

Women's Homelessness in Europe: Recognition and Response

Dr Joanne Bretherton

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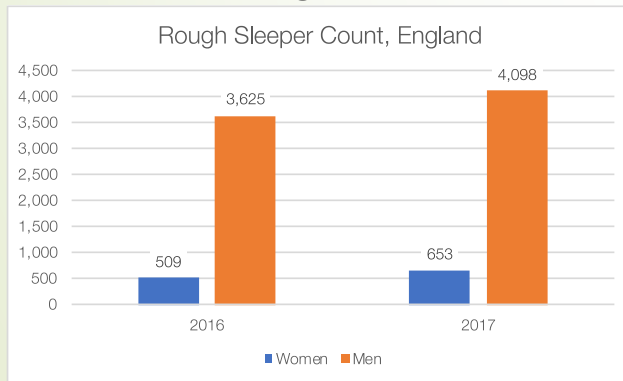


The Extent of Women's Homelessness – What do we know?

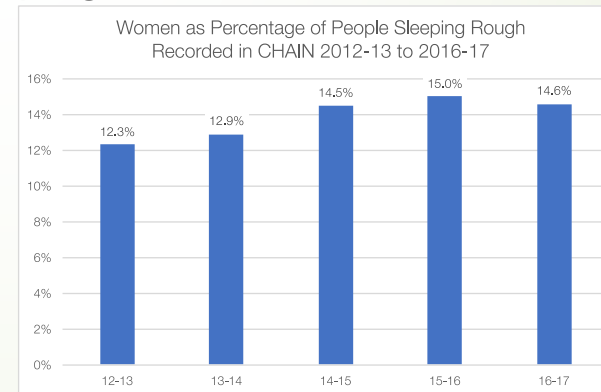
The available figures in most countries almost certainly underestimate numbers of homeless women. True extent of women's homelessness in Europe is unknown. However from some of the most recent statistics we do know.....

Rough Sleeping in England

In England in 2016, Government statistics show 12% of people reported sleeping rough were women and in 2017 the figure was 14%. The definition used includes people bedded down, apparently about to bed down and living in tents. CHAIN data is slightly higher:



Source: MHCLG.

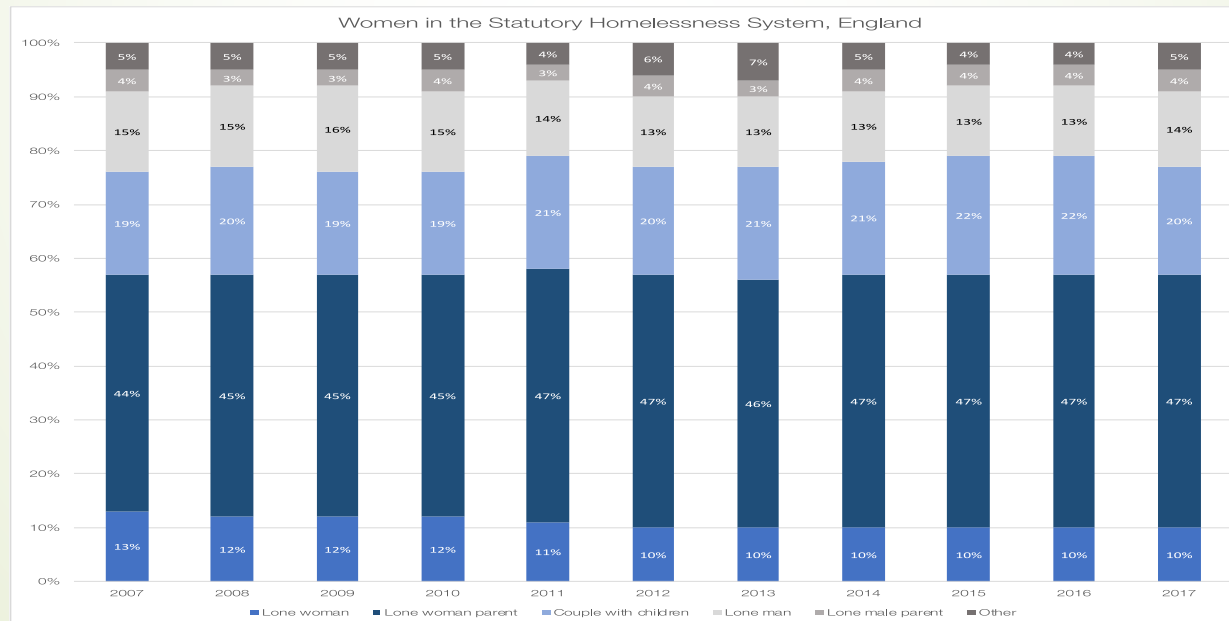


Source: CHAIN (authors' analysis). Base: 4,040 women and 24,095 men

The Extent of Women's Homelessness – What do we know?

Whatever dimension of homelessness you observe, women are present. They become even more evident as your definitions start to encompass family homelessness and hidden homelessness.

- England – 57% of all households accepted as homeless were headed by lone women (lone women parents at 47% and single women at 10%). Also a further 20% of homeless households (those within a couple with dependent children) contain a woman. Therefore 77% of statutorily homelessness involves a woman (DCLG, PIE data, 2018, n=57,890).



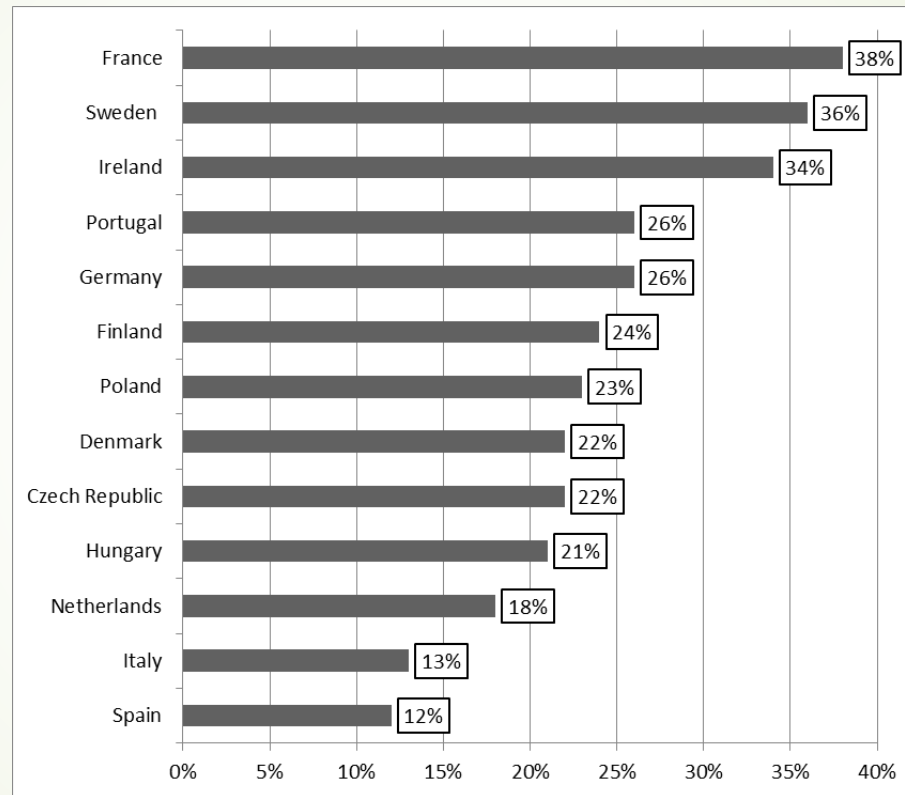
Source: MHCLG Live Tables. Author's analysis, Bretherton & Pleace, 2018.



The Extent of Women's Homelessness – What do we know?

- ▶ Scotland – 45.2% of all main applicants are female (Scottish Government, HL1, 2016/17).
- ▶ Ireland – 42% of the homeless population nationally are women with the figure rising to 44% for Dublin (Dept of Housing, Planning & Local Government / Central Statistics Office, July 2017).
- ▶ Finland – 22% of all homeless people are women (ARA, 2017).

The Extent of Women's Homelessness – What do we know?



Women's Homelessness as a Proportion of All Homelessness in 13 EU Member States.

Different methodologies and data sets were used in each country, (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014)



Recognition – Women's *Invisibility*

- ▶ Historically homelessness has been perceived as largely the domain of (single) men. However, the invisibility of women's homelessness – in the academic literature as well as within homelessness policy and service provision – has been recognised for some time (Watson & Austerberry, 1986; Edgar & Doherty, 2001; Baptista, 2010) but little consideration has been given to **why.....**

There are intersecting factors that account for homeless women's invisibility (Mayock & Bretherton, 2016):

1. The issue of *measurement* – the various ways in which the techniques of enumeration serve to obscure the extent of women's homelessness.
2. *Women's responses to homelessness* can serve to hide their situation.
3. Homeless women's *reaction to services* – the strategies used by them to avoid or delay service contact may be more significant than previously recognized in explaining the 'hiddenness' of women's homelessness.



Recognition – Enumeration in Europe

- ▶ Enumeration techniques across Europe are less well developed than is the case for single homeless men.

Four significant deficiencies:

- ▶ A key aspect of women's homelessness, hidden homelessness, has received limited attention. Challenges in counting this:
 - ▶ *They could be homeless for a long period of time and be bouncing from family to friend and only eventually come to the attention of the [homelessness services] when that breaks down, or they've exhausted all those options. Service Provider. (Pleace and Bretherton, 2013)*
- ▶ Family homelessness is less extensively researched and again this is usually the domain of women.
- ▶ When women are found among homeless populations, they are often noted rather than examined in depth.
- ▶ The experience of domestic violence causing homelessness is not sufficiently recorded, recognised or analysed as homelessness – a 'separate' social problem.



Recognition – Enumeration in Europe

- ▶ These limitations in data are set against a context of the wider evidence base on European homelessness. Research is skewed to the North West (especially the UK and Ireland) and tends to focus on rough sleepers and those in services.
- ▶ While data is improving (Spain, Portugal, Italy, Poland now collecting extensive data) definitions or frames of reference that exclude dimensions of female homelessness remains widespread (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2010; Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014).
- ▶ A key gap in what we know centres on understanding **why women respond to homelessness in the way they do**. Lots of evidence showing women not engaging with services and employing their own resources (Mayock and Bretherton, 2016; Bretherton, 2017). This not only leads us further into the enumeration quandary but also raises questions as to why women are not accessing homelessness services.

Women's Experience of Homelessness

- Historically, dominant discourse has depicted homeless women as deviant, transgressive and, by implication, as largely unworthy. Implications of a woman's **expected role** is at the fore.
- Many early texts on homelessness characterised women (when they included women) as sexually deviant and essentially lacking the ability to live and function 'as women' (O'Sullivan, 2016).
 - In England, 'Edna the Inebriate' a BBC drama depicting an eccentric, alcoholic, elderly woman who moved around an institutional circuit of hostels and psychiatric institutions.
 - In the US, Weiner (1984: 181): "women tramps were so deviant their existence was unthinkable to many and their numbers relatively few".
- Today, the language used to describe women who experience homelessness is far more nuanced but there is evidence of continuity in how these women are viewed and their situations understood.
- These categories, and the cultural constructions underpinning them, profoundly influence policy and service responses:


"Images of women's homelessness and definitions of homelessness – including their underlying assumptions produce particular policy responses and practices (while others are seen as 'unthinkable'), in turn (re)producing discursive categories such as 'the homeless woman'" (Löfstrand & Quilgars, 2016: 42).



Women's Experience of Homelessness- Services*

As with all aspects of women's homelessness, research and understanding of women's interactions with services is at best limited.

- Nonetheless, there are studies that have examined how women negotiate or 'manage' the experience of homelessness and this provides insight into the 'hiddenness' of their homelessness.
- Women will frequently only seek accommodation through formal channels (homelessness services) when they have exhausted alternative options (Mayock *et al.*, 2012).
- Significant variation throughout Europe in terms of the nature and range of services targeting women who experience homelessness.
- Shelter/hostels and other systems of emergency, short- or medium-term accommodation remain a dominant response in many countries.
 - Continued reliance on institutional responses to women's homelessness.
 - Evidence of women remaining in – or of cycling in and out of – homelessness services for lengthy periods (Mayock *et al.*, 2015; Reeve *et al.*, 2006) and of long-term homelessness among far greater numbers of women than is routinely recognised (Pleace, 2016).



Women's Experience of Homelessness- Services*

- ▶ Disconnect' between homelessness and domestic violence services (Baptista, 2010; Mayock *et al.*, 2016).
 - ▶ Qualitative research in Europe has shown anything from 40% to 100% of homeless women experiencing abuse and violence.
- ▶ The available research evidence suggests that service provision for women experiencing homelessness lacks gender sensitivity (Mayock & Bretherton, 2016).
- ▶ There is also evidence that the nature of service provision – which significantly impacts women's service experiences – influences women's decision-making and their *responses to homelessness*.

Women's Experience of Homelessness- Services* **Reasons for avoidance**

- **Informal Networks** - Women avoiding services at early stages of homelessness and relying on informal networks.
- **Stigma** - Women find many homelessness services difficult places to be because of the stigma of being homeless and their desire to conceal that status.
- **Fear** - Women frequently avoid homelessness services because of fear; because they feel threatened, unsafe and insecure (Mayock *et al.*, 2015).
 - Male-dominated services
 - Lack or absence of women-only services and spaces
 - Services tailored primarily to meet the needs of males
- *Women's experiences of services often become the single greatest barrier to service use and engagement.*



Women's Experience of Homelessness- Services* **Reasons for avoidance**

- Experiences of infantilisation/being treated like a child (Paradis *et al.*, 2012; Mayock *et al.*, 2015).
- Homeless women, particularly mothers, feeling judged for being homeless and or because of drug / alcohol use (Loftstrand and Thorn, 2004)
- Women struggle with the rules and regulations dictating their movement, daily routines and their interactions with their children, in many cases (Reeve *et al.*, 2006; Mayock *et al.*, 2015).
 - Leading to feeling subservient, a lack of control or 'say' in their daily lives and futures.



Innovations in Service Response for Women: **Threshold**

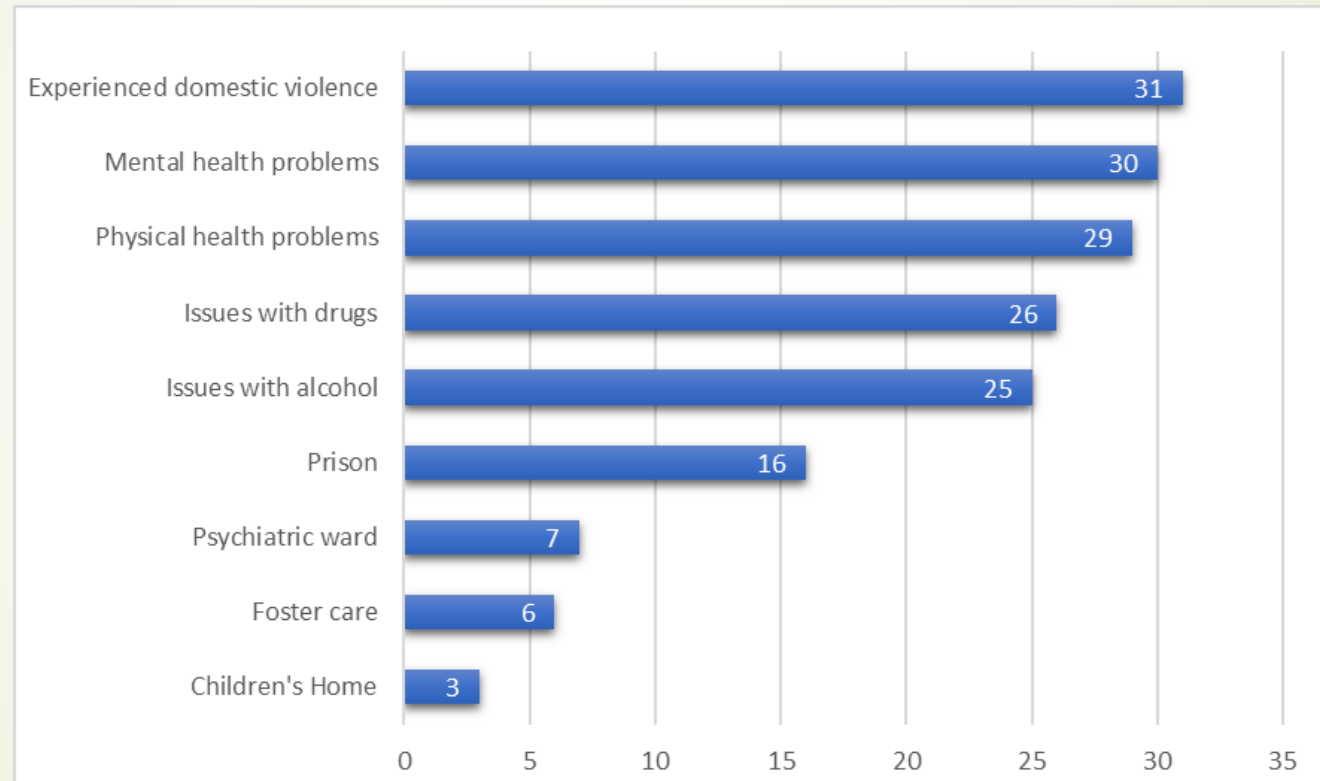
- First known Housing First project in Europe focused on women with complex needs/ offending issues.
- Developed by housing provider (Threshold) working with statutory Probation agency – drivers were addressing ‘revolving door’ issue and following visit here to Canada.
- Operational in 3 local authorities in Greater Manchester, England.
- Small project - Up to 12 women at one time; 2 workers and part-time manager.
- High fidelity to Housing First model, in particular:
 - Intensive / responsive / reliable service
 - High degree of customer choice and control
- Threshold just been commissioned to deliver first Housing First service for women with experience of domestic violence – funding from central Govt (MHCLG)



Innovations in Service Response for Women: **Threshold**

- High demand for service
- 82% single women at referral – BUT almost all recently in violent relationships; 79% had children but not currently living with them
- Adverse life experiences; need for 'trauma' informed care
- Challenge of finding housing; lost 10 women in waiting period...
- 20 women in own housing (18 housed; 2 supported in existing tenancies). By June 2017, of 20 in tenancies:
 - 16 still in tenancies (including moves) – 80% tenancy sustainment rate
 - 3 women supported to move in with family following difficulties with living independently (DV targets; neighbour complaints)
 - 1 tenancy abandoned
- Major impact on reducing recidivism; service providers felt service was offering 'protective factors'

Innovations in Service Response for Women: **Threshold**



Source: Quilgars and Bretherton, 2017



Innovations in Service Response for Women: **Threshold**

- ▶ Impact of housing: *'first step'; 'Godsend'; 'massive weight off my shoulders'; 'I've got my own home'; 'I feel safe'...*
- ▶ *There's not one thing that I've asked for help with and they've not helped me, there is nothing that they've said no to or I can't do that, absolutely everything, they are brilliant.*
- ▶ *I have phone contact every day, even at weekends – welfare checks, I love those welfare checks... because who phones at the weekend to see if you are alright? Nobody. But they do... It made me feel good that somebody is actually worried about me... it's amazing... it gives me that little boost every day, I like it.*
- ▶ *...she took everything on board and that's what she has worked off and it has just been brilliant, her support and how much she has taken the time out for me really – she is really good because she has took the time out for me and no-one ever does that for me.*

Innovations in Service Response for Women: DAHA

- ▶ The Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance's (DAHA) mission is to improve the housing sector's response to domestic abuse through the introduction and adoption of an established set of standards and an accreditation process.
- ▶ Launched in September of 2014, DAHA embeds the best practice learned and implemented by its three founding partners and has established the first accreditation for housing providers.



- ▶ DAHA Accreditation is designed to detect and respond to domestic abuse more effectively and provide early warning.
- ▶ DAHA Accreditation is the first step in delivering a consistent set of standards across housing providers in the UK.



Innovations in Service Response for Women: DAHA

- ▶ Domestic violence is a key cause of homelessness and access to safe housing is a key priority for survivors of domestic abuse and factors strongly into their decision making around whether to stay in or leave an abusive relationship.
- ▶ Housing professionals, including caretakers, neighbourhood managers, housing officers and repair staff are in an ideal place to identify those perpetrating and at risk of domestic abuse and their children and respond to them with appropriate support and information. DAHA's mission is to equip these professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills to support residents to live safely and free of abuse.
- ▶ The accreditation process will on average take between 3-12 months at the end of which the Housing Provider receives the DAHA Chartermark signalling that it has a robust and nationally accredited response to domestic abuse.
- ▶ For more information about DAHA and the accreditation process:
<https://www.dahalliance.org.uk>

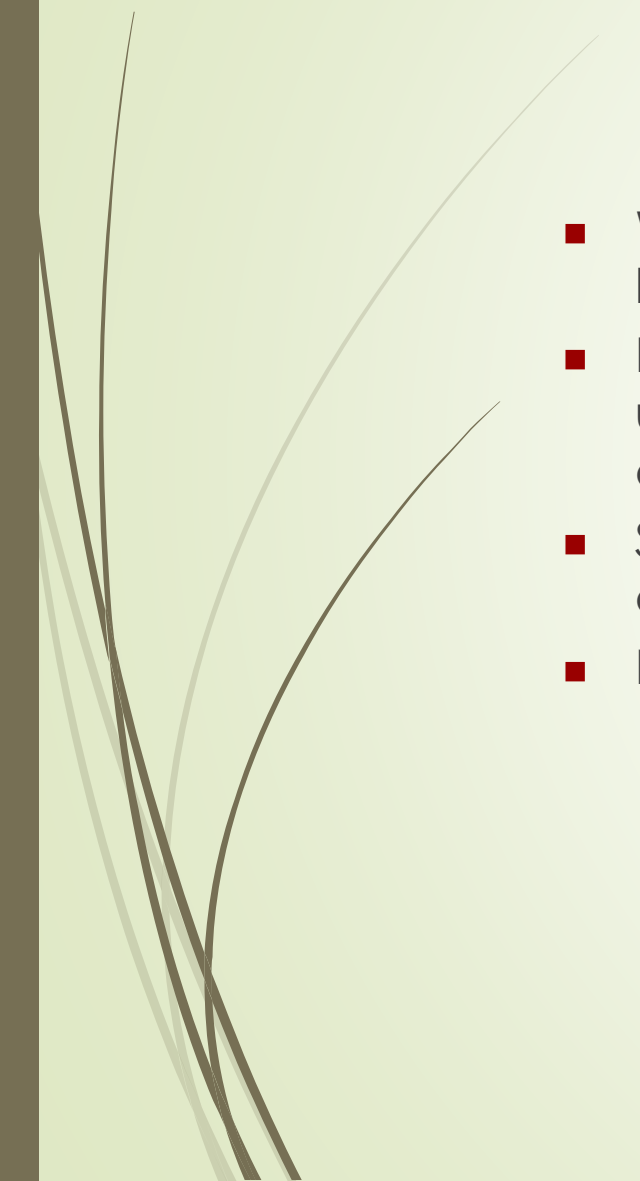


In Summary.....

- While we have *some data*, compared to that of men, research on women's homelessness is limited and inconsistent throughout Europe. This means that the evidence base is patchy and uneven.
- **Homeless Women's Invisibility:**
 - Related to a long-standing neglect of or marginalizing of women's homelessness by academics and policy makers.
 - Also related to measurement techniques, which obscure the extent of women's homelessness.
 - Recent research suggests that women's invisibility is one outcome of women's responses to homelessness and to their perceptions of how they are treated by services/service professionals.



In Summary.....

- Women are often experiencing and responding to situations of homelessness differently than their male counterparts.
 - Domestic violence, 'relationships', safety and trauma are central to understanding experience of unaccompanied homeless women – need for different sectors to work more closely together.
 - Shared need for better evidence base on 'what works' including applicability of Housing First for homeless women.
 - New innovations in the sector with women at the fore.
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Women's Homelessness in Europe Network (WHEN)



Women's Homelessness in Europe Network (WHEN)

- ▶ Established in 2012 by Dr Paula Mayock, Trinity College, Dublin
- ▶ Co-Directors:
 - ▶ Dr Joanne Bretherton, University of York, UK.
 - ▶ Dr Paula Mayock, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland.
- ▶ WHEN was developed by us in response to a lack of research and policy attention to gender dimensions of homelessness.
- ▶ We have received funding support from:



FOCUS Ireland



Women's Homelessness in Europe Network (WHEN)

- ▶ WHEN (Women's Homelessness in Europe Network) is a collaboration and network for researchers, policy makers and service professionals who have an interest in women's homelessness.
- ▶ People who are part of WHEN contribute to discussion and debate about women's homelessness across Europe and beyond. They share knowledge and information and have opportunities to disseminate and generate discussion on issues that can have a direct impact on policy and practice.
- ▶ The network currently has a core membership of fifteen senior academics from across twelve EU countries and includes representation from Denmark, England, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Slovenia and Sweden.
- ▶ We also have Associate Membership from around the World, including here in Canada.



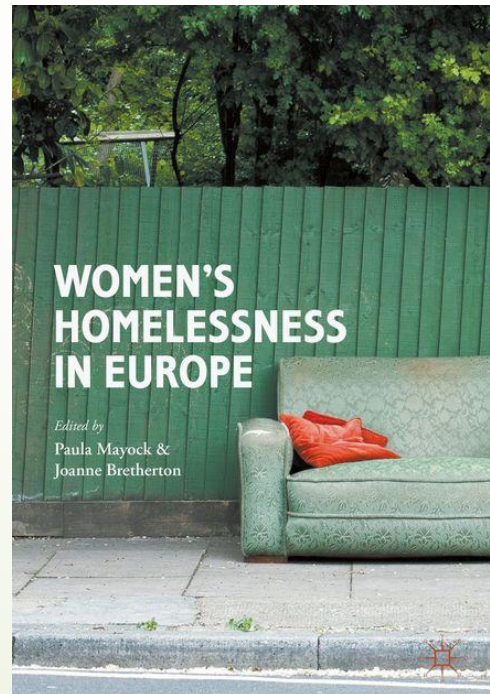
Women's Homelessness in Europe Network (WHEN)

- ▶ The core objectives of the network are:
 - ▶ To enhance the understanding of issues at the core of women's homelessness.
 - ▶ To foster international collaborative research on gender dimensions of homelessness.
 - ▶ To promote and develop academic scholarship and to generate practical and policy relevant research.
 - ▶ To facilitate the dissemination of research, analysis and debate on women and homelessness.



Women's Homelessness in Europe Network (WHEN)

- ▶ An important recently achieved goal of WHEN was the publication of Women's Homelessness in Europe, which assesses the state of knowledge on women's homelessness.
- ▶ This collection of papers is co-edited by Paula Mayock and Joanne Bretherton and published by Palgrave MacMillan.



Women's Homelessness in Europe Network (WHEN)

- ▶ In the medium term, WHEN plans to organise an international conference that will aim to share and disseminate research findings and promote comparative perspectives on women's homelessness.
- ▶ Possibly in York in early 2020.
- ▶ In the short-term and right now, WHEN welcomes your participation as an Associate Member and also invites 'Think Pieces' on women's homelessness.

<http://womenshomelessness.org>

- ▶ ***How would a network such as WHEN be established in the Canadian setting.....***





Thank you for listening.....

► Joanne.Bretherton@york.ac.uk

► Some useful references....

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