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The Magazine of FEANTSA - The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless AISBL

# Homeless in Europe

Autumn 2019

## Family Homelessness in Europe



FEANTSA  
30 YEARS





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## 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](mailto:laura.rahman@feantsa.org)



## Family homelessness in France – an overview

By **Laura Slimani, Guillaume Cheruy, Maelle Léna** - *Task officers at Fédération des Acteurs de la Solidarité*

The number of homeless families in France has been steadily increasing for quite a few years. This has transformed the emergency accommodation sector and worsened its bottleneck. This type of household is defined by the presence of a parent and at least one child under 18. The reality for families in vulnerable social situations first came to light at the end of the 1990s when they were picked up by outreach teams or calls to the 115 emergency accommodation hotline.

### Homeless Families, Emergence of a Phenomenon

In 1999, people who were part of families and were accommodated by the Paris 115 service made up less than 13% of the total number of people accommodated at least once during that year.<sup>1</sup> At that time, they were accommodated for an average of two weeks and only while they were waiting for more suitable accommodation. This household type was unusual, given its vulnerability, and was prioritised by social service providers because political decision-makers were keen to keep children away from the street.

When this – mainly Parisian – phenomenon was new, homeless families were systematically accommodated in hotels, in former “boarding houses” or in holiday lets low on business. Families were accommodated unconditionally, that was a fact, but it was often at the expense of the quality of the accommodation units provided to them. Obviously, given their primary intended use, hotel rooms do not meet their needs. Often, they lack cooking facilities, there is no separation between living spaces and there is no support available. Despite this, using this type of accommodation meant almost all accommodation requests could be met up until 2012.

### France, 2012: Being a Family No Longer Kept Homelessness at Bay

The accumulation of situational and structural factors, in particular the housing crisis (insufficient availability, higher housing prices), and the economic crisis from 2008 onwards (increased insecurity) sped up the journey towards poverty for those who were closest to the brink. In addition, the nature of migratory flows had changed, and the number of single asylum seekers and asylum-seeking families had been increasing continuously for around ten years. In 2018:

- a million more people lived below the poverty line than in 2008,<sup>2</sup>
- 50% more people were homeless than in 2008,<sup>3</sup>
- more than 30,000 people were evicted from their homes,<sup>4</sup>
- the number of families on the street increased, a growth in numbers recorded every year since the end of the 1990s.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, since 2010, more families than single people have been staying in hotel accommodation and emergency accommodation. In 2014 in the Paris region, 70% of people in accommodation were parents and children.<sup>6</sup> As well as the numbers, lengths of stay have significantly increased. This means that 44% of the families accommodated in 550 hotels in the Paris region have been there for more than two years.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the available hotel units are saturated – units that, every night in 2019 in France, have hosted almost 50,000 people, half of whom are children. Here is a staggering figure: in 2016, five babies were born every day to families living in hotels in the Paris region.<sup>8</sup>

- 1 Eberhard Mireille, Guyavarch Emmanuelle, Le Méner Erwan. Structure familiale et hébergement d'urgence au 115 de Paris (Family Makeup and Emergency Accommodation Through the Paris 115 Service). In: *Revue des politiques sociales et familiales (Social and Family Policy Review)*, n°123, 2016. Joindre les deux bouts. Enquêtes d'ethnocomptabilité (Making Ends Meet. Ethnocompatibility Studies).
- 2 Fondation Abbé Pierre (Abbé Pierre Foundation), 24ème rapport sur l'état du mal-logement en France (24th Report on the State of Housing Deprivation in France), 2019, [https://www.fondation-abbé-pierre.fr/documents/pdf/rapport\\_complet\\_etat\\_du\\_mal\\_logement\\_2019\\_def\\_web.pdf](https://www.fondation-abbé-pierre.fr/documents/pdf/rapport_complet_etat_du_mal_logement_2019_def_web.pdf)
- 3 Insee, L'hébergement des personnes sans-domicile en 2012 (How Homeless People Were Accommodated in 2012), <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/1281324>
- 4 Fondation Abbé Pierre (Abbé Pierre Foundation), Dossier de presse fin de la trêve des expulsions locatives, (Press Release at the End of the Moratorium on Rental Evictions) March 2019.
- 5 Enquête ENFAMS (enfants et famille sans logement) (ENFAMS Study (Homeless Children and Families)), carried out by the Observatoire du Samusocial de Paris (Paris Samusocial Research Observatory), October 2014.
- 6 Eberhard Mireille, Guyavarch Emmanuelle, Le Méner Erwan. Structure familiale et hébergement d'urgence au 115 de Paris. Family Makeup and Emergency Accommodation Through the Paris 115 Service. In: *Revue des politiques sociales et familiales (Social and Family Policy Review)*, n°123, 2016. Joindre les deux bouts. Enquêtes d'ethnocomptabilité (Making Ends Meet. Ethnocompatibility Studies).
- 7 Samusocial de Paris, service du 115 (Paris Samusocial 115 Service), 2014.
- 8 Pôle Hébergement et de Réservations Hôtelières (Accommodation and Hotel Booking Hub), Samusocial de Paris, 2016.



These families are mostly migrant families – 94% of the parents were born abroad – and they demonstrate close links between migration and homelessness. These homeless families are often single-parent families and they are mostly single mothers with very young children. Being accommodated in a hotel has huge consequences for them: their journeys to work can be extremely long, it can be difficult for them to access public services, they may not have support, they have no privacy, etc. As for children and teenagers, they are deprived of the life they should have. Marginalisation, instability and overcrowding can have a negative effect on their schooling and can have an impact on their mental health, their developing social life, their access to extracurricular activities or to a healthy diet (there are only very rarely cooking facilities in hotels).

Another consequence of this bottleneck is that there are more and more families without accommodation. The Paris 115 service, that manages the emergency number specifically for homelessness, counted on average 50 families per month for whom no accommodation was found in the 2000s, 500 per month in 2011, 2000 per month in 2014 and more than 12,000 per month in October 2019,<sup>9</sup> which is a 600% increase in 5 years.

The efforts that have been made (the available accommodation has doubled in 10 years with 146,000 accommodation spaces in France in 2018) show that the State wants to improve the service available, but the funding allocated to emergency accommodation remains too low. Crisis management in a crisis means an over-reliance on temporary solutions that are costly and insufficient in number and quality. To respond to this, the State is trying to put in place longer-term housing solutions for families, like developing property management by non-profits and family hostels, but these efforts are still not sufficient. Moreover, these solutions are not appropriate for all families as some have complex social and health needs which mean they need significant support. Others are not eligible for social housing because of their immigration status. This is why the *Fédération des acteurs de la solidarité* (Federation of Organisations Working for Solidarity) campaigns for the granting of leave to remain for all families that have been in temporary accommodation for more than two years.

This situation will not change so long as the poverty rate curve among single-parent families is not inverted. According to the Abbé Pierre Foundation,<sup>10</sup> the rate was 34.8% in 2016, in a constant upward arc since 2008, creating faster growth in the number of people being “pushed over the edge”, forcing them onto the street.

Another issue – in July 2018 in mainland France, 16,000 people lived in slums and squats. Of these people, who were often families, around 10,800 are European citizens (67% of the total population).<sup>11</sup> These figures do not include the shanty towns in Calais and France’s overseas territories. According to UNICEF, there were an estimated 9000 under-18s living in shanty towns in 2015.<sup>12</sup> Their living conditions are difficult and often violate their fundamental rights (limited access to water and electricity, blocked refuse collection in many local authorities). As well as the difficulties linked to their living conditions, these population groups are overwhelmingly the victims of discrimination linked to their actual or perceived origin in their access to education, employment or health services. What’s more, they are frequently driven out of where they live, often illegally and without a real accommodation or housing alternative. Some local projects allow these families to find long-term solutions but there still aren’t enough of them.

## What Solutions are Out There for Homeless Families?

For years, NGOs and federations have been promoting the simple and realistic solutions that do exist to facilitate families’ access to decent accommodation or housing that also offer them support in line with their needs.

In France, the national strategy for preventing and combatting poverty<sup>13</sup> gives extra funding for accommodation so that families may be accommodated in suitable structures and to stop them being accommodated in hotels or having to sleep on the street. The Housing First policy<sup>14</sup> creates additional housing and support solutions for this group. But the State’s investment in these policies will have no effect if they are not accompanied by, at the very least, putting a stop to evictions without rehousing, the granting of leave to remain for families blocked in emergency accommodation for several years and a more general policy of access to housing for low-income households, through the construction of properties let at “social rent” and measures for ensuring the solvency of households (rent controls, higher welfare benefits and family allowances). But these are sorely lacking in today’s context.

Supporting families experiencing social exclusion is critical: it is essential that we assess and respond to these children’s basic needs. Access to physical and mental health care, access to education and access to the prevention of and protection from violence are just a few of the serious concerns that organisations fighting exclusion are trying to find a response to, in

“Crisis management in a crisis means an over-reliance on temporary solutions that are costly and insufficient in number and quality.”

9 Ibidem.

10 Fondation Abbé Pierre (Abbé Pierre Foundation), 24<sup>ème</sup> rapport sur l'état du mal-logement en France (24th Report on the State of Housing Deprivation in France), 2019, [https://www.fondation-abbé-pierre.fr/documents/pdf/rapport\\_complet\\_etat\\_du\\_mal\\_logement\\_2019\\_def\\_web.pdf](https://www.fondation-abbé-pierre.fr/documents/pdf/rapport_complet_etat_du_mal_logement_2019_def_web.pdf)

11 [tp://www.romeurope.org/etat-des-lieux-des-bidonvilles-en-france-metropolitaine-dihal-juillet-2018/](http://www.romeurope.org/etat-des-lieux-des-bidonvilles-en-france-metropolitaine-dihal-juillet-2018/)

12 [http://romeurope.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/07/rapport\\_chaque\\_enfant\\_compte\\_rapport\\_unicef\\_france\\_202015.pdf](http://romeurope.org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/07/rapport_chaque_enfant_compte_rapport_unicef_france_202015.pdf)

13 <https://solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/affaires-sociales/lutte-contre-l-exclusion/lutte-pauvrete-gouv-fr>

14 <https://www.gouvernement.fr/plan-quinquennal-pour-le-logement-d-abord-le-gouvernement-engage-pour-un-acces-rapide-et-perenne-au>



particular by trying to help the families they support access legal advice, and opening up access to essential financial help. This can take the form of child benefit for families with regular immigration status.

As they had been confronted with these systemic problems around access to accommodation and housing and increasing poverty for a long time, these organisations looked into what support could actually be offered to these families. One crucial factor is the relationship between parents and their child(ren). Clearly, even though poverty on its own is not synonymous with family dysfunction, some households need specific support, in particular around how they approach and experience the parent/child relationship. A few different, inspiring practices have come about through social workers and accommodation managers, more used to supporting single men in times gone by, challenging their ways of doing things. Though there are many techniques, we might mention, by way of example, appointing a designated parenting skills worker in a support work team, making an apartment available so a parent can have their children to stay when they are separated from their partner or signposting towards family mediation services if there are conflicts.

A key issue for support work with families, in particular single mothers with children, is that of access to childcare options. Being unable to find childcare solutions for their children, for financial or practical reasons such as nursery opening times, remains a major obstacle to social inclusion for many families. This is why the *Fédération des acteurs de la solidarité* (Federation of

Organisations Working for Solidarity) eagerly awaits the measures announced by the current government that aim to increase diversity in nursery schools and improve their accessibility for poorer families – measures that still need to be implemented.

What's more, it is impossible to support families if we don't listen to what children have to say. Within the accommodation and support services provided for families by organisations working to combat exclusion, particular attention must be paid to the development of listening spaces where the children receiving support have room to express themselves. The organisations and establishments providing services to vulnerable families also need to make sure they develop tools appropriate for supporting children and teenagers.

Lastly, we really need to understand this population group better. A comprehensive study on homeless people carried out by the *Insee* (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies), like the one carried out in 2012,<sup>15</sup> would allow us to accurately measure the number of families with no accommodation or those who do not use the structures available, as well as document their daily experiences. This would allow public policy to match up with the reality of street life and invest appropriately in solutions that are tailored to these families' needs and are available long term. A gender-informed approach would also allow work to be done on the reasons why many women with children end up in such a vulnerable situation and to find solutions as a result.

<sup>15</sup> L'hébergement des sans-domicile en 2012, des modes d'hébergement différents selon les situations familiales (How Homeless People Were Accommodated in 2012; Accommodation Types Differ By Family Situation), Françoise Yaouancq, Alexandre Lebrère, Maryse Marpsat, Virginie Régnier (Insee) Stéphane Legleye, Martine Quaglia (Ined), 2012.



## Family Homelessness: a gender issue?

By Isabel Baptista, *Independent Researcher*

Emerging debates about the role of gender in homelessness and housing (Doherty 2001; Baptista 2010; Mayock and Bretherton 2016; Pleace 2016; Bretherton 2017) have been fuelled by growing evidence that experience of homelessness is differentiated by gender.

Studies on family homelessness across Europe (Baptista et al. 2017; Bretherton, 2017) have often described it as highly gendered, i.e. there is a very disproportionate rate of homelessness experienced by lone women parents and their children compared to lone men parents with children.

The use of definitions and/or data collection frameworks which tend to exclude important dimensions of women's homelessness (e.g. hidden homelessness, family homelessness, concealed forms of rough sleeping) have been noted elsewhere (Busch-Geertsema et al. 2014, Pleace 2016).

The most recent European study on homelessness and housing exclusion in Europe (Baptista & Marlier, 2019) confirms this link between predominant definitions of homelessness and the invisibility of women's (and family) homelessness.

The evidence collected among the 35 countries covered by the study show that women usually represent a minority among the homeless population surveyed, rarely accounting for more than 20-30% of the total. However, whenever the definitions and the enumeration methods used encompass a wider reality than rough sleeping and the use of emergency accommodation services, women appear in larger proportions. Such is the case, for example, in Scotland where women accounted for 45% of the total applicants to the statutory system (2017-2018); in England where, in 2017-18, of those accepted as homeless and owed a main duty, 64% of households were families with children; in Luxembourg where women accounted for 52% of the total people counted as homeless under ETHOS-Light category 3 (homeless hostels, temporary accommodation, transitional supported accommodation and women's shelters), but only 28% of emergency shelter users (2014); and in Ireland, where the most recent homelessness count (week of March 25-31, 2019) recorded a total of 1,733 families of which 59% are single parents with children, i.e. a total of 6,484 adults and 3,821 children (58% of homeless adult men and 42% women).

The underrepresentation of women is also often linked to the paucity of data and research on family

homelessness compared to data on single homelessness among men (Bretherton 2017, Baptista et al. 2017).

In 2017, the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH/FEANTSA) produced a comparative study on Family Homelessness which also noted the lack of data about the specific situation of homeless families across most of the 14 EU countries covered. Nevertheless, the data collected confirmed the highly gendered nature of family homelessness and that "lone women, with their children, are the bulk of the population who experience family homelessness."

One of the reasons why family homelessness seems to receive comparatively less attention than single homelessness (which is mostly about single homeless men) – and is recorded to a lesser extent – is because family homelessness is often concealed and therefore not visible. The 2017 study highlights – based on the data available – that family homelessness is often hidden homelessness.

Different forms of hidden homelessness are identified. A few countries (e.g. Denmark, UK and Ireland) collect data on hidden homelessness among single mothers. Even in countries which report a lack of data on these more concealed forms of homelessness, national experts acknowledged the existence of a proportion of single mothers with children who resort to informal supports (e.g. staying with family and/or friends) before seeking assistance from the formal support system. Several reasons contribute to women's decision to engage in this "informal support trajectory", namely: the lack of adequate accommodation provision for mothers with children, perceptions around the child protection system's operation regarding child custody, informal network support options and a determined avoidance of rough sleeping "alternatives".

The ESPN study on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (Baptista & Marlier, 2019) also acknowledges this lack of data and evidence on family homelessness across the 35 countries covered by the study. Yet, the available evidence reported by the ESPN national teams confirms the predominance of lone mothers with their children among homeless families (e.g. Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Portugal), but also the growing presence of families with children living on the streets (Romania), of homeless families living in collective centres, temporary dwellings or other forms of inadequate accommodation (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and of large multi-generational families among internally displaced Roma population (Serbia).

"Lone women, with their children, are the bulk of the population who experience family homelessness."





Evidence of the relationship between domestic and gender-based violence and family homelessness has been documented in Europe through research carried out on women's experience of homelessness (Reeve et al, 2006; FEANTSA, 2007; Quilgars & Pleace, 2010; Mayock et al, 2016; Bretherton, 2017).

The 2017 EOH comparative study on family homelessness highlights the presence of such association, alerting to the potential impact of women's use of domestic violence (DV) services – in most countries a sector of service provision totally separate from the homelessness sector – on the above mentioned undercounting of family homelessness both at the Member States level, but also across Europe as a whole.

The presence of domestic violence services is reported as an important form of temporary accommodation support for women with children. However, women and children who have become homeless as a result of domestic violence and who resort to this formal support network are often not defined and reported as being homeless, but rather as "users of domestic violence services" (e.g. refugees, transition houses). These family homelessness situations are, thus, rendered relatively invisible by the presence of domestic violence services.

Nevertheless, despite the paucity of data available and of the presence of these "invisibility mechanisms", domestic violence and relationship breakdown clearly emerge as commonly reported causes of family homelessness across the 14 countries covered by the study.

Domestic violence is a major trigger for family homelessness and it overwhelmingly affects women. More importantly, the relationship between domestic violence and homelessness or housing instability should be understood within the complex interplay between structural, institutional and individual factors which lead to the loss of accommodation and the need for support: "Women and children escaping domestic violence face numerous economic and housing difficulties when they enter – and when they try to move on from – available homelessness or domestic violence services." (Baptista et al, 2017)

Thus there is a clear need for policy and service responses to homelessness and domestic violence that address the need for further cooperation and exchange between the homelessness and the domestic violence sectors, with a view to better responding to the needs of women escaping violence and using homelessness support services, and to improving the housing outcomes of the support provided within the DV sector.

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# The Effect of the 'Cost Sharing' Norm on Youth Homelessness in the Netherlands

By **Marry Mos**, *Stichting De Tussenvoorziening Utrecht* and  
**Rina Beers**, *Federatie Opvang Amersfoort*

In 2015 the Dutch government introduced the 'cost sharing' norm for people receiving social assistance. This measure involves a decrease in social assistance allowance depending on the number of people over 21 years old living in the same house. The assumption is that people who share a house are members of one household. The idea is that they can share all costs of living, whether or not they have family ties or a personal relationship.

The reduction in social assistance allowance is substantial. A single person on social assistance receives €1030 per month. Living in a house with another person over 21 years old means a reduction to €736. Living in a house with 5 people would mean a reduction to €559 per month. When implementing the norm, local authorities are not obliged to take into account whether the other people living at the same address have an income. So, even when the other people do not receive an income, the 'cost sharing' norm can be implemented.

## Increasing the Risk of Homelessness

Many families or friends, who would normally offer a young homeless person a place to stay, refrain from doing so because they fear the consequences for their social assistance allowance. The measure can also generate stress within families at the time of a young person turning 21. This birthday means that, in effect, a parent with a social assistance allowance will face a reduction of income. Not all local authorities implement the measure the same way. Some local authorities opt for tailor made arrangements, to prevent youth homelessness. But in general, the threat of a reduced allowance is enough to increase the risk of homelessness.

## A Case Study: Claudia

*When Claudia became pregnant and did not have a house, she moved back to her mother's place. Her mother lived on social assistance. Claudia registered with the local authority at the new address and applied for social assistance for herself, which takes up to three months to be granted. Her mother's allowance was reduced immediately after Claudia registered with the local authority. Claudia didn't have any income and her mother could not pay the cost of living for them both. Claudia's mother wants Claudia to leave the house and cancel the registration at her address. Thus, Claudia will have to apply for shelter and assistance at the local authority.*

## A Controversial Measure

The introduction and implementation of the 'cost sharing' norm has led to a lot of discussion and controversy in the Netherlands. It seems logical to assume that people who share a house will also share the cost of living and other general expenses; an arrangement that reduces the individual cost of living. For this assumption to be correct, it would require people sharing a house to make a voluntary and clear agreement on the kind of costs which would be shared. By introducing the 'cost sharing' norm the government forces people to share the cost of living, regardless of whether these people have a relationship or an income. It is up to the person receiving a social allowance to find a solution for the lack of money which arises from this government measure. Although social assistance is meant to shield people from destitution, the 'cost sharing' norm can cause just that.

## Less Help from Family and Friends

The willingness from parents, friends and acquaintances with a social assistance allowance to help a son or daughter or a close friend has diminished severely. A study in Friesland (in the northern part of the country) showed that an unexpected number of people (family, friends, neighbours) are willing to help someone who runs the risk of homelessness. In return they want the guarantee that their income (from social security or tax allowances) will not be influenced by having an extra person in their house. Since this guarantee is not available, they are less willing to help.

## Registration with the Population Register

Access to social assistance is obtained by registering with the population register. The local authority also uses the register to verify whether the 'cost sharing' norm must be applied. The consequence is that young homeless people refrain from registering with the population register because they do not wish to cause problems for their hosts. However, this can create major problems for them personally. In the eyes of local and national authorities, a person who is not registered does not exist. They are not able to obtain a passport or ID, to enrol at a school or university, to renew a driver's license, or to get a job. The National Statistics Office found in 2017 that the number of young homeless people had increased to 4000, an increase of 30%. The implementation of the 'cost sharing' norm is one of the causes for this increase.

“Many families or friends, who would normally offer a young homeless person a place to stay, refrain from doing so because they fear the consequences for their social assistance allowance.”



## Lack of Trust in Government and Local Authorities

In theory the law provides the option to register with a so called 'reference' address at the address of a family member or friend. This should not have any effect on the income from social assistance or tax allowances. However, in practice people have had bad experiences with claims from local authorities or the tax office to pay back income allowances. People fear the government and do not trust official authorities. So, while it is legally possible to register and access social benefits, the possibility is not utilised for fear of getting in trouble with authorities.

## Cultural Impact

We know that in some cultures this 'cost sharing' norm is perceived as inappropriate. In many migrant families it is customary to live with your parents and family, until you get married. Parents have the obligation to take care of their children until that time. Children are expected to save their income so they can buy a house when they get married. The 'cost sharing' norm is a breach of that custom. The expression 'going Dutch' illustrates very aptly the difference between the general Dutch way of thinking and hospitality norms in other cultures. For young people in migrant families the 'cost sharing' norm implies that they are obliged to leave the house and pay their own way. Parents can feel powerless in this situation which is imposed on them and which conflicts with their own values.

## Cost and Benefit of the 'Cost Sharing' Norm

Our impression is that the government has not considered the unintended and undesirable effects of introducing the 'cost sharing' norm. In the situation of pregnant Claudia, we see her mother's income reduced despite the fact Claudia has no income to support herself or her mother. If Claudia finds herself out on the streets, she will face huge problems. She will be at risk of endangering her own health as well as her baby's health. For Claudia and her mother, the impact of this stress will be detrimental to finding practical solutions to their financial and housing situation. If Claudia has to apply for shelter during her pregnancy and after, the cost for the local authority will increase by tens of thousands of euros. Saving a few hundred euros per month by implementing the 'cost sharing' norm seems a 'penny wise, pound foolish' measure in comparison.

In our opinion the 'cost sharing' norm is an unnecessary measure. The perceived savings of this measure are not substantial enough to justify the extra cost to the local authority for the provision of shelter and support for homeless people. Thus, there is no gain, just loss for all parties concerned. Society would be better off without the 'cost sharing' norm. Without it, it would be possible, for those who want to, to offer hospitality and shelter to a relative or friend in need; a valuable offer for people in situations of vulnerability.





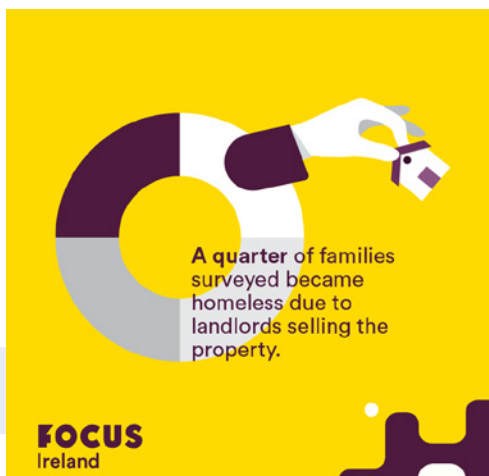
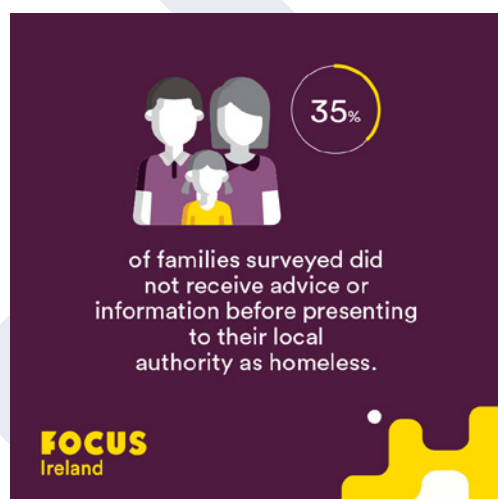
## Family Homelessness in Dublin

By **Daniel Hoey**, Policy Officer and **Sarah Sheridan**, Research Officer – Focus Ireland

Since 2014, the number of families experiencing homelessness in Ireland has grown rapidly. In August 2019, there were 1,726 families with 3,848 children living in emergency accommodation across Ireland<sup>1</sup>. In terms of family homelessness, this is an increase of 348% in five years. It is an unprecedented crisis.

The government produces monthly data on the numbers of those in emergency accommodation. However, very little is known about what is driving families into homelessness. To determine the root causes of family homelessness in Dublin, Focus Ireland began a research program in 2016 to examine the key drivers and dynamics of family homelessness in Dublin. The research design captured reasons why families lost their last stable home, families' housing histories (details of their last four homes prior to presenting as homeless), demographic profiles, and help seeking patterns e.g. whether families contacted any government agencies or homeless services.

In total, eight separate reports, two summary reports, and a recent substantial study have been produced<sup>2</sup>. The recent study follows the same research design and methodology of previous reports but with a larger sample of families who the Focus Ireland Family Homeless Action Team (HAT) are currently case managing. Additionally, the design and scope of the survey was broadened to capture experiences of looking for secure housing while residing in emergency accommodation. A total of 237 families who were on the Focus Ireland Family HAT caseload and had given consent were successfully contacted.



### Key findings from the research

A key aim of the research was to ascertain the location of last stable home for families. 68% of families (n=161) reported that their last stable home was in the private rental sector. While 22% (52%) had their last stable home with family or with a family member. All other types of accommodation accounted for the remaining 10% of families. Additionally, 60% of all respondents (n=142) were categorised as having very stable housing histories, i.e. – they reported lengthy, stable tenancies and never reported homelessness or hidden homelessness in the past (i.e. sofa-surfing or living in overcrowded conditions).

In terms of reasons why families left their last stable property, 36% (n=86) of respondents cited the property being removed from the market as their primary reason for leaving their last stable accommodation (most commonly due to the landlord selling); 22% (n=51) cited problems with private sector accommodation (predominantly affordability); while 30% (n=70) cited family circumstances (including domestic violence, and relationship breakdown).

A section of the survey instrument contained questions in relation to sourcing of housing through a government social housing support scheme for people who have a long-term housing need known as HAP (housing assistance payment). Many respondents had applied to over 20 rental properties through the scheme. Respondents reported extreme difficulty finding properties willing to accept HAP. 77% (n=183) of respondents had been actively looking for proper-

“The research findings clearly demonstrate that the key drivers of family homelessness are rooted in the private rental sector.”

<sup>1</sup> Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (2019) Homelessness Report August 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Gambi, et al. (2018) Causes of Family Homelessness in Dublin Region during 2016 and 2017. Dublin: Focus Ireland. Available: <https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Gambi-Sheridan-and-Hoey-2018-Insights-into-Family-Homelessness-No-16-Causes-of-family-homelessness-in-the-Dublin-region-during-2016-and-2017-Final-2.pdf>



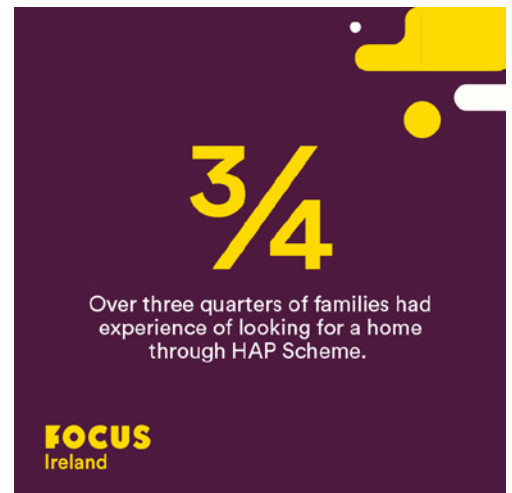
ties under the HAP Scheme. Of these, 61% (n=111) of those surveyed had applied to over 20 properties under the HAP Scheme without success.

Of considerable concern was the 35% (n=82) of respondents who did not seek advice or information before presenting as homeless despite several initiatives to make advice and information available to families at risk of homelessness. 55% (n=130) of respondents did seek assistance before presenting as homeless, primarily to their local authority, or services run by Focus Ireland or a tenancy protection service known as Threshold.

In line with previous research in the series, this study found that single mothers and migrants continue to face a disproportionate risk of homelessness. 58% (n=137) of the survey respondents were lone-parents, of which 95% were female. While 56% of the respondents were originally from a country outside Ireland, of which 41% (n=97) were from outside the EU and 15% (n=35) were from an EU country. Significantly, 80% of the migrant cohort reported a notably lengthy and stable housing history prior to becoming homeless.

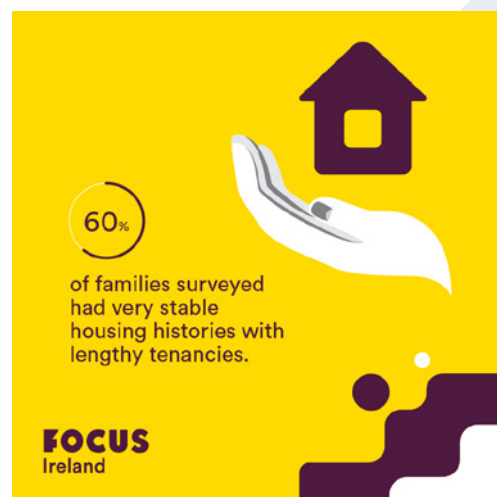
## Implications for policy and service delivery

The research findings clearly demonstrate that the key drivers of family homelessness are rooted in the private rental sector. Families with stable housing histories are entering homelessness due to specific issues related to availability and affordability. The government's primary response to this worsening crisis has been to commit a significant amount of public money to emergency measures, including the development and expansion of 'Family Hub' type congregate accom-



modation. Not only is this policy decision extremely expensive for the exchequer, it is also highly inappropriate for families who are condemned to live for long periods of time in confined conditions<sup>3</sup>. This is particularly alarming considering a recently published report by the Ombudsman for Children capturing the perspectives of children and feelings of sadness, shame and embarrassment in relation to their living situation<sup>4</sup>.

What is needed, and needed urgently, are measures that prevent families becoming homeless in the first instance, such as stronger tenant rights and protections. Secondly, HAP is wholly unsuitable as a key plank of 'social housing support' for vulnerably housed families. As evidenced in this research, it is not a solution for many families. Additionally, it provides housing subsidies worth hundreds of millions a year to the private sector, which is of little value to the State. Instead local authorities must set ambitious targets for building new social, affordable and public housing - and must be held accountable to deliver on those targets. Above all, this research emphasises the failure of current policy and the urgent need for the government to introduce a dedicated Family Homelessness Strategy to adequately address the needs of families experiencing a crisis in their housing.



3 Share, M. and Hennessey, M. (2017) Food Access and Nutritional Health for Families in Emergency Accommodation. Dublin: Focus Ireland; Walsh and Harvey (2015) Family Experiences of Pathways into Homelessness: The Families' Perspective, Dublin: Housing Agency; Children's Rights Alliance (2017) Report Card 2017. Dublin: CRA

4 Ombudsman for Children's Office (2019) No Place Like Home: Children's views and experiences of living in Family Hubs, Dublin: OCO



# The housing exclusion of Roma Families in Italy

By **Donatella De Vito**, Head of Social Emergency area, Casa della Carità, Italy

According to the The National Strategy for Roma inclusion, ratified by Unar<sup>1</sup> in 2012<sup>2</sup>, “the homelessness of Roma is the most extreme example of poverty and social exclusion in Italian society”, that should be addressed by “increasing access to a wide range of housing solutions for the Roma and Sinti in order to overcome emergency and large sized mono-ethnic settlements”. Nevertheless, in 2018, 26.000 Roma still live in formal or informal slums<sup>3</sup>, in conditions of severe housing exclusion. Over 16.400 Roma, 43% of whom are of Italian nationality, live in formal municipal settlements, while over 9600 Roma, most of them Romanian, live in informal settlements, in severe housing and social exclusion. The homelessness of Roma in Italy can be linked back to several factors, even if one seems to prevail: the persistence of widespread prejudice, which has been affecting the Italian housing policies for homeless Roma in the last 3 decades.

## Italy, Campland<sup>4</sup>

Over 16.000 Roma - spread across 147 municipal settlements built by Italian authorities to house Roma families – are faced with housing exclusion, which originated in the 80s.

At that time, most housing policies for the homeless Roma by local authorities were based on the belief that Roma communities were *nomadic, hostile to sedentary life*, and therefore in need of housing solutions that should be *temporary and transitional*<sup>5</sup>. However, most of the Roma families settled in these municipal camps were not nomads<sup>6</sup>, and so the transitional and temporary accommodation provided for them became permanent. Although direct stakeholders, like Roma and Sinti NGOs, pointed out that correlating Roma with nomadic was wrong, local Authorities continued to build these sites in the 90s, in response to the housing needs of the Roma that were escaping the Balkan wars by coming to Italy. In the following years, parallel and diversified housing policy systems for Roma and Sinti Communities became a widespread practice, and after 2000, similar policies were adopted by many local Authorities to face

Roma families' increasing need for housing as they migrated from Eastern Countries. Living conditions in these camps are far below the minimum standard foreseen by the national and European regulations on housing, as the housing facilities provided are small, deteriorate quickly, and often do not provide access to sanitary services. The social exclusion faced by the inhabitants of these sites has a negative impact on their integration to the job market as only 33,3% of their residents are employed, mainly in the black market (50,2%), while 29,5% of them are unemployed and 22,6% inactive<sup>7</sup>. Scarce access to regular income makes it harder for the families to break the circle of exclusion they are in and limits their possibilities to find access to adequate housing. Moreover, many Roma have been effectively denied access to regular, unsegregated social housing, due to the lack of national investments to increase the availability of affordable accommodation in line with the needs of the general population. The target group that is more heavily affected by this condition of housing exclusion are the romani children, who constitute over 55% of the total residents of these sites. Data collected by Associazione 21 Luglio<sup>8</sup> and Casa della Carità<sup>9</sup> underline that housing exclusion has a negative impact on both their mental and physical health and their social inclusion. Their life is scarred by poverty, scarce access to sanitary and social services, and impacts their schooling opportunities<sup>10</sup>. As reported by the Jo-Cox Committee set up by the Italian Chamber of Deputies in 2017, “the so-called nomad camps, authorized or informal, are places of exclusion, where special and housing segregation becomes social and cultural ghettoisation”<sup>11</sup>. The Committee also reports that the creation of these settlements is an integral and crucial element in the creation of “a Roma issue in Italy”<sup>12</sup>. Although the National Strategy stated there was a need to find alternatives to camps as places of relational and physical degradation, very little action has been taken, and new camps have even been built to house Roma families<sup>13</sup>. This underlines the existence and the persistence of a differentiated and discriminatory approach in the implementation of housing policies for homeless Roma, on which urgent action is needed.

“The so-called nomad camps, authorised or informal, are places of exclusion, where special and housing segregation becomes social and cultural ghettoisation.”

1 Unar is the National Office against racial discrimination, entitled by the Italian Government to safeguard equal treatment of religious and ethnic minorities, LGBT and disabled people

2 Unar, National Strategy for the inclusion of Roma, Sinti e Camminanti in Italy, European Commission Communication n.o. 173/2011, (Roma UNAR, 2012).

3 21 luglio, I Margini del Margine, Comunità Rom meglio insediamenti formali e informali in Italia, Rapporto 2018

4 Definition used for Roma housing condition in Italy by the European Roma Right Center in ERRC, Campland: racial segregation of Roma in Italy Report on Italy, Country report Series n.9, Budapest, 2000

5 ERRC, Campland: racial segregation of Roma in Italy Report on Italy, Country report Series n.9, Budapest, 2000

6 According to the European Commission, Only 3% of the 180.000 Roma present in Italy live in semi-nomadic

7 Soros Foundation Romania, National report on Labour and social inclusion of Roma in Italy, 2012

8 Associazione 21 Luglio, Uscire Per sognare, Roma, 2016

9 Soros Foundation Romania, National report on Labour and social inclusion of Roma in Italy, 2012

10 As reported by 21 Luglio, 1 out of 5 Roma children living in a formal camp never attend a class, while 9 out of 10 children do not attend school regularly. As a consequence of that, 1 out of 2 children that attend school is in school delay, and that impacts on his/her possibilities to continue schooling, and get a high school diploma.

11 Commissione Jo-Cox, relazione finale, pg 89

12 Ibid.

13 21 luglio, I Margini del Margine, Comunità Rom meglio insediamenti formali e informali in Italia, Rapporto 2018





## The homelessness of Roma migrants

According to recent monitoring reports<sup>14</sup> over 9600 Roma find shelter in informal settlements, self-built in private or public areas throughout the Italian territory. In these sites, Roma families live in shacks made of wood, metal sheets or tents, and have no access to running water, heating, lighting or a sewage system. Rome (300 sites) and Milan (130 sites) are the urban areas where there is a higher concentration of these settlements, while in Naples these sites are bigger in size<sup>15</sup>. As to Roma Municipal Camps described previously, the word that best describes these sites is *precarious*: over half of these settlements are small in size, located in very peripheral areas, in proximity to train tracks, motorways, dumps or rivers. The majority of Roma living in these settlements are European citizens, mainly Romanian families that arrive in Italy by activating family or community ties. These ties will later work as pulling factors for other Roma belonging to their community in Romania, that will end up migrating and settling in the same location and condition. The groups' ties to the country of origin appears to be very strong, which is mirrored in the reason of their migration: they migrate to earn money through begging or underpaid work, in order to pay remittances for their families, or build a house in their country of origin<sup>16</sup>. Their social exclusion makes them valuable manpower to exploit in the building-, services and agricultural sectors, where many Roma end up in underpaid work and without a regulated contract. The lack of contract and of sufficient income, paired with housing exclusion, has a negative impact on their chances of obtaining a permanent residence permit, which is a requirement in Italy to accessing basic rights like sanitary services and social care. This condition activates a spiral of exclusion that violates their fundamental rights and limits their possibilities of interaction and inclusion in the Italian society. The situation is worsened by

the fact that local authorities keep on evicting families from the sites where they have settled, without providing the necessary safeguards such as consultation and adequate notice, which violates the country's international and regional human rights obligations and is carried out in contrast with other forms of evictions carried out in Italy<sup>17</sup>. Often, when this happens, Romani' families are not provided with adequate housing alternatives, and as a result, they end up homeless. The National Strategy for Roma inclusion acknowledged the excessive use of evictions from informal settlements, and how these were highly inadequate to address the housing situation of Roma people, yet recent reports confirm that Italy continues to evict Roma families without providing proper housing alternatives<sup>18</sup>, leaving the families homeless. In the few cases where they are offered an alternative housing solution, local authorities place these families into new mono-ethnic settlements, reiterating their paths towards social and housing exclusion that are faced by the Roma residents in municipal camps. In recent years, certain NGOs and Local Authorities have been promoting successful interventions, pointing out that there are solutions to homelessness<sup>19</sup> of Roma families, but they remain isolated good practices that are not widely promoted. While the National Strategy committed to go beyond camps as places of relational and physical degradation<sup>20</sup>, currently camps remain the only housing option provided for Roma. This underlines the existence of a parallel and discriminatory housing system for Roma.

Over 7 years after the ratification of the National Strategy for Roma inclusion, no progress has been observed on the housing exclusion of Roma families. Segregation in camps, discrimination in social housing access, and forced evictions in Italy still represent breaches of the Race Equality directive. The European Commission should start combating these breaches through the use of infringement proceedings, in order to promote proper access to housing for Roma families and defend their fundamental rights.

14 Ibid., and Roma Civil Monitor II, report on the implementation of the National Strategy on Roma inclusion in Italy, European Commission, 2019  
15 Ibid.

16 Caritas Ambrosiana, *In-visibili, La presenza Rom e gli insediamenti spontanei*, 2018

17 Associazione 21 Luglio, *I Margini del Margine, Comunita' Rom meglio insediamenti formali e informali in Italia, Rapporto 2018*

18 Associazione 21 Luglio, *I Margini del Margine, Comunita' Rom meglio insediamenti formali e informali in Italia, Rapporto 2018*

19 Soros Foundation Romania, *National report on the good practices of Roma Inclusion in Italy, 2012*

20 Unar, *National Strategy for the inclusion of Roma, Sinti e Camminanti in Italy, European Commission Communication n.o. 173/2011.* (Roma UNAR, 2012).



## Family Homelessness: A Child's Perspective

By **Leen Ackaert**, *policy advisor and researcher, The Office of the Children's Rights Commissioner*

“Thomas and Kelly are living with their mother Ria, in the house of Ria's new boyfriend. Their own house had been declared unfit for habitation. The two other brothers are at boarding school and living in a youth care institution respectively. Before that, they spent time living at various shelters for homeless people, scattered across Flanders. Time and again, they had to change schools. The family has debts and not enough money to rent a home.”

Sadly, Thomas and Kelly are not the only children in Flanders to find themselves without a home or a roof over their heads. A few years ago, Professor Koen Hermans counted some 3,730 homeless people in Flanders' homeless shelters. 1,728 children joined their parents to live in homeless shelters, including night shelters and transit housing. In March 2017, homeless sector support center, La Strada, together with volunteers, counted in one hour 653 homeless children in Brussels. The children were sleeping rough in public spaces, staying in night shelters or living in illegally occupied buildings.

As a response to the dire situation in Belgium, we - the Flemish Children's Rights Commissioner and his Office - produced a dossier<sup>1</sup> analysing the root causes of the homelessness affecting children and proposing policy changes that would effectively address this homelessness. For this dossier, we analysed the housing and homelessness policy in Flanders from a child's perspective and interviewed 43 parents, children, and young people who were homeless, or about to become homeless.

In 2018 the European Commission and the Belgian government gave us the opportunity to host a Peer review on “Homelessness from a child's perspective, Brussels, 27-28 June 2018” and discuss the dossier at a European level.

In this paper we highlight the key elements of an effective child homelessness strategy, to ensure the well-being and rights of children currently without a home, that was agreed on by the countries (the Czech Republic, Denmark, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and Belgium) who participated in the Peer Review.

### The multiple vulnerabilities of homeless children demand a multistrand child homelessness strategy that takes these vulnerabilities into account

The interviews in the dossier, with children, young people and parents, show that homelessness has grave consequences for children. Homeless children frequently change neighbourhoods, schools, friends and neighbours. Each time, they move they must start again. It compromises their physical and psychological well-being, as well as their health and development. It shapes their future. The situation of homelessness does not only contradict a child's right to housing, but also denies them their other rights, such as the right to privacy, friends, leisure and education. They become refugees in their own country.

Homelessness among children is a “both/and” story, meaning several key elements and policy changes must be taken into account when attempting to protect the well-being and rights of these children.

The participants of the Peer Review agreed that an effective child homelessness strategy must focus on five key elements: prevention of child homelessness, data collection to increase visibility of homeless children at policy level, management of child-friendly shelters and support, establishment of a holistic housing allocation system, and local governance and collaboration among stakeholders.

### Prevention of child homelessness

In their initial stages, the interviews set out from the idea that homelessness is largely the result of a lack of money and means. However, over the course of the first few interviews it became clear that homelessness among children and young people is not a single-cause event. Parents, children and young people cited reasons for homelessness including: their home being declared unfit for habitation and forced eviction, as well as: alcohol abuse, a parent in the process of radicalising, a mother who stopped looking after the children, domestic violence and constant arguing between parents.



The Peer Review reiterated the importance of prevention and early intervention in effectively addressing the structural causes of child homelessness. These include increasing access to affordable housing, taking strong poverty reduction measures, the provision of adequate welfare services, and the implementation of comprehensive child protection systems and youth services that support young people transitioning from out-of-home care to independence.

## Data collection to increase visibility of homeless children at policy level

As a group and as individuals, homeless children and young people are insufficiently visible in regulation and policy plans on homelessness, housing, and rental issues. They are also ignored in statistics and data collection on homelessness. How many children, young people and parents need a home? Who needs a bed each night in winter shelters? How many evictions are carried out (each year) and how many children are involved in these evictions? Almost none of the participating countries could answer these questions.

Highlights of the Peer Review demonstrate that existing data on family homelessness is often incomplete and sporadic. The participants stated that data collection and improved statistics on homelessness among families and children is crucial for the scientific evaluation and regular monitoring of policies, in order to assess their effectiveness and ensure that spending makes sustainable social impact. More specifically, in each data collection exercise on homelessness, specific measures need to be integrated so that the age of each homeless child can be captured. This will make it possible to form conclusions about homeless children, not only homeless adults.

## Management of child-friendly shelters and support

**“We were in a winter shelter and now we’re here (family shelter). They don’t lock the door as early in the evenings. So I can play and stay out longer. At the winter shelter, we were also able to do some arts and crafts, like making rainbow looms. They have a playroom there and we’re allowed go on the computer if we like. Here (family shelter), you can’t.” (Zaid, primary school, family shelter)**

The children, young people and parents who participated in the interviews illustrated that long spells of living together in collective homeless shelters present further problems, especially when there are barely any prospects of moving to a home of their own. Parents and children are stressed and lose heart in the face of

their seemingly desperate situation. Parents and children find themselves in a constant state of transience, when the very things they need the most are stability and steadiness. This stress and despair weighs on the relationship between parent and child, between parent and care worker, and between other residents. Teenagers especially find this particularly hard. As time goes on, they want to have more of a say in their own life. They want to build an independent life for themselves, which sometimes clashes with the collective rules of the facilities. Families that do have some privacy, courtesy of the infrastructure of separate residential units, greatly appreciate this.

Although all Peer review participants considered shelters to be a last resort and as providing only a temporary solution, they generally agreed that they should be adapted to children’s needs as much as possible, in order to mitigate the adverse effects of living in such transitional, temporary accommodation. This includes ensuring a safe, protective and supportive environment, that enables a life of some continuity (i.e. children of school age can remain in their school, are able to retain relationships with their peers etc.). It is also vital that children are involved in the development of child-friendly shelters and services. Children should be seen as individuals with their own rights. They must be allowed to stay children, to engage in appropriate, children’s activities, express their feelings, and access information that will allow them to grow. Above all, children must be able to depend on a reliable adult.

## Establishment of a holistic housing allocation system

It won’t come as a surprise that the greatest wish of the children, young people and parents that we interviewed, is to have their own home; A place where they feel happy, can build a family life and secure their future. Parents and adolescents talk about their discouraging search for a suitable and affordable home. They experience several barriers to housing: unaffordable rent, discrimination in the private rental market, and a shortages of social rental housing

**“That I have a home where I can stay and go on living. That I won’t need to move again. Now I have to move again, for the umpteenth time. I’ve moved 22 times. And now I’m made to move out again.” (Ria, single mother of 4, staying with her new boyfriend)**

Across the participating Peer Review countries, young people and families with children who are homeless are considered a priority group when it comes to housing allocation. However, how this support is realised tends to vary among the Member States. In reality, allocation depends upon specific eligibility conditions, criteria for matching children, young people, and families with housing suitable to their needs, and





importantly, on the scale of the housing provision. In the participating countries, the key obstacles to accessing affordable housing were identified as the insufficient supply of social housing, resulting in long waiting-lists, and the financial constraints of families.

The Peer Review discussed several interesting and innovative housing-led initiatives and alternative housing solutions (e.g. Housing First for Youth in Denmark; social rental agencies in Belgium) directed at overcoming these challenges. Meanwhile, a more structural policy is needed to guarantee housing affordability.

## Local governance and collaboration among stakeholders

*“At the shelter in my town, I would go round to play at my friend’s home on Wednesdays. She didn’t come to play at mine. She was allowed to, but I didn’t want her to. In the evening, I attended music classes.” (Rebecca, primary school, social house)*

From a child’s perspective, local solutions and collaboration among different services are crucial for preventing children and young people from becoming homeless. If they could find a suitable home or a place at a shelter in their own municipality, they would be more likely to experience continuity in their education. Their ties with the local neighbourhood, school and friends would remain intact.

The Peer Review echoed the notion that strengthening local governance and devoting sufficient resources are essential for addressing homelessness among families and children in an effective way. A local governance solution is necessary for children. It guarantees continuity in their development, education, integration and social inclusion.

The Member States considered access to service provision, in particular ensuring the quality of housing and other social services, and the need for a variety of access points to ease access for different groups of service users, of great importance. Furthermore, smooth cooperation between the homelessness services, the Public Social Welfare Centre, local policy, social housing organisations and letting agencies, youth welfare, education and youth policy are key.

*“[...] data collection and improved statistics on homelessness among families and children is crucial for the scientific evaluation and regular monitoring of policies”*



## Women and Children First

### Looking at a Few Statistics on Homelessness in Brussels

By **Benoît Quittelier, Nicolas Horvat** – *research officers, Bruss'help*

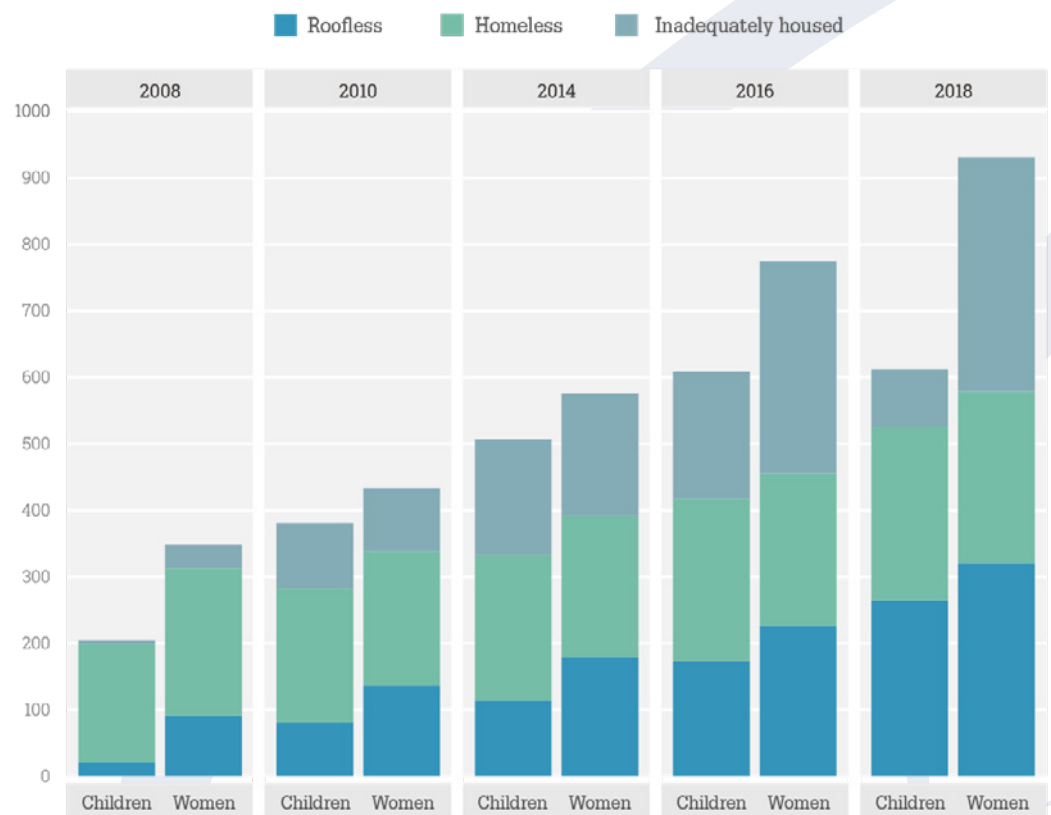
We often read in the press that the number of homeless women and children is increasing.<sup>1</sup> In Brussels, as in most large European cities, this subject stirs up public opinion and forces the authorities to take action. There is also a specific provision for this group: several services are devoted to supporting families and exceptional measures are put in place at certain times to make sure they do not end up on the street – especially during the winter months.

But is it really true that more families than before are forced to spend the night outdoors or in temporary accommodation? Do they make up a greater proportion of the homeless and inadequately housed population or is the increase in their numbers just part of a general upward trend? Using statistical reports produced by the *Centre d'appui au secteur d'aide aux sans-abri* (Homelessness Sector Support Hub), we would like to give a quick overview of the situation in the Brussels region.

*Bruss'Help* (formerly *la Strada*) is a monitoring centre, an information hub and a body that coordinates the work of the different support services. The Centre has two statistical instruments that can be used to study the situation as regards homelessness in the Brussels-Capital Region: a biennial census and a centralised database of statistics on accommodation and support services.

### Counting People Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Deprivation

The Brussels census hinges on joint working between homelessness sector organisations but also several partners from related sectors: public transport, hospitals, etc. Its aim is to be able to come up with the most comprehensive count possible of the number of people affected by homelessness and housing deprivation at a specific point in time:<sup>2</sup> this can be those who



1 See for example: « A Bruxelles de plus en plus de familles avec enfants sont sans abris », (More and More Families with Children are Homeless in Brussels (in French)) *RTBF*, 6 May 2019 ; « Toujours plus de sans-abri à Bruxelles : où dorment-ils, combien de mineurs parmi eux ? » (Still More Homeless Families in Brussels: Where Do They Sleep, How Many Under-18s Are Among Them? (in French)), *L'Avenir*, 8 May 2019.  
2 The census uses the ETHOS typology put forward by FEANTSA.



spend the night outdoors or in night shelters (roofless) but also those in hostels (inadequately housed). It also tries to count, as far as possible, people who find shelter through other means (squats, licensed squatting, religious communities, etc.) because of a lack of available spaces in accommodation units or because it is difficult for them to access the services on offer (inadequately housed).<sup>3</sup> A comparison of these studies, which are carried out every two years using the same parameters, highlights how the phenomenon has changed and how the characteristics of the population group under study have changed as well.

The census only gathers the numbers of people experiencing homelessness or housing deprivation: the study does not allow conclusions to be drawn on the number or the makeup of family units. It's only by focusing on the statistical information on under-18s and women that we can infer certain trends.

In total, 612 children and 939 women were found to be homeless or inadequately housed on the night of 5 November 2018. Although the number of children greatly increased between 2008 and 2014, increasing from 204 to 507, this number has stayed relatively stable since 2016 (609). As far as women are concerned, a continued increase in numbers can be observed since records began: the number of women has increased from 349 to 939 in ten years (+169%). These figures are alarming but do not necessarily signal a change in the population demographic: the increase in women and children in absolute numbers can be explained in large part by an increase in homelessness and housing deprivation figures in general. The relative increase is in reality too low to be indicative of the population becoming made up of more young people or more women:<sup>4</sup> children and women represented, respectively, 11.3% and 19.3% of the people counted in 2008, and 14.6% and 22.4% in 2018.

Of the 265 children who were homeless in 2018, 20 spent the previous night outdoors (compared with 24 in 2016). Between 2016 and 2018, the number of under-18s counted in temporary accommodation increased greatly (+39.2%): an increase that can partly be explained by the increase in emergency accommodation capacity. The proportion of children among homeless people decreased slightly between 2016 and 2018 (from 14.6% to 12.3%). Of the 931 women counted during the first census, 34.1% were roofless (compared with 29.2% in 2016): 84 spent the previous night on the street, in a tube station or in a park (50 in 2016 and 40 in 2014). The proportion of women among homelessness people also slightly decreased between 2016 and 2018: from 19.2% to 14.9%.

The growth in the number of women and children present in temporary accommodation needs to be read in the context of an increased number of available emergency beds. By the same token, many families still manage to find somewhere to stay that is outside mainstream homelessness services. For example, in 2018, 333 people were staying in a licensed squat, and among them were 72 under-18s and their families.

As regards hostels, it is abundantly clear from the data gathered in the count that priority is given to women and under-18s. In 2018, women made up 27.8% of the people accommodated by these structures, when they only made up 22.4% of the homeless and inadequately housed people counted. This trend is even more marked when it comes to under-18s: the proportion of under-18s in hostels is 28.1%, versus 14.6% in the overall population. In the same vein, supported housing services saw the numbers of women (+43.5%) and under-18s (+14%) among their residents increase dramatically in absolute terms between 2016 and 2018.

## Centralised Database

The Centralised Database (CD) gathers statistics from structures approved by the *Commission Communautaire Française* (French Community Commission) (COCOF), the *Commission Communautaire Commune* (Common Community Commission) (COCOM) and the *Vlaamse Gemeenschap* (Flemish Community) (VG). It aggregates the information gathered from two types of service:<sup>5</sup> hostels and emergency shelters/crisis provision. The CD provides statistics on the use of the subsidised accommodation services on offer and on socioeconomic profiles and population movements, but not on the ways these centres are actually used. Moreover, in many services, the policy on data collection is to record only basic information about under-18s and to gather complete data on their parents. This is why less can be gleaned from data on children.

There are 1328 approved hostel spaces: 370 for males only, 383 for women with or without children and 575 accessible to anyone. It therefore appears that these spaces are generally easily accessible for families. In emergency accommodation, a policy of non-refusal (*Samusocial*) or of prioritisation of families is in operation in the vast majority of cases (85.2% – 277 of the 325 available spaces).

This proportion is even greater if we add the 800 extra spaces allocated to *Samusocial* as part of the Winter Plan. Also, *Samusocial* has set up a centre with 120 spaces specifically designed for families and funded on an annual basis.

“As regards hostels, it is abundantly clear from the data gathered in the count that priority is given to women and under-18s. In 2018, women made up 27.8% of the people accommodated by these structures, when they only made up 22.4% of the homeless and inadequately housed people counted.”

<sup>3</sup> The count only gives a very incomplete picture of the number of people at risk of eviction or who, having lost their home, are staying with friends or family (not settled accommodation).

<sup>4</sup> On this point see also: Lelubre, M. (2012) *La féminisation du sans-abrisme bruxellois : une évolution à mieux définir*, (The Feminisation of Homelessness in Brussels: A Growth That Needs Looking at Further (in French)) Brussels Studies 62, online: <http://journals.openedition.org/brussels/1110>.

<sup>5</sup> The night shelters (*Samusocial*, *Pierre d'Angle*) are not included in the Centralised Database.



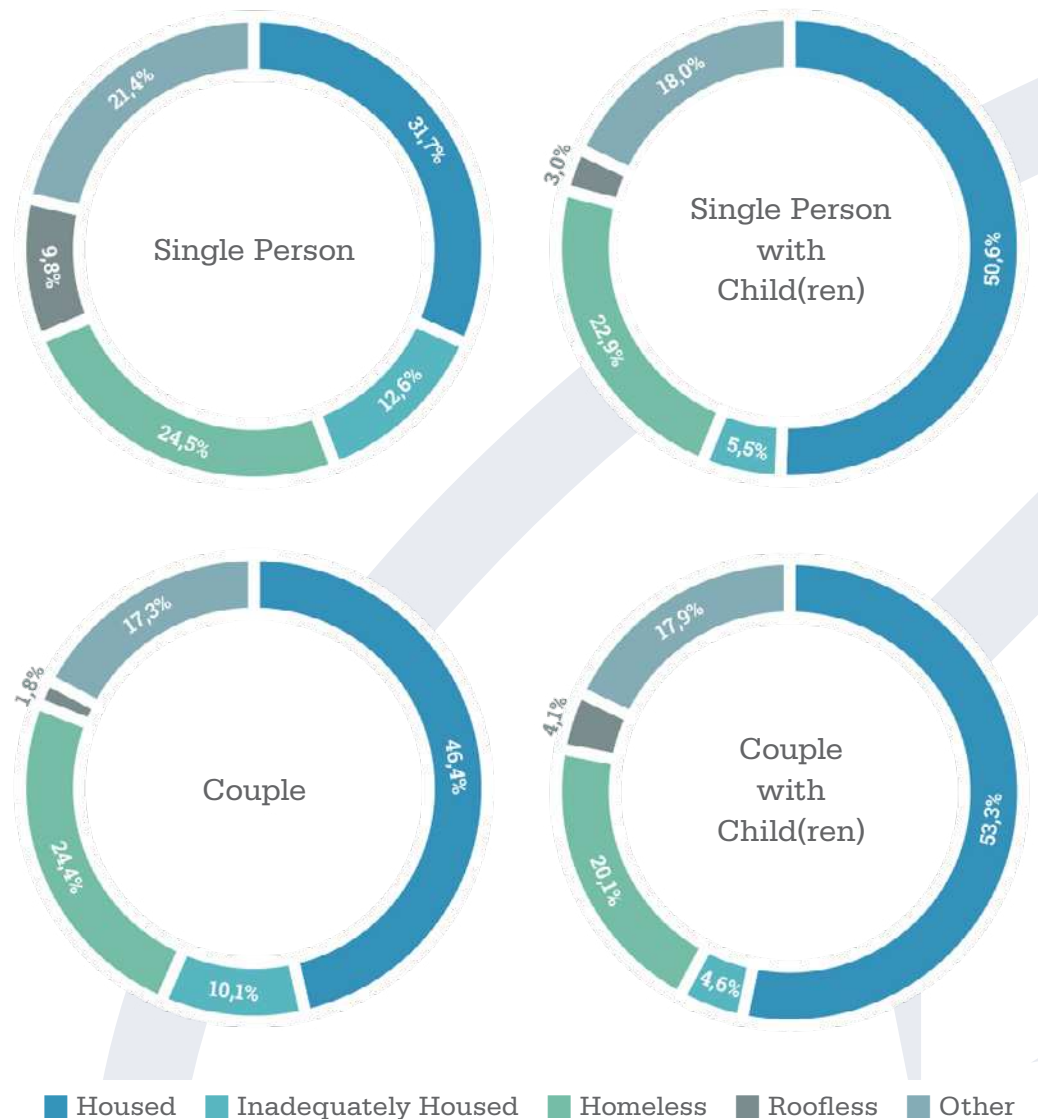


As regards to hostels, families have access to 59.7% of the approved spaces (599 of 1003). Aside from the centres for single males, only the *Montfort Centre* is not open to families because its focus is on accommodating single females only. Although two new centres have opened for women with or without children: *Le Refuge* (10 spaces) and *La Parenthèse* (24 spaces), which both belong to the *Centre de prévention des Violences Conjugales et Familiales* (Centre for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence) (CPVCF), the number of available spaces in hostels has remained stable for several years.

Between 2015 and 2017, the homelessness services in the Centralised Database took in around 3000 different people each year, of whom around one third were under-18s. This high proportion of under-18s demonstrates the significant number of families in emergency accommodation and hostels, given that it is rare that under-18s are accommodated on their own.

The fact that priority is given to accommodating women with children in emergency accommodation comes through clearly in the statistics around accommodation type, as there is a majority of women in emergency accommodation while there is a majority of men in hostels.

This observation is not as straightforward as it seems, though. It is the case that a substantial proportion of men counted are actually male children staying with their mothers in accommodation. The units for single men will tend to allocate all their beds to men while units for women and children will allocate some of their beds to male children. This goes a long way towards explaining the greater number of males staying in hostels. This phenomenon is important as, between 2015 and 2017, more than half the adult women accommodated had at least one child with them (51.9%).





Another thing to consider is that the presence of children and the existence of a family unit seems to have a significant impact on the housing trajectories of the people accommodated, both when they come into and when they leave these institutions. As couples with children and women with children are often prioritised in emergency accommodation (but not only there), they come less often from and leave less often for extremely precarious living situations, in particular on the street.

Accordingly, couples with children arrive, in two thirds of cases, straight from private accommodation that they have had to leave. If we count those who have had to spend some time in emergency accommodation, they make up more than eight out of ten couples with children. Single people with children have had more varied experiences than couples with or without children before being admitted. Still, 55% of them have been booked in following departure from private accommodation or emergency accommodation, more than two thirds if we count those who are booked in following time spent in a hostel. From this, we can

draw the conclusion that there is a real drive to make sure, as far as possible, that under-18s do not have to sleep on the street.

What is observed when people enter institutions is confirmed when they leave them. Having dependent children gives priority access to different types of structures (hostels, social lettings agencies, registered social landlords, etc.). This can explain in part families' housing pathways, be they couples with children or single-parent families. This doesn't mean the situation for families is good. In emergency accommodation units, where women are in the majority, lengths of stay are getting longer, not least because the hostel network is saturated and it is difficult to rehouse people in the Brussels rental market.

Nevertheless, the presence of a close family unit (partner, children) is an element that has a tendency to improve people's housing pathways, either because it allows them to be prioritised by some institutions or because it gives them moral support and the possibility to share the cost burden with someone.

“There is a real drive to make sure, as far as possible, that under-18s do not have to sleep on the street.”



## Family Homelessness in Europe

By **Nicholas Pleace**, *Director of the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York*

We know less about family homelessness in Europe than we do about the experience of lone homeless men and, also, less about the experience of children who become homeless than we know about people living rough. One reason for this, which the European Observatory on Homelessness explored, in our 2017 research supported by FEANTSA *Family Homelessness in Europe*<sup>1</sup>, is that social services in most European countries provide protections for children facing destitution and it was long thought that this made family homelessness unusual.

We have also assumed that women's homelessness is more unusual than men's homelessness, because when relationships break down and homelessness occurs, dependent children are more likely to stay with their mother. Children facing homelessness should, again, be protected by social services who should also protect their mother. There is growing evidence that this assumption may be wrong and that both family homelessness *and* women's homelessness may be more widespread than was thought<sup>2</sup>.

Women with children appear more likely to fall back on family and friends when they experience homelessness than is the case for lone adult men<sup>3</sup>. Research has suggested that a high proportion of women lone parents with children only seek assistance from homelessness or social services when they reach a point where they cannot stay with family or friends any longer. Homeless women with children may only approach services weeks or months *after* they first become homeless, because they only seek those services when they can no longer stay with relatives or friends<sup>4</sup>.

Some families may stay living in these arrangements with friends or relatives, experiencing hidden homelessness, for prolonged periods, but we are not sure how widespread this might be and need to do some more research. This is important, because while we may not think of people staying with friends or relatives as 'homeless', the reality of these living arrangements can be harsh. A family staying with family or friends has no legal right to live where they are, and they may be without their own front door or private space which they control, experiencing problems like severe overcrowding and sometimes living in situa-

tions where there are safeguarding concerns. If you have no control over your own living space, or privacy and no legal rights saying that somewhere is your home, then you do not have a home, even if there is a roof over your head. A family in such situations might also be living in badly overcrowded or hazardous conditions.

When we think about a 'family' we tend to think of two parents and one or more children. However, family homelessness across Europe and also in North America and Australia is often experienced by lone women parents. Just as most of the adults living rough are probably men<sup>5</sup>, family homelessness is probably mainly experienced by lone women parents with dependent children. Family homelessness is *highly gendered* because it is mainly experienced by women bringing up children on their own.

As with all forms of homelessness, simple poverty can be a trigger for family homelessness, for example if one or both parents loses their job. However, there is evidence that family homelessness is most frequently triggered by a relationship breakdown in combination with relative poverty. When a relationship has come to a normal end, a lone woman parent with her child, or children, can find themselves facing housing costs they can no longer afford. Family homelessness happens, quite often, mainly because there is less income than there used to be, i.e. if their home were more affordable, or the family had more money, homelessness would not occur.

Family homelessness can also be triggered by abusive or violent relationship breakdown, where violence or abuse has been directed by one parent against another and/or a child may also have come under threat. While it can be the case that men can be victims of these forms of abuse, the reality is that most cases involve a male perpetrator who directs violence or abuse at a woman. In the UK, it has been estimated that one in four women will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime and 70% of victims of domestic violence are women<sup>6</sup>. Research across mainland Europe, the UK and North America into family homelessness has suggested that domestic violence, by men against women, is one of the main causes of family homelessness.

- 1 Isabel Baptista; Lars Benjaminsen; Volker Busch-Geertsema and Nicholas Pleace (2017) *Family Homelessness in Europe* FEANTSA: Brussels <https://www.feantsaresearch.org/en/comparative-studies/2017/12/15/comparative-studies-on-homelessness?bcParent=763>
- 2 Paula Mayock and Joanne Bretherton (Eds.) (2016) *Women's Homelessness in Europe* London: Palgrave Macmillan. <http://womenshomelessness.org/blog/womens-homelessness-europe-book-now-published/>
- 3 Joanne Bretherton (2017) Reconsidering Gender in Homelessness *European Journal of Homelessness* 11(1), pp. 1-21 <https://www.feantsaresearch.org/en/comparative-studies/2017/12/15/comparative-studies-on-homelessness?bcParent=763>
- 4 Nicholas Pleace, Suzanne Fitzpatrick *et al* (2008) *Statutory Homelessness in England: The Experience of Families and 16-17 Year Olds* London: Department for Communities and Local Government. [http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/73926/1/Final\\_Communities\\_web\\_version.pdf](http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/73926/1/Final_Communities_web_version.pdf)
- 5 There are probably more women than are thought, issues with how numbers are counted and estimated may mean they are not fully represented, see: Joanne Bretherton and Nicholas Pleace (2018) *Women and Rough Sleeping: A Critical Review of Current Research and Methodology* London: St Mungo's <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/138075/>
- 6 <https://www.refuge.org.uk/refuge-responds-to-latest-ONS-crime-survey-figures-on-domestic-abuse/>



Families may have been through traumatic experiences, where relationship breakdown, violence and abuse in the home, or another life changing event, such as the death of a partner, has led to homelessness. However, while there is some evidence that rates of depression among adults in homeless families can be higher than average, some of the other issues and needs we tend to associate with homelessness are not present.

Homeless families, for the most part, do not have high and complex support needs, such as severe mental illness or problematic drinking or drug use, nor are they characterised by high levels of contact with criminal justice systems. This is a quite different picture than that which we are used to with lone homeless men, particularly those men who have been homeless for a long time or on a repeated basis, where support needs around addiction and severe mental illness are much more common than among the general population, as is contact with law enforcement and emergency health services.

The best services for homeless families need to meet two main needs. First, there is a need to ensure support around domestic violence and abuse is in place and second, any response to family homelessness must be housing focused and housing led.

The first need, where family homelessness has been triggered by violence or abuse, centres on ensuring that a woman and her child or children are safe. While we tend to think of domestic violence services as distinct from 'homelessness' services, refuges and secure supported housing for women with children play a significant role in reducing homelessness. We often do not appreciate the full scale of that role because we tend to design policy, administration and measurement of domestic violence services separately from 'homelessness' services. This is another reason why family homelessness experienced by women

lone parents is probably more widespread than was thought to be the case, because we apply the label of 'at risk of violence and abuse' to families who are also, actually, homeless.

There are some examples of services developed specifically for homeless families who are at risk of violence and abuse. One system is 'sanctuary' schemes, which provide enhanced security for someone, usually a woman and her children, with support services, in combination with criminal justice interventions to manage the (usually male) perpetrator. Sanctuary schemes enable a family who were potentially at risk of homelessness due to violence and abuse to remain in their existing home, making them safe and secure by removing the source of the threat, rather than picking up the pieces after a parent and their children has been forced to leave their home'. Another recent development is DAHA accreditation (domestic abuse housing alliance), which is designed to create much better reporting and recording of abuse and violence for social housing providers. DAHA accreditation is designed to enable early interventions to stop abuse and violence and to help prevent associated homelessness<sup>8</sup>.

As most lone parent and two parent homeless families do not have high and complex needs, most just require a home that offers them legal security, sufficient space, adequate quality and an affordable rent in a reasonable neighbourhood. While some families will need support and there are interesting innovations like Housing First services for families with high and complex needs being developed, most family homelessness in Europe happens primarily for economic and social reasons. This means family homeless can often be best and most effectively solved by quickly providing adequate, affordable homes, stopping unnecessary evictions and other forms of homelessness prevention.

“Family homelessness happens, quite often, mainly because there is less income than there used to be.”

7 [Anwen Jones; Joanne Bretherton et al \(2011\) The Effectiveness of Schemes to Enable Households at Risk of Domestic Violence to Remain in Their Own Homes London: Communities and Local Government.](#)

8 <https://www.dahalliance.org.uk>



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For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi>

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Cover Art: “Inner Spaces”, George Mannouris, New York. Acryl, 2019. Curated by freshart NYC.

*“Through my artwork I explore realms of possibilities in the eternal now that contains the past and the future. I attempt to tap into and convey timeless, universal beauty that aims to inspire a sense of awe, poetic wonder, reflection, and joy.”*

*Inspired by the “Ceremony In The Air” from the Lotus Sutra, I celebrate life in all its manifestations and marvel at its wonder and beauty, transcendent and interdimensional, intending to evoke joy, inspiration and reflection, such that the viewer would tap into his/her own inner beauty and dignity.”*

George Mannouris’ art is curated by freshart, an organisation in New York City, which produces public art exhibitions at various venues throughout the city to promote the talent and creativity of New York City’s disadvantaged and underserved adults. freshart artists live in supportive housing facilities, shelters, and senior residences. Artists receive 60% of proceeds from art sales, with the remaining funds supporting fresh art’s exhibitions and workshop programs.

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