



## A gender and psychologically informed approach to tackle women's homelessness

PIE4shelters workshop at the annual FEANTSA Policy Conference, 31<sup>st</sup> May 2019, Porto

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#### 1. Summarized minutes of the workshop including agenda

FEANTSA, lead partner on dissemination for the PIE4shelters project, organized a PIE workshop during the annual FEANTSA policy conference which took place in Porto, Portugal, on the 31st May 2019. The conference was attended by approx. 280 people working with homeless services, general social support services, local authorities and policy makers as well as representatives of the European Commission and other social service network organizations who work at European level. See also the conference [twitter threat](#).

The workshop was chaired by Boroka Feher from project coordinator BMSZKI, Budapest, an expert on women's homelessness. The Tamas Gerencser, PIE4shelters project officer working with BMSZKI, presented experiences and results on informing homeless services through a psychologically and gender-informed approach, sharing the example of a service that has successfully developed a gender and psychologically-informed approach to tackle women's homelessness. In particular, he describes how homeless services need to consider the impact of gender-based violence on women in service set-up and delivery.

Speaker Sophie Hansal from the European Women's Lobby Observatory provided a framework for the workshop, providing figures on GBV, explaining the relationship between GBV and women's homelessness and outlining the current service provision for women who experience(d) homelessness and GBV. She specifically outlined the current lack of shelter and support for women with unclear residency statuses, in Austria as well as other European countries. Providing proper psychological and trauma-informed support is even more challenging in the case of women who can not access transitional housing. A stable housing situation is a precondition for addressing GBV and related trauma as only stable housing provides ontological security, a condition to recover from trauma.

Speaker Catherine Glew from St Mungo's, United Kingdom, described the women's strategy of St Mungo's in detail, emphasizing the necessity to run specific services for women. She emphasized the great added value of psychologically- and trauma- informed approaches for improving service provision, such as PIE. PIE allows services to provide a consistent approach involving the whole organization. She emphasized the importance of reflective practice as well as the need for more training on trauma and consequences of trauma for homeless service staff. Her statement 'trauma is gendered' points out to a key aspect of GBV-related trauma of women who experience abuse and violence from people they loved and trusted (which also is the major difference to trauma of men).

Speaker Tamas Gerencser shared the experiences from local staff trainings where PIE and trauma sensitive work was experienced as a very helpful framework to better understand the interactions between women service users and staff. The participants of the PIE4shelters training in Budapest showed great interest for





the gender sensitive approach promoted by PIE4shelters, in terms of its contribution to tackle and address the specific support needs of women who experience homelessness. Trainings also evidenced a strong need for more reflective practice for staff (internal and external supervision). Staff also pointed out the need for a stronger involvement of women service users to deliver services in a more gender sensitive way. The contribution of Catherine Glew, who shared the very positive experiences St Mungo's has with involving women as key actors during the development of the organization's women's strategy, was very relevant and interesting at this point. Furthermore, Mr Gerencser pointed out that, although many trainees first struggled with making themselves available for the local PIE trainings, mostly due to time constraints, feedback was overwhelmingly positive in terms of usability and practical relevance of the content.

The three presentations were followed by a lively discussion with the audience.

Barring orders and how to keep women safe in their homes was one of the questions raised. Sophie Hansal emphasized that the situation in the EU is very heterogeneous: While some countries established effective barring orders (for instance Austria), some Member States established such orders but struggle with an efficient enforcement while in other countries, although few, no such legislation is yet in place. Also, strong discourses emphasizing 'gender-neutrality' weaken the argument that women need specific support when they experience violence and suffer from related trauma.

The importance of prevention work, especially for specific groups of women was emphasized too. St Mungo's work with women in prison is definitely a relevant good practice. Leaving prison is one of ways how women become homeless (again) or reengage in abusive relationships. Stereotypes/negative preconceptions by police officer can be challenging and create further barriers to access support services, for instance women with a history of drug use, women who were in prison or engaged in sex work. They all run the risk of being perceived as 'undeserving victims'.

The workshop was attended by 59 participants (withouth FEANTSA staff, see also the provided signature list), the minimum of 20 participants was hence more than reached. Participants work with local authorities (e.g. Catalonia, City of Prague, Galicia), homeless services and the European Commission (DG Employment). The number of participants and high level of engagement in the discussion showed the great relevance of the PIE4shelters project.

The conference programme is available [here](#) (for the PIE workshop, please see pages 12/3).

The presentations by Catherine Glew and Sophie Hansal are provided at the end of this document.