What is striking about the various contributions to this issue of Homeless in Europe is the level of ambition in the various national strategies, and in the case of Germany, a proposed framework for such a strategy, discussed in this edition, and in the deployment of evidence-based responses to achieve their ambition to ending homelessness. In the Welsh paper, a clear statement that ending homelessness means ensuring that the experience of homelessness is rare, brief and unrepeated is a helpful short-hand way of thinking about what ending homelessness would look like.

However, amongst the contributions, a regrettable outlier in the otherwise ambitious plans is the case of the Czech Republic, where the strategic approach to homelessness, which covered the period 2013-2020, was not renewed in 2021. This is regrettable, because evidence-based, housing-led strategies have demonstrably reduced the number of households experiencing homelessness in two of the countries discussed in this edition, Finland and Norway.

SYNERGIES BETWEEN HOUSING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

The Spanish, German, Danish and Norwegian papers all stress the importance of housing and support in ending homelessness, with, for example, the very significant decrease in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Norway between 2012 and 2020 being attributed to a ‘long-term integrated strategy for housing and support services.’ Indeed, the case of Norway, although it has not received the same international attention as Finland, demonstrates that prioritising the provision of housing and supports for those experiencing homelessness, evaluating responses, and robust monitoring of trends are the key components in reducing the experience of homelessness.

MONITORING TRENDS

The importance of robust and consistent data collection is also stressed in the review of the Spanish homelessness strategy, and will inform the new plan which is currently being drafted covering the period 2023-2030. This issue is also highlighted in the Welsh contribution.
They all emphasise the need to transform the homelessness response system from the provision of emergency shelter beds to the provision of secure and affordable housing.”

which notes that accurate data is ‘critical to understanding the extent of homelessness in Wales, how to respond to it, and how to measure progress.’ In an interesting observation, the authors of the Norwegian paper conclude that both municipalities and politicians take notice of the trends and can move homelessness up the policy agenda.

This is an issue worth considering further; that demonstrating that the number of households experiencing homelessness can be reduced can create a virtuous circle of political support and prioritisation that can further reduce the numbers of people experiencing homelessness. Equally, for those member states that have seen increases in the number of households experiencing homelessness based on robust monitoring mechanisms, the focus of policy can be on galvanising administrative and political support to respond in an evidence-based manner to the increases, rather than an often unproductive debate about the ‘real’ scale of homelessness. Having robust mechanisms of monitoring trends in homelessness is also crucial given the Lisbon target of ending homelessness by 2030 – without such robust monitoring mechanisms, it will not be possible to determine if the objective of ending homelessness will be met.

MAKING THE SHIFT FROM SHELTERS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

Permanent housing solutions rather than temporary accommodation are core to the Spanish, Welsh, Danish, and Norwegian strategies, as well as to the long-standing demand of the National Federation for the Homeless in Germany (BAG W) for a “National Strategy to Overcome Homelessness and Poverty in Germany.” They all emphasise the need to transform the homelessness response system from the provision of emergency shelter beds to the provision of secure and affordable housing.
However, as the Welsh paper notes, there are currently 7,500 people in temporary accommodation, so providing long-term accommodation will remain challenging in the short-to-medium term, particularly as the flow of people into temporary accommodation remains high. This has prompted increased efforts to prevent the experience of homelessness and to increase housing supply, availability, and accessibility in both the social housing and private rented sectors.

**FINANCIAL INCENTIVES AND DISINCENTIVES**

Of great interest is the new Danish policy of changing the funding regime for temporary and emergency accommodation. Central government in Denmark has, until now, reimbursed municipalities 50 percent of the cost of maintaining people in temporary and emergency accommodation without a time limit. However, with the new reforms, this reimbursement will be given for up to 90 days only, after which the full costs for shelter stays will be carried by municipalities. Instead, the central government reimbursement will be transferred to be available for various forms of support in housing following a stay in temporary and emergency accommodation. Rent levels in just over 4,000 units of existing and new public housing will be reduced to facilitate moving those in temporary and emergency accommodation into housing.

Financial incentives and disincentives to maintaining people in emergency accommodation are under-explored in the European context. The Danish data suggest that for the majority (70 percent) of emergency shelter users, the only barrier to exiting the shelter is the provision of an appropriate housing solution. Hence, the proposed shift to increasing the affordability of public housing, allied to dedicated funding to provide support in housing and increasing the costs to municipalities of maintaining people in shelters after 90 days is worth watching closely and, if successful in reducing shelter use, may be an important policy tool for other member states to consider deploying.