



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2** Editorial
- 4** Family homelessness in France – an overview, *Laura Slimani, Guillaume Cheruy and Maelle Léna*
- 7** Family Homelessness: a gender issue?, *Isabel Baptista*
- 9** The Effect of the ‘Cost Sharing’ Norm on Youth Homelessness in the Netherlands, *Marry Mos and Rina Beers*
- 11** Family Homelessness in Dublin *Daniel Hoey*
- 13** The housing exclusion of Roma Families in Italy, *Donatella De Vito*
- 15** Family Homelessness: A Child’s Perspective *Leen Ackaert*
- 18** Women and Children First, *Benoît Quittelier and Nicolas Horvat*
- 22** Family Homelessness in Europe, *Nicholas Pleace*

Family Homelessness in Europe

By **Clotilde Clark-Foulquier**, *Project Coordinator, FEANTSA*

Public awareness of the consequences of homelessness on people in general, and on children in particular, has slowly been increasing over time: homelessness affects childrens’ mental and physical health, their performance in the education system, and homeless children are more likely to become homeless adults... Not so surprisingly, research on the topic has confirmed intuition by highlighting the harmful impact homelessness has on children and their parents.

Through quotes, statistics and powerful pleas, the articles in this magazine have tried to capture the painful reality that is so frequently kept hidden because so many refuse to face and address it. The French Overview by Laura Slimani, Guillaume Cheruy and Maelle Léna, for instance, paints a vivid portrait of the deteriorating situation. The authors report that in Paris the 115 emergency accommodation hotline was unable to provide emergency housing to about 50 families per month back in 2000. Today, in October 2019, it’s 12 000 families per month that are not offered any housing solution after having dialed 115 for help.

The contributions in this magazine highlight the diverse realities of family homelessness in Europe. Benoit Quittelier and Nicholas Hovart debunk some common misconceptions about homelessness data in Brussels, and show that, in Brussels at least, families are given informal priority in shelters, and less children have spent their nights in the streets than in previous years. However, there are of course other forms of homelessness than rough sleeping. Isabel Baptista and Nicholas Pleace address this fact, since family homelessness seems to be a particularly hidden form homelessness. Isabel Baptista presents a well-documented picture of the gendered nature of family homelessness in Europe, showing how lone women with their children represent the majority of homeless families. She also delves deeper into the hidden nature of family homelessness, explaining that families will often be prioritized in access to emergency homeless support services or will resort to informal support networks (friends and families) to avoid sleeping rough. Coincidentally, Rina Beers

and Marry Mos show a contrasting system in the Netherlands in their article, where they present the new Dutch “cost sharing” policy measure: a measure which has established a decrease in social benefits when adults share a house. The measure has impacted solidarity between family and friends who would have otherwise supported each other but are now left with a tragic choice: leaving a loved-one in the street or welcome them and loose a significant (and often essential) part of their own means of subsistence. Despite family and social ties so often being the last defense against homelessness, this policy has come to introduce a further breach in the social fabric, leaving young people even more vulnerable and exposed to the risk of homelessness. How can such a policy be brought forward and persist after evidence of its damaging consequences have been brought to light?

Several articles complete the picture of the situation of family homelessness in Europe: Laura Slimani, Guillaume Cheruy and Maelle Léna tell of babies born into families living temporarily in hotels, and of migrant families striving to work and be part of society, while having to live in inadequate temporary accommodation, impacting their children’s development, stability and health. Furthermore, Donatella de Vito tells us that Roma families are being denied access to unsegregated social housing and are living in self-built informal settlements made of wood with no access to running water. Such is today’s Europe.

Yet, there is hope (there must be, otherwise we would not be here!). Leen Aeckert’s article brings this perspective by presenting the European Peer Review on “Homelessness from a child’s perspective” and its five take-ups for an effective child homelessness strategy. First, prevention, for instance through adequate poverty reduction measures and service provision, which play a decisive role in stopping the spiral towards homelessness before it starts. Second, data collection. Almost none of the participating countries’ representatives were able to report on the number of children, youngsters and parents needing a home in their countries. How can

The articles in *Homeless in Europe* do not necessarily reflect the views of FEANTSA. Extracts from this publication can be quoted as long as the sources are acknowledged.



this be? How can governments pretend to address a situation if they do not commit to the means necessary to capture it? Data collection is crucial and must be prioritized as a stepping-stone towards the end of family homelessness. Third, shelters and temporary accommodation should never be the solution, but where they are the only solution that is offered, they need to be child-friendly, at least providing a safe protective and supportive environment. Fourth and very importantly, a child-homelessness strategy must encompass a holistic targeted housing allocation system that will enable families to access adequate, affordable stable housing. Finally, local governance and collaboration amongst stakeholders must be facilitated as they provide the last and decisive safety net for families to weather the storm they face and re-access permanent adequate housing.

Solutions to family homelessness exist. Nicholas Pleace, in his overview of Family homelessness in Europe, points out that the main reason for family homelessness in Europe is due to social and economic reasons. It is primarily through this angle that solving homelessness needs to be approached: Rapid

rehousing in adequate, affordable homes and stopping unnecessary evictions would be a good start. A ban of family evictions “to nowhere”, massive investment in scattered social housing dedicated to the most excluded families, well designed and targeted housing allowances are feasible but necessary prevention measures. In the Irish context, where family homelessness has seen a 348% increase in 5 years, Daniel Hoey and Sarah Sheridan also highlight the urgent need for prevention measures such as stronger tenant rights, as research has shown that the key drivers of family homelessness are rooted in the private rental sector, and a need for a dedicated Family Homelessness Strategy.

Member States across the European Union and the European Commission together have the means, through the mobilization of EU funding, a targeted and determined use of the European Semester, and the forthcoming child guarantee, to change the course of action and address family homelessness, so that no child is left homeless and families stay together in facing life. FEANTSA's ambition and driving force is to end homelessness. Let's do this together.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We would like to give you the chance to comment on any of the articles which have appeared in this issue. If you would like to share your ideas, thoughts and feedback, please send an email to the editor, laura.rahman@feantsa.org