made, certainly in Chapter 4, to engage with the lives and situations of the women from a cross-country comparative perspective. A great deal of work is left to the reader, who is charged with making sense of lengthy lists of quotes in the absence of a narrative or 'story line' based on the authors' analysis and interpretation. Further to this, the study's women are rendered rather faceless in the sense that narrative excerpts are presented without any contextual information related, for example, to their age, the

duration of their homelessness, the places where they lived subsequent to first experiencing homelessness, their daily routines and so on. With no 'identifiers' in the form of pseudonyms or codes attached to the quotes, it is not possible to follow or 'link' individual stories through the chapter. These problems with the presentation of data are further aggravated by the analysis presented in Chapter 6, which essentially quantifies segments of the women's stories using quantitative displays of data (pie and bar charts). Apart from the dubiousness of introducing a quasi-statistical account of the women's lives and experiences at this juncture, this attempt at quantification is misleading, particularly given the very small sample of women recruited in each of the participating countries.

The conclusions drawn from the findings presented focus on the existence of partner abuse and mental health issues, the extent of the women's alienation because of their lack of social networks and their separation from their children and their lack of access to appropriate services and supports. The causal link between the women's homelessness and intimate partner violence is repeatedly highlighted, as evidenced, for example, by "the number of women whose homelessness is directly attributable to partner abuse" (p.161) and the "extensive stories of long-term abuse endured within intimate relationships with partners or husband" (p.168). However, with women rough sleepers recruited to the study *because* they had been abused and suffered violence, the credibility of the claim that domestic abuse is the central cause of the women's homelessness is very significantly undermined. The lack of attention to the structural underpinnings of homelessness and rough sleeping among the study's women is conspicuous, particularly given the extent to which they appeared to lack educational qualifications and rely on welfare benefits. There is no attempt to analyse the *intersection* of violence/abuse and homelessness as distinct from noting an association between the two and (apparently) presuming that prevalence implies causation.

Research of the kind undertaken by the authors – involving partner countries and researchers who undertake to recruit a 'hidden' and 'hard to reach' population such as women rough sleepers – is extremely demanding and invariably presents challenges. The methodological commitment of the authors to allowing women rough sleepers to articulate their experiences is commendable. One of the strongest potential contributions of good qualitative analysis is its ability to capture the essence of people's lived realities, their social worlds and how they themselves view and perceive their lives and situations. Equally, however, questionable methodological and analytical choices inevitably weaken the empirical basis upon which robust inferences and conclusions can be drawn.

We are still some distance from understanding the relationship between violence/abuse in women's lives and their subsequent experiences of homelessness or housing instability. The findings presented in this book potentially provide a case for further detailed and nuanced investigation of the violence/homelessness nexus in the case of women, with dedicated attention to the *nature* of the relationship and the *meaning* of violence and abuse in the lives of women who experience homelessness.

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