

Homelessness and Violence Against Women Addressing the Link and Responding Effectively

Introduction

This policy statement examines the overlap between violence against women and homelessness in the EU. It examines the heightened risk of homelessness which accompanies forms of violence against women, such as domestic violence, and analyses women's exposure to gender based violence once they become homeless. The statement presents FEANTSA's analysis and recommendations as to how the needs of homeless women can be best met.

The issue of violence against women is one which should be treated with the utmost sensitivity and for this reason a conscious effort is made throughout this policy paper to use appropriate language. In line with experts operating in the women's shelter sector, this paper refers to survivors of violence rather than victims, and chooses to use language which can empower those who experience abuse rather than contribute to the stigma that often surrounds gender based violence and victimization.

For the purposes of this statement FEANTSA uses the definition set out by the Council of Europe when defining violence against women:

*"The term "violence against women" is to be understood as any act of gender-based violence, which results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. This includes, but is not limited to, the following: a. violence occurring in the family or domestic unit, including, inter alia, physical and mental aggression, emotional and psychological abuse, rape and sexual abuse, incest, rape between spouses, regular or occasional partners and cohabitants, crimes committed in the name of honour, female genital and sexual mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, such as forced marriages b. violence occurring within the general community, including, inter alia, rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in institutions or elsewhere trafficking in women for the purposes of sexual exploitation and economic exploitation and sex tourism"*¹

It is important to note that there is a lack of data, academic commentary and international research on the topic of women's homelessness, resulting in many academics highlighting the paucity of work and data on the gender specific needs of homeless people.² The data and information which is referred to in this statement predominantly refers to Women Rough Sleepers (WRS) who are generally representative

¹ Council of Europe, Recommendation Rec (2002) 5 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States

² Moss and Singh, *Women Rough Sleepers in Europe : Homelessness and Victims of Domestic Violence* 2015. Meyock, Parker and Sheridan, *Women, Homelessness and Service Provision*, 2015.

of women from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, with less access to financial resources and support networks to prevent them entering a situation of homelessness resulting from violence. In addition to the broader information vacuum there has also been an absence of targeted policy responses to meet the specific needs of women who are homeless. Therefore this statement aims to bring attention to the research that is available and highlight the significant overlap between violence against women and homelessness and in particular the gender specific needs of survivors.

Homelessness and Violence Against Women

Women's homelessness can often be misunderstood and even go unrecognized by policy makers. FEANTSA's European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS)³ outlines a range of situations where a person can be rendered either homeless or at risk of homelessness. Homelessness is a multi-dimensional phenomenon with a wide variety of components contributing to its prevalence in Europe. One such factor is violence against women and within this there is significant evidence to suggest that domestic violence is a pathway into homelessness for women.

Domestic abuse can cause a person to become roofless or houseless, where the abuse forces them to leave their home and live in sheltered accommodation or live rough on the street, or to reside in insecure housing whether that is under the constant threat of violence, sofa surfing or being forced to live in overcrowded accommodation. Unsurprisingly, domestic abuse is often cited as a common cause of women's homelessness. A study examining WRS found that in the UK, 31% respondents cited domestic violence as the primary cause of their homeless situation. In Hungary, 20% of WRS cited domestic violence as the cause of their homelessness, and an additional 15% said they were homeless as a result of leaving a relationship.⁴ When looking at the general homeless population, a 2015 Irish study found 92% of homeless women said they had suffered some form of violence or abuse, emotional, physical, financial or sexual, over their lifetime. Overall, 66% experienced intimate partner violence of which 20% stated that they had experienced violence from more than one partner.⁵ The dimensions of homelessness in the context of violence against women are far broader than living rough on the street or in sheltered accommodation.

EU Policy Relevance

The Directorate General for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Gender Equality (DG JUST) have committed to coordinating and promoting both legislation and policy development to promote equality and combat discrimination on the grounds of sex in their 2016 work plan. DG JUST specifically highlight preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and supporting actors who can contribute to ending violence at an EU level. Over the coming 18 months the DG, and in particular Commissioner Jourova, will also place a priority on tackling violence against women and addressing the gendered dimensions of poverty. Within this policy framework it is imperative that homelessness and a gendered analysis of

³ <http://www.feantsaresearch.org/IMG/pdf/article-1-3.pdf>

⁴ Moss and Singh, *WRS Women Rough Sleepers Who Suffer Violence*

⁵ Meyock, Parker and Sheridan, *Women, Homelessness and Service Provision*, 2015.

women's homelessness are not excluded from any policy developments. In a response to a written question, Commissioner Jourova recognized that violence against women is both a cause and a consequence of homelessness.⁶ Additionally the European Parliament has recently approved the Meszerics Report on meeting the antipoverty target in the light of increasing household costs which among other things called for the Commission to conduct research and collect data on women's homelessness.⁷

Both the homeless and women's sector can play a role in assisting EU Member States meet their obligations under Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime. This Directive in particular notes that Member States should provide shelters and integrated support for victims with specific needs with an explicit reference to the survivors of gender based violence and violence in close relationships.

Additionally Commissioner Jourova has stated that the EU will accede to the Istanbul Convention, this again will place an obligation on both the EU and Member States to provide a minimum number of shelters for the survivors of gender based violence. When making this announcement the Commissioner recognised that this was an opportunity to provide an EU mandate for better data collection to better understand the prevalence and implications of violence against women.

Both the Victims Right's Directive and the Istanbul Convention provide the Commission with an opportunity to acknowledge and respect the rights of survivors of abuse and ensure they are provided with appropriate supports to make sure they are not rendered homeless as a result of gender based violence. Actors from both the homeless and women's sectors can play an active and important role in supporting the European Commission in bridging the current gaps in services as elaborated upon in this policy statement.

Profile of Survivors of Violence Against Women and Arising Needs

The prevalence of violence against women among homeless women gives rise to an important, and often ignored, gender dimension to homelessness. Women, who are frequently the survivors of abuse, will present to homeless services, refuge centres and counselling services with a different set of complex needs compared to their male counter-parts. It is imperative that homeless services are equipped with the skills, expertise and resources to appropriately respond to the trauma suffered by those who have experienced violence against women. Limited research to date has shown that due to the hidden nature of women's homelessness, services are not adequately tailored to their needs. This creates a vicious cycle whereby women forego emergency shelter for sofa-surfing and rough sleeping. For example it is estimated that nearly 20% of WRS in the UK and Slovenia sofa-surf while 11% of WRS sofa-surf in

⁶<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2F%2FEP%2F%2FTEXT%2bWQ%2bP-2015-015144%2b0%2bDOC%2bXML%2bV0%2F%2FEN&language=EN>

⁷<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2F%2FEP%2F%2FTEXT%2BREPORT%2BA8-2016-0040%2B0%2BDOC%2BXML%2bV0%2F%2FEN&language=EN#title1>

Hungary.⁸ A study referenced in FEANTSA's Gender Perspective Magazine, also highlighted that an average of 25% of homeless women in Lisbon have precarious living situations including sofa surfing and the sex trade.⁹ In the UK, Slovenia and Hungary around 10% of WRS slept in parks, train stations or the woods. Furthermore 28% of UK WRS cited entering a new relationship for the sole purpose of gaining accommodation and avoiding becoming homeless while 32% felt that sex work was relevant for them. Although in Slovenia the study found no evidence to suggest WRS entered the sex trade or entered new relationships for shelter, in Hungary 5% of WRS were forced to join a gang while 5% were forced into prostitution and a further 10% reported entering a relationship for survival, 50% of those said it was an abusive relationship.¹⁰

The hidden dimension to women's homelessness is by no means a recent development. Writing back in 2010 the Director of Assistencia Medica Internacional (AMI) Portugal noted that homeless "women do exist, but they hide, they do not want to come forward, and because of that, they are forgotten and, therefore, there are no specific measures addressing them".¹¹ As many women avoid sheltered accommodation, these services continue to embed a male oriented service, and thus women are further marginalized and locked out from much needed services.

While the data available on survivors of abuse is sporadic and limited, general trends can be witnessed regarding the profile of women who are homeless and survivors of abuse, which should inform the approach advocated by both service providers and policy makers. The infographic below highlights some of the common experiences homeless women have before and after homelessness.

⁸ Moss and Singh, *WRS Women Rough Sleepers Who Suffer Violence*

⁹ <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article147&lang=en>

¹⁰ Moss and Singh, *WRS Women Rough Sleepers Who Suffer Violence*

¹¹ <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article147&lang=en>



Source: Simon Communities Resource Guide on Women's Homelessness (2015)

Abuse throughout the life-cycle

There is a clear link between childhood trauma, adversity and homelessness. One study from 2015 found that 72% of women presenting to homeless services experienced abuse or violence as a child, while 20% entered state care as a child.¹² This profile is important as it demonstrates that both experiences of abuse and housing instability can be cyclical and can often be repeated throughout the lifecycle. Service providers should be aware of the complex needs homeless women may present with arising from their trauma. Complex needs include *'where a person who is homeless presents with 3 or more of the following characteristics and where 1 were to be resolved the others would still be cause for concern i) Mental health problems, ii) Problematic drug/alcohol use, iii) Personality disorder, iv) Offending behaviour, v) Borderline learning difficulties, vi) Disabilities, vii) Physical health problems, viii) Challenging behaviours and ix) Vulnerability because of age'*. Policy makers should also be aware of the importance of family support and prevention services as both are indicative risk factors for becoming homeless and suffering abuse in adulthood.

Complex Health Needs

Those who have experienced gender based violence generally tend to present with complex health needs, which accompany and in many instances exacerbate the trauma they endured. In the UK 44% of WRS abused alcohol, of which 66% did so on a daily basis, 37% reported mental health problems and

¹² Meyock, Parker and Sheridan, *Women, Homelessness and Service Provision*, 2015.

11% had drug problems. In Hungary 25% cited suffering poor mental health problems.¹³ Due to these mental health and substance misuse problems, those who have experienced violence against women, for example women forced to leave their home due to domestic abuse, may find it difficult to attain a place in dedicated women's refuges as these services generally place a higher threshold for accessing services. This means that for many survivors, homeless services are the only accessible sheltered accommodation. As a result homeless shelters are likely to be able to offer shelter to the survivors of abuse with the most complex needs and therefore such services should be afforded additional resources and supports from governments to ensure they have the capacity to adequately and effectively address the trauma endured by survivors of abuse. However, as referenced earlier, women, particularly those with past experiences of violence, are more likely to engage in coping strategies such as sofa-surfing or entering the sex trade rather than present to homeless services. It is vital that these services do more to reach out to vulnerable women before they reach a crisis point and create more inclusive spaces. To achieve this, models of care such as Trauma Informed Care or Psychologically Informed Environments should be considered relevant.

Exposure to Violence

While many women who experience homelessness have experienced intimate partner violence, as a cause of their homelessness, research shows that once homeless, women are at increased risk of exposure to further gender based violence and trauma, as a consequence of homelessness. Many women face barriers to gender specific services, as mentioned above, and considering that many homeless services are either at capacity or are unable to cater for the trauma which results as a consequence of violence, due to a lack of resources, women often opt to live rough on the street, rather than present to homeless services. This living situation exacerbates trauma and puts women at a higher risk of abuse.¹⁴ 60% of UK respondents in the Wolverhampton study worried about violence and 22% carried a weapon, generally a knife. In the UK 31% of respondents had experienced violence which included being pushed and grabbed, being beaten up, stolen from or raped while homeless. Similar findings were witnessed in Slovenia as 13% reported being raped while homeless, 15% had been beaten up, 11% stalked and 8% choked or strangled. While in Hungary 10% of the sample said they had been beaten up and 5% were raped. This is also reinforced by the Irish study which noted that 92% of homeless women sampled said they had suffered some form of violence or abuse, including emotional, physical, financial or sexual abuse, in the lead up to or after becoming homeless.¹⁵ The gendered violence endured while homeless leads to the further marginalization and social exclusion of homeless women. The provision of adequate services to prevent women rough sleeping is an important step in preventing and ending violence against women suffered by WRS. Therefore it is imperative that the homeless sector are given further resources and supports to ensure that they can cater for the needs of some of one of the most vulnerable groups in our society.

¹³ Moss and Singh, *Women Rough Sleepers in Europe : Homelessness and Victims of Domestic Violence* 2015.

¹⁴ Moss and Singh, *WRS Women Rough Sleepers Who Suffer Violence*

¹⁵ Meyock, Parker and Sheridan, *Women, Homelessness and Service Provision*, 2015.

Children and Violence Against Women

Designing services that incorporate the ability to maintain relationships between survivors and their children is incredibly important in the context of profiling women's homelessness. Particularly in the context of violence against women, many survivors are faced with leaving their children behind them when presenting to services or living rough on the street. Where services do exist, some do not allow boys of a certain age, generally around 12-14+, to attend, which often means that women, who have already suffered significant trauma, are then separated from their children. In the UK, 65% of WRS had children, and while they were no longer living with their children they did wish to be reconnected, while in the Hungarian context 75% of WRS were mothers. The 2015 study published by the Simon Communities in Ireland noted that many homeless women found the separation from their children to be traumatic. In order to work from a recovery model, it is essential to support these women to deal with this particular form of trauma around enforced separation. It is important to note that the issue of maternity and parenthood has often been excluded from general analysis of homelessness as it is gender specific.¹⁶

Provision of Services:

Clearly a series of complex needs can result from traumatic experiences of violence against women. In addition to struggling to source stable accommodation many women have other needs relating to mental and physical health problems, and/or addiction issues, barriers to employment or social isolation. With such diverse needs it is important that shelters, whether gender specific or not, meet both quantitative and qualitative standards to ensure that the survivors of violence against women can be given safe and stable accommodation. This means that shelters need to be more responsive to the complex needs of homeless women and must be capable of addressing the specific needs homeless women have arising from the abuse they have endured.

In terms of quantitative needs it is clear that Europe does not have a sufficient number of women's shelters to provide the required short term accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse. The Council of Europe recommends that a refuge place should be available for a mother and child for every 10,000 inhabitants. This recommendation is incorporated under the Istanbul Convention. According to a report compiled by Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) in 2011, Europe requires approximately 82,000 places. Only 28,000 shelter places are available indicating a substantial shortfall of 53,800 places. Furthermore, only 5 countries in Europe (Luxembourg, Norway, Netherlands, Slovenia and Malta) have met this threshold. Additionally there is a sharp east-west divide between the provision of services in the "older" 15 EU countries and the "newer" 12 countries, noting in particular that 96.7% of shelters for women are in the "older" 15 EU states and only 3.3% of shelters are in the "new" member states. In the absence of providing the minimum recommended shelter spaces, it will not be possible to provide an adequate service to either protect the survivors of such violence nor to appropriately address their complex needs and source long-term, safe and stable accommodation.

¹⁶ Moss and Singh, *WRS Women Rough Sleepers Who Suffer Violence*

The provision of such sheltered accommodation should be considered a crucial component of any strategy aimed at reducing the prevalence of violence against women in Europe and protecting those who experience it. The failure to provide a safe and secure shelter system will leave many women in abusive relationships without an alternative to staying and as such may continue their exposure to abuse while those that are able to leave, in the absence of such services, will be exposed to further violence on the streets. The provision of these services should be viewed not only as reactionary, in terms of responding to the needs of service users, but also preventative as the multi-disciplinary and holistic approaches in shelters can often act to prevent the service user or client from returning to an abusive relationship or experiencing violence on the streets.

In the 1970s, Blijf-van-m'n-Lijf (Stay-off-my-body) launched a campaign in the Netherlands entitled "You can leave if you want", which highlighted the capacity of survivors to leave their home by identifying many of the supports available to them. However in light of the shortage of shelter places available across Europe, it is clear that many women cannot leave when they do not have a safe alternative. In 2016 it is a damning indictment on our society that we cannot, or at least have not, provided for appropriate shelter and supports for survivors of domestic violence.

The Need for Adequate Alternatives to Homeless Shelters

On a practical level, many homeless women find it difficult to attain housing in the private market. This is due to a number of factors and is not solely related to the trauma, mental health or substance misuse problems which can result from violence against women. For instance in cases of domestic violence, the survivor may be financially dependent on the perpetrator of the violence, creating significant problems for the survivor in sourcing affordable accommodation in the private rental market. Due to the nature of coercive, controlling or abusive relationships it is not uncommon for survivors to never have been a signed tenant on a lease and therefore do not have a reference to provide to a new landlord. In instances where such a reference can be provided, the previous landlord may be unwilling to give a positive reference if the perpetrator's behaviour damaged the property or significantly disrupted the neighbours. In this context many survivors of abuse would likely find it difficult to avail of alternative accommodation and thus present to homeless services. The lack of women's shelters further reduces the options available to women. In these instances it is imperative that the homeless services are capable of appropriately addressing the trauma suffered by many survivors of abuse. Without these much needed services, survivors are likely to feel further marginalized which only serves to contribute to the problem of the "hidden homeless" which is evidenced by the high number of women who sleep rough, sofa-surf or engage in other coping strategies.

For those who chose to avail of services provided by the homeless sector, the University of Wolverhampton study further illustrated that these shelters were not the preferred choice by WRS in the UK as they were mixed with men. Women in the UK reported that they felt comfortable discussing the abuse they had endured with other WRS and felt this to be a good method of treating their trauma, rather than discussing these problems with service providers. As Dr. Uta Enders-Dragasser, Director of

Research at the GSF e.V. (Germany) noted “mixed-sex support provisions are not places where women can speak out about disastrous experiences of male violence and the specific degradation of the social decline of women”.¹⁷ In Slovenia many WRS felt that the services they accessed dealt with a range of issues, including employment and alcohol, but did not touch on addressing the gender-based violence they endured, which further illustrates the need for homeless services to become increasingly adept at addressing the gendered trauma endured by abuse survivors. Similarly in Hungary, many WRS reported participating in life skills and employment programs but no services existed to deal specifically with their trauma. These experiences, though only reflective of 3 EU member states, demonstrates the service gap which exists between what is provided for homeless women versus the actual needs which should be catered for.

According to research conducted by Edgar and Doherty as far back as 2001, though reflected in a 2015 study commissioned by the Simon Communities in Ireland, across the EU, homeless services are generally designed for men, and there is a lack of coordination between services to target the specific needs of women. The University of Wolverhampton study demonstrated that 66% of services examined accommodated both men and women and only 34% provided women only accommodation or accommodation for mothers and children.¹⁸ The primary obstacle which arises in this scenario, leaving aside the low level of service provision, is the general structure of male oriented services. Women only services often impose a high threshold for accessing the services resulting in many women who present with complex mental health, drug or alcohol problems being precluded from the services. This has enormous implications for survivors of such violence as noted under the Wolverhampton University study, many of whom have mental illness or a substance misuse problem emanating from their traumatic experiences, which is subsequently exacerbated by the stress and chaotic lifestyle which accompanies living between emergency accommodation and the streets. As a result many women with experiences of gender-based violence are either forced to use low-threshold and male oriented services, therefore facing experiences which are detrimental to their mental and emotional well-being and in some cases their physical health and safety, or opt out of services altogether. For most survivors, living with the trauma from their abuse and living in such close proximity to unknown men is unsustainable and leaves them with little alternative but to live rough on the street.

While there are deep-rooted problems with the structures and availability of homeless services to women, which require both significant funding and a comprehensive review of how services are delivered and who they should target, there is evidence to suggest that a better communication strategy and outreach program to vulnerable women could have a positive impact. A low level of awareness of suitable services was one of the primary reasons survivors of abuse did not present to women’s shelters.¹⁹ A respondent to the 2015 study conducted by the Simon Communities in Ireland noted that “*I never heard of a [domestic violence] refuge in my life. They have very bad publicity about refuges*”. Perhaps the most tragic reason as to why those who look to flee abusive relationships avoid tailored

¹⁷ <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article147&lang=en>

¹⁸ Meyock, Parker and Sheridan, *Women, Homelessness and Service Provision*, 2015.

¹⁹ Meyock, Parker and Sheridan, *Women, Homelessness and Service Provision*, 2015

refuge shelters is they didn't feel their life was in imminent danger. As one respondent in the Simon Communities Report noted *"I'd rather somebody else that was fearing their life to be there than me taking up a bed"*. This underscores two important factors, firstly the unwillingness of survivors or those experiencing violence to avail of services due to their personal assessment of their own situation, which subsequently means that when a woman presents to services, either homeless or a gender specific refuge centre, they are at a crisis point in their lives where they are most fragile and most likely to succumb to mental illness or substance misuse. Consequently, as noted earlier, the survivor's complex needs can act as a bar to availing of services in refuges and as such, survivors will be left with little to no alternative but to present to mainstream homeless services, live rough on the street, sofa-sofa and in tragic circumstances enter the sex trade or return to the abusive relationship.

In the UK, service providers commented that the majority of women who presented to their service were victims of domestic violence but went further to note that 100% of WRS were subjected to violence on the streets. The forms of violence which the service provider identified included forced prostitution, rape, sexual assault, domestic violence and trafficking. Slovenia had a similar prevalence of domestic violence and further noted that survivors had a history of fractious and chaotic relationships. In Hungary service providers reported that 85% of WRS they came in contact with experienced violence while living on the streets, noting in particular that such women were being viewed as easy targets as they were considered outside of the law with the police rarely intervening with rough sleepers.

By their very nature, homeless services, cater to a large variety of service users and as such cannot provide the tailored service many survivors of abuse will require to ensure their trauma is addressed in an appropriate and sensitive manner. However, as repeated throughout this statement, it is not uncommon for survivors to be left with little alternative but to present to what are generally considered lower threshold services. While in principle, and in an ideal world, survivors should be provided with the tailored and specific care they require, this is not always the case. In reality women's shelters, much like the homeless sector, face operational constraints due to their under-resourcing from the state and are not provided in sufficient numbers as recommended by the Council of Europe. Therefore due to i) services operating at capacity, ii) lack of geographically approximate services, iii) absence of gender specific refuges for survivors of violence and iv) the imposition of high thresholds to access certain services, many survivors will present to the mainstream homeless services. In addition to these factors, the Irish study found that many service users will also navigate through emergency shelter, domestic violence refuges, residential drug treatment settings, psychiatric hospitals and prison.²⁰ Therefore in practice and reality, housing and homeless services should be equipped with the skillset to adequately address the needs of women who have past experiences of homelessness. This should include expertise to:

1. Support staff to address multiple/complex needs
2. Recognise woman's autonomy & agency

²⁰ Meyock, Parker and Sheridan, *Women, Homelessness and Service Provision*, 2015

3. Provide housing with support to leave homelessness behind
4. Facilitate involvement & engagement of women in the development of their own care plan
5. Learn how to deal with challenging behaviour
6. Train staff to deal with aftermath of trauma & violence
7. Collaborate with domestic violence services
8. Be mindful of the power differentials within service environments.

Case Studies

This section outlines two case studies identified while conducting research for this policy statement.

Case Study 1 – [Domestic Abuse and Housing Alliance \(DAHA\)](#) Initiative

In the UK, an interesting approach has been adopted by three organisations: [Standing Together Against Domestic Violence](#) (STADV), [Gentoo](#) and Peabody. They all have a longstanding commitment to tackling domestic abuse, working in partnership, and innovation. DAHA's mission is to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse, through an accreditation process which assesses individual housing providers and supports them to improve their practice.

Peabody and Gentoo, who have both passed DAHA accreditation, offer specialist training to their frontline staff such as housing officers, gas engineers and handypersons; to help identify instances of abuse. As a result of this training, Peabody has seen an increase of 1424% in reporting of domestic abuse in 8 years. This does not necessarily reflect an increase in incidences of abuse and violence, but demonstrates how increasing awareness, and enhancing skills to help employees to identify abuse, helps to create an environment where service users, clients and tenants feel comfortable and confident about speaking out.

Gentoo takes a holistic approach to tackling domestic abuse and provides a high level of support to its customers experiencing domestic abuse. It also runs a Perpetrator programme with local partners to support men to change their abusive behaviour and is commissioned by Northumbria Police to mentor other housing organisations in the area to take this approach.

Standing Together have been coordinating a Housing Operational Group with local providers of housing and the Local Authorities in West London for over 5 years. This operational group were instrumental in developing the standards on which DAHA are based and are a great example of how locally national initiatives can be implemented.

DAHA is also working with homeless services as the sector needs to work together in preventing, identifying and supporting families affected by domestic abuse. It provides a structure which enables dialogue across sectors to talk & improve the response to families.

Case Study 2 – Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence – [Housing First Model](#)

In Washington State, a Housing First Project has been launched specifically for survivors of domestic violence. Rather than looking to place survivors into shelters and short-term accommodation, the initiative provides clients with flexible financial assistance aimed at supporting them retain their homes, for example with rent, utilities, childcare and transport costs. The assistance is flexible and driven by the survivor and their needs and supports they feel they require. Staff involved both attend housing appointments with survivors and help negotiate leases. Perhaps most importantly, in terms of multi-agency support, the project places an emphasis on community engagement to reach out to landlords, law enforcement, housing providers and employment programs, to help support the survivor's full integration into the

community.

The project has proven successful in sourcing accommodation for the survivors of domestic violence on average within 3 months of first presenting to the service, with a 96% success rate of retaining accommodation 18 months later. The average cost of housing a survivor in this program was USD 1,250. As a result of living in their own home, rather than a shelter, clients feel safer, more stable and self-sufficient and empowered to live their lives

Next Steps and Actions

A pan-European analysis is required as to how sheltered accommodation is provided to homeless women, particularly those who have experienced gender based violence. This analysis should incorporate questions relating to the appropriate types of shelters for addressing trauma, the services which should be available for counselling homeless women with complex needs and a review of the selection criteria used by gender specific refuges and the impact that they have on potential service users' access to shelter. Writing for a 2010 edition of the FEANTSA Magazine Bea Chityl, then Policy Officer for Equality Between Men and Women for DG EMPL, highlighted that "tracking homelessness entails an analysis of the respective situation of homeless women...ensuring that policy responses are sensitive to providing solutions that respond to their specific needs", however such an analysis is not possible when the data is by and large unavailable.²¹

Generally, residents of such shelters remain there for much longer than intended which is due to many factors including a lack of affordable housing stock. While these shelters can, and in most instances do, work with their residents to help upskill them and assist them to pro-actively participate in the labour market, often their incomes are not high enough to support themselves or their dependents in private accommodation. Therefore a greater emphasis must be given to transitional housing projects and ensuring that survivors attain safe, stable and long-term accommodation. In this regard the Housing First Model, outlined under Case Study 2, can provide an interesting departure to current policies which are failing to source safe accommodation in a timely or cost-effective manner. There is great potential for the Housing First model as a solution for preventing homelessness as a result of violence against women. This is very much a rights-based approach with extremely positive results in the number of people who acquire long-term accommodation and proves more economically effective than the costly alternative of long-term stay in shelters. Housing First does precisely what it says on the tin, effectively giving the homeless person a house and then starting to address their trauma and mental and physical health and wellbeing on a voluntary basis. Piloting a Housing First Model for survivors of violence against women would be a very practical solution to alleviate homelessness among survivors of abuse.

²¹ <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article147&lang=en>

Recommendations

This section outlines key conclusions and recommendations from this policy statement.

Conclusion/Recommendation - 1

FEANTSA calls on the European Commission, the European Parliament's Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee and National Governments to acknowledge the "hidden" nature of women's homelessness. In the absence of such recognition it will not be possible for policy makers to fully understand and address in the best possible and most effective manner the gender specific causes of women's homelessness.

Conclusion/Recommendation – 2

FEANTSA joins the European Parliament and endorses the Meszerics Report on meeting the antipoverty target in the light of increasing household costs, particularly the European Parliament's call requesting the European Commission and the European Institute for Gender Equality to conduct specific research into women's homelessness.

Conclusion/Recommendation – 3

FEANTSA joins organizations such as WAVE in calling for the EU and Member States to work together to implement effective measures to increase the number of women's shelter spaces available to better protect the safety and health of survivors of domestic violence while they transition to long-term accommodation. The Commission should make adequate funding available to ensure the EU has the requisite number of shelters and refuges under the Istanbul Convention and Victims' Rights Directive.

Conclusion/Recommendation – 4

Policy makers at EU and national level should do more to assist frontline homeless service providers to create more inclusive spaces for women and the survivors of abuse. This should include increasing allocation of resources or project funding for increasing knowledge exchange of best practices as to how services can address the trauma suffered by many survivors. Initiatives such as the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (Case Study No. 1) present an interesting approach which can better protect the survivors of domestic violence from further abuse.

Conclusion/Recommendation – 5

FEANTSA calls on the European Commission, under Directorate-General for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Gender Equality (DG JUST) to coordinate a multi-stakeholder roundtable of relevant civil society and NGO actors to provide an opportunity to exchange and share knowledge on best practices and design a strategy for how the homeless and women's sectors can collaborate together and assist the Commission in their commitment to end violence against women and support survivors of abuse.

Conclusion/Recommendation – 6

FEANTSA calls on the European Commission, under Directorate-General for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Gender Equality (DG JUST) to facilitate a peer review to assist member states to critically analyse the adequacy of their response measures to gender based violence, with an emphasis on integrated support and shelter.

Conclusion/Recommendation - 7

FEANTSA calls on the European Commission, under DG JUST, to make funding available to pilot a Housing First project for survivors of domestic violence. Funding for such a project, as outlined under Case Study 2, can pilot the use of Housing First with an aim to scaling and replicating the model across the EU. As a practical action responding to this problem, FEANTSA possesses the expertise and network to pilot such an EU project.