



# International lessons on tackling extreme housing exclusion

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by [Gina Netto](#), [Suzanne Fitzpatrick](#), [Filip Sosenko](#) and [Harry Smith](#)

This study uses lessons from eleven countries to identify solutions to the problem of extreme housing exclusion (homelessness, severe overcrowding, very poor or insecure housing).

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The current climate of deepening welfare cuts in the UK provides a compelling case for identifying solutions to the extreme housing exclusion faced by those groups who are entitled to little or no statutory support. This study draws together international lessons for tackling this phenomenon from 11 countries.

People facing extreme housing exclusion include various groups of migrants (undocumented and economic migrants, and asylum-seekers) and individuals with complex needs who are not able to engage with services.

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## **This report:**

- reviews international literature relating to the drivers of extreme housing exclusion and approaches to addressing the phenomenon;
- identifies and analyses innovative approaches to tackling the problem based on empirical evidence, including how and why they work; and
- assesses the transferability of the approaches to the UK, and what would need to change in order for them to work.

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# Executive summary

## Background

The current climate of austerity and deepening welfare cuts in the UK and across many other European states provides a compelling argument for identifying solutions to the extreme housing exclusion faced by those groups who are entitled to little or no statutory support. Manifestations of extreme housing exclusion include rooflessness, severe overcrowding and living in very poor or insecure housing.

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One key route into these circumstances of extreme housing exclusion is a lack of eligibility for benefits or social housing for various categories of migrants, including undocumented and economic migrants, and asylum-seekers. For UK nationals, on the other hand, who are usually eligible for Housing Benefit and social housing, routes into extreme housing exclusion – particularly rough sleeping – often relate to extreme social as well as economic marginality. In many cases this is associated with complex support needs, such as substance dependencies or mental health problems, which make it difficult for people to sustain accommodation.

The aims of the current study are to identify international lessons on tackling extreme housing exclusion from a diverse range of socioeconomic and political contexts.

## Tackling the drivers of extreme housing exclusion with innovative solutions

Multiple drivers, often interacting with each other, contribute to the phenomenon of extreme housing exclusion. Structural factors include the lack of affordable housing and high house prices. Other drivers relate to the economic circumstances of the people affected by the phenomenon, including low income and unemployment. Further reasons relate to ineffective engagement with people with mental health problems and substance dependencies. Experience of gender-based violence or trafficking can also contribute to loss of home. Finally, weak social links due to recent arrival, stigma, mental ill health or dispersed settlement patterns over large rural areas can also contribute to the phenomenon.

Most of the innovative solutions identified below address one or more of these drivers. Although many of them require some funding from the state, evidence of cost-effectiveness is available in many cases.

## Solutions that tackle the lack of affordable housing

### Maximising the use of empty buildings

A historical example from Geneva, Switzerland, highlights the value of ‘sweating’ existing assets in the form of empty properties in city centres, in order to boost the supply of affordable housing. A strategic approach to such assets, which involves identifying empty properties, the use of legal instruments, and adequate resourcing to enable these properties to be used for (temporary) housing, can add to the supply of affordable housing.

## **Prevention and responses to indefinite occupation of property or land**

People who are unable to find accommodation may resort to informally occupying vacant land or property. Lessons from the United States indicate scope for creative use of planning legislation to enable religious organisations to accommodate homeless people on land that they own. Local authorities have also played an active role in supporting homeless people by issuing temporary use permits, establishing links to key services or employment agencies, and ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations.

## **Encouraging the development of community-led communal housing solutions**

Community-led housing solutions, including housing cooperatives, are often closely linked to the use of empty buildings in Switzerland and other countries. These housing organisations may be attractive to individuals who are willing to consider collective solutions. Factors that would facilitate the growth of housing cooperatives are greater public awareness of such organisations, robust governance structures, innovative mortgage packages and government support.

## **Designing low-income permanent housing**

House building in the UK tends to be dominated by a small number of large companies, restricting the design of affordable housing. In Canada, the Grow Home prototype was designed for low-income renters who were willing to buy cheaper, well-designed, smaller properties, and to complete the construction of the property themselves when their resources allowed. Such homes are likely to relieve pressure at the lower end of the housing market and may provide an alternative to private rented accommodation.

## **Designing high quality temporary housing**

New forms of temporary housing can play an important role in providing good quality, short-term accommodation for economic migrants on short-term contracts and others in need of such accommodation. In order to facilitate the development of these homes within the UK, the house-building industry would need to be encouraged to build such homes and the requirement for them would need to be assessed.

## **Community self-build approaches**

Community self-build approaches aimed at low-income self-builders are already in existence in the UK, but tend to form only a small proportion of the growing self-build output. Supporting such projects can lower the cost of housing through eliminating the cost of developers' overheads and profits. Factors that would facilitate community self-build in the UK are increasing the availability of land, and access to financial and specialist advice. Modern construction techniques can speed up the pace of construction of both temporary housing and community self-build approaches.

## **Solutions that tackle other drivers to extreme housing exclusion**

### **Housing First approaches**

Housing First approaches constitute a departure from the traditional model of care in which homeless people with complex needs (often involving substance dependencies) are placed into 'transitional' accommodation, and only moved into independent housing after they are deemed 'housing ready'. In contrast, under Housing First ordinary housing is immediately provided to service users who have access to intensive and open-ended support, but who are not obliged to take this up as a condition of living in this housing. Such approaches are increasingly being used in North America and many Western European countries, and to a limited extent in the UK, and have resulted in positive outcomes for service users and providers in terms of tenancy sustainment and some health-based indicators.

## ***Skaeve huse* approaches**

*Skaeve huse* or 'alternative housing' projects in Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands provide independent and permanent accommodation for a small minority of people with severe addiction and behavioural problems who are unable to live in either ordinary housing with floating support or in supported accommodation. The projects consist of small groups of houses in carefully selected locations, where residents are allowed to live as they please, without any expectation that they are obliged to engage in rehabilitation. The projects involve the support of municipalities, working in partnership with health and social workers, and the police. Although viewed positively by the majority of residents and housing providers where more conventional approaches have failed, they remain controversial and do not sit well with strategies that emphasise more community-based approaches.

## **Housing women and children who have experienced gender-based violence or trafficking**

In the UK, dominant models of provision for women who have experienced domestic abuse take the form of temporary accommodation in refuges and floating support. An innovative model that emerged in South Africa is specialist housing that takes into account the changing financial circumstances of the women. As the incomes of the women grow, through taking up employment, they are enabled to move into larger accommodation owned by the same organisation, allowing for continuity of support.

## **Strengthening social links**

In the UK, with the exception of mixed tenure initiatives, projects that set out to counter stigma and build social links through the built environment are relatively rare. Innovations include: the use of 'host' families in apartment blocks to support refugees and displaced people in Serbia; the leadership role played by service users in homelessness services in the Netherlands; and the sensitive (re)design of the built environment to promote opportunities for interaction between and within communities in the US and Australia.

## **Mobilising social change**

The emergence and role of social movements in countries such as Argentina and Spain illustrate the potential for positive change once public awareness of the structural factors that contribute to the housing crisis is raised. Such movements involve people affected by extreme housing exclusion working in partnership with organisations and individuals from a range of disciplinary backgrounds. They have succeeded in helping to bring about legislative changes that have enabled some sections of the population to access housing.

## **Cost-effectiveness of solutions**

It is worth noting that it was difficult to find solutions with no state support at all in the diverse socioeconomic contexts reviewed. However, many elements of interventions that demonstrated cost-effectiveness were identified. Some solutions, including the conversion of non-residential properties, cooperative housing, homes that can be built incrementally or temporary housing, clearly indicate the potential to lower housing costs for individuals on low incomes. Other solutions seek to draw on community resources and commitment in finding local solutions, through homes constructed via community self-build programmes or the use of host families. Solutions that involve the immediate provision of housing to people with complex needs indicate the potential to reduce the long-term social and economic costs of 'repeat homelessness'. Yet other innovations provide social value in enhancing employability, health and community cohesion, as well as accommodating people on low incomes.

## **Conclusions**

The lessons emerging from this study strongly indicate the need for a multi-faceted approach to tackling the multiple drivers of extreme housing exclusion. In order for the solutions identified to be adopted in the UK, they would need to be politically and culturally acceptable, institutionally practical and financially

viable. Considering changes to the nature and design of affordable housing that is available in the UK, under what conditions it can be provided, and for which groups, is likely to involve sustained engagement with a broad range of stakeholders including central and local government, architects, property developers, house builders, planners, environmentalists, migrant and homelessness organisations, and financial institutions. However, the current emphasis on localism and community empowerment provides fertile ground for considering how more community-oriented initiatives might be supported to help ameliorate extreme housing exclusion.

# 1 Introduction

## Research context

The current climate of austerity and deepening welfare cuts in the UK and across many other European states provides a compelling argument for identifying solutions to the extreme housing exclusion faced by those groups who are entitled to little or no statutory support. As the welfare net is radically cut back (Tunstall, 2015), pressure on homelessness services (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015b) is likely to rise. The combination of an increased number of homeless people and cuts to funding for organisations delivering services to them is likely to mean that such organisations will have less scope to respond to those with little or no entitlement. Yet the pressing needs of those who are likely to be most vulnerable are likely to remain.

The focus of the current study on international lessons on tackling extreme housing exclusion signals an interest in policy and practice responses that are likely to alleviate the phenomenon. These include rooflessness, severe overcrowding, or other very poor or insecure housing conditions (Netto *et al.*, 2011; Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015b). A key route into these circumstances of extreme housing exclusion include a lack of eligibility for benefits or social housing for various categories of migrants, including undocumented and economic migrants and asylum-seekers. Undocumented migrants, that is, migrants without any legal permission to be in the country of residence, from both EU and non-EU countries, have 'no recourse to public funds'. Economic migrants from the EU are not entitled to access public funds or social housing in the first three months of their stay in Britain. Afterwards their entitlements depend on their situation (and may be none or very limited), but in general have been eroded by recent legislative changes. Asylum-seekers, who are fleeing war or political conflict in their countries of origin, have no right to work and, in the process of claiming asylum in the UK, have limited support. Refused asylum-seekers also have no right to work and generally no recourse to public funds; only under stringent conditions can they apply for very limited state support.

The specific vulnerabilities of each of these groups of people have been documented (Kumarappan *et al.*, 2013; Woolfson *et al.*, 2013), including forced labour (Geddes *et al.*, 2013; Lewis *et al.*, 2013) and destitution (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015a). A number of studies concur that a high proportion of asylum-seekers face destitution, especially refused asylum-seekers (Smart, 2009; Lever 2012). Destitution has been found at all stages of the asylum-seeking process, from initial application to the transition to refugee status (Carnet *et al.*, 2014). There are strong overlaps between destitution and vulnerability to extreme housing exclusion. Not only are these groups largely ineligible for social housing and Housing Benefit – the main 'planks' of the housing safety net that provides a level of protection for UK nationals – very often they cannot access even homeless hostels and emergency shelters because of their ineligibility for Housing Benefit.

For UK nationals, on the other hand, the route into extreme housing exclusion (particularly rough sleeping) often relates to extreme social as well as economic marginality. In many cases, this is associated with complex support needs, such as substance dependencies or mental health problems, which make it difficult for people to sustain accommodation (Bramley *et al.*, 2015). While these groups do usually have access to state support in the form of Housing Benefit to meet at least some of their rent, those who are single will generally lack entitlement to long-term rehousing under homelessness legislation unless they are in Scotland (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2015b). This means that they may find themselves in a position of extreme housing exclusion if they lose their accommodation and are unable to access voluntary sector provision to meet their support and accommodation needs. The importance of developing effective homelessness prevention initiatives and housing support packages for this group of people is also clear.

Very little attention has been paid to how the most excluded groups fare in different welfare contexts (Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 2013). Policy and practice responses to such groups raise issues related to the national and universal character of welfare states and the boundaries of state responsibility towards individual citizens, as well as their human rights obligations to those who are not citizens. Studying how extreme housing exclusion is tackled in countries with considerably less developed housing safety nets

than the UK provides an opportunity to consider alternative approaches to alleviating such exclusion. However, it is also worth examining innovative approaches in countries with relatively well-developed statutory provision, since highly marginalised groups are present in even the most protective welfare contexts (Fitzpatrick and Stephens, 2013). It may also be worth examining innovations that require more than minimal or no state support, if such approaches appear to be cost-effective relative to other approaches.

## Aims of the research

The present study aims to identify international lessons on tackling extreme housing exclusion from a diverse range of socioeconomic and political contexts.

Five more specific research questions can be identified:

1. What lessons can be learned in the UK from how other countries provide homes for excluded and/or exploited groups on a permanent or temporary basis?
2. What are the factors or principles that contribute to successful innovations?
3. How cost-effective are these innovations?
4. What are the implications of these findings for various stakeholder groups, including policy-makers, practitioners, the voluntary sector, employers, businesses and communities? What would need to change for these innovations to be adopted in the UK?
5. What are the main gaps in research?

## Methods

A systematic review of the literature, and key websites and databases, was undertaken to identify the main drivers of extreme housing exclusion and approaches that effectively tackled the phenomenon. The study was also publicised through relevant networks. This led to the identification of promising innovations in a diverse range of socioeconomic contexts, including both OECD (Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the United States) and non-OECD countries (Argentina, Serbia and South Africa). Eleven experts were then recruited in each of these countries to contribute to the research by providing contextual information relating to extreme housing exclusion, conventional mechanisms for addressing the phenomenon and innovative approaches within the national context.

Thirty two interviews were carried out with key informants of innovative projects (including managers and key partners) to explore the factors that led to the growth of these projects, the target groups, sources of funding, costs, innovative aspects, evaluative criteria, impact, replication in other contexts and the challenges that they faced. This led to analysis of the individual projects within the context of the country in which they operated, and to study of commonalities in the approaches taken by diverse projects across national contexts in tackling extreme housing exclusion.

Draft versions of the report benefited from discussion with a small group of 'critical friends'. This was followed by stakeholder engagement through events organised in Glasgow and London, which helped inform assessment of the relevance of the projects for the UK and the writing of the final report.

## Summary

This chapter has introduced the context for the study, its main aim and research questions. It has also provided an outline of the methods employed. In the next chapter, we explain the links between our approach to conceptualising extreme housing exclusion, and selecting and categorising innovative approaches to tackling the phenomenon.

# 2 Conceptualising extreme housing exclusion and identifying innovative approaches

In this chapter, we develop our approach to identifying lessons for policy transfer that are relevant to tackling extreme housing exclusion in the UK. We begin by conceptualising extreme housing exclusion, applying insights from the literature on extreme poverty to identify multiple drivers of the phenomenon that may interact with each other. These are then linked to innovative solutions that address specific dimensions of the phenomenon. Solutions are considered to be ‘innovative’ if they are not widely practised in the UK. The policies most relevant to each of these solutions are also highlighted. Cumulatively, the study indicates the need for a multi-faceted approach to tackle the drivers of extreme housing exclusion.

## Conceptualising extreme housing exclusion

As discussed in Chapter 1, the term ‘extreme housing exclusion’ signals an interest in groups of people who are affected by severely disadvantaged housing circumstances, including undocumented and economic migrants, asylum-seekers and other people who have complex needs. Experiences of severe marginalisation within the housing system include rooflessness, severe overcrowding or very poor housing conditions (Garapich, 2010; Netto *et al.*, 2011).

The term extreme housing exclusion has not been used in the academic literature, but it is likely that there are considerable overlaps between this phenomenon and the experience of extreme poverty, a concept which has been the focus of some academic attention. The term extreme poverty has been coined to refer to the situation of those whose experience of poverty is multi-dimensional (that is, including money metric measures, such as lack of income, and basic needs measures, such as shelter and food), severe and persistent. Extreme poor households are also characterised as lacking in assets and excluded from the labour market (Du Toit, 2005). These households are also reported to experience social exclusion from the economic, social and political spheres (de Haan, 1998 and 2000) and differential or ‘adverse incorporation’ into key societal institutions that protect people from extreme want, that is, the state, market or civil society (Hickey and du Toit, 2007; Sharam and Hulse, 2014). However, while drawing on the literature on extreme poverty provides some useful insights into understanding aspects of extreme housing exclusion, approaches to tackling the latter need to be informed by understanding the factors that contribute to exclusion from the housing market in the UK.

## Drivers of extreme housing exclusion

As noted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Housing Market Taskforce, even before the credit crunch and the global financial crisis, increasing numbers of people were priced out of home-ownership, the dominant preferred tenure (Stephens, 2011). The growing need for traditional social housing – the only means of obtaining secure and affordable housing for those households that cannot achieve home-ownership – remains (Stephens, 2011). The increasing reliance on the private rented sector, especially among young people, is also evident (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2015a; Kenway *et al.*, 2015). The difficulties of accessing affordable housing are likely to be exacerbated among the people who are the focus of this report – people who are either not eligible or prioritised for social housing or Housing Benefit, or who may not be prioritised for rehousing.

These groups of people experience a range of specific drivers that interact with poverty, resulting in extreme housing exclusion. Migrants – including undocumented migrants, (refused) asylum-seekers and economic migrants – commonly face exclusion or constrained access to the labour market (Hudson *et al.*, 2013). In some cases, this may in turn be related to lack of recognition of skills or experience of racism in

the labour market (Hudson *et al.*, 2013; Netto *et al.*, 2014). Other drivers are lack of access to financial support from family or friends, and lack of access to credit.

UK nationals with complex needs related to alcohol or substance dependencies may also face similar drivers leading to extreme housing exclusion. Additionally, poor mental and physical health may exacerbate these problems.

While these two broad groups are presented as distinct, some overlap between them is likely. For instance, Garapich (2010) has revealed that alcohol addiction is an issue among homeless economic migrants. The physical and mental health problems of (refused) asylum-seekers, traumatised by war and loss or separation from family and friends, have also been documented (Mulvey, 2009; Smart, 2009). Furthermore, experience of gender-based abuse or trafficking may also be viewed as a driver of extreme housing exclusion that cuts across these groups.

Other drivers of extreme housing exclusion common to all the groups that are the focus of this study include weak social capital, though the specific factors that contribute to this may differ. For instance, recent migration of individuals or households inevitably involves loss of contact with family and friends (Netto, 2011a). Drug and alcohol addiction may also contribute to loss of connections with family and friends (Lomax and Netto, 2007). Other factors that contribute to a weakening of social links may include stigma (Mulvey, 2009) or dispersed settlement patterns in remote or rural areas (de Lima *et al.*, 2011). Yet more factors that contribute to extreme housing exclusion are a lack of 'voice', which contributes to an inability to influence decision-making (de Haan, 2000).

A number of specific drivers, acting independently or simultaneously, can thus be seen as contributing to extreme housing exclusion among the groups that are the focus of this report. Below, we outline our approach to identifying innovations that address these drivers.

## Identifying innovations

A systematic review of the literature, key websites and databases, and consultation with country-based experts in the 11 case study countries resulted in a long list of interventions that are not conventionally practised in the UK. The experts also provided an analysis of the main manifestations of extreme housing exclusion, recent trends, the groups affected and the conventional mechanisms for addressing housing exclusion in each country. This information is summarised in the separate [Appendix](#). The experts also contributed to identifying innovative approaches in each of the case study countries.

## International policy transfer, lesson-drawing and selection criteria for innovative solutions

Following identification of the long list of innovations to tackling extreme housing exclusion, solutions most likely to be relevant to the UK were identified. This analysis was informed by studies that examined why and how policies in one context were transferred to another, and what processes facilitate or constrain policy transfer (Parsell *et al.*, 2014; Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000). The dangers of uninformed transfer were also noted, as was the importance of solutions being politically acceptable, socially legitimate, economically sound and institutionally practicable (Jenkins and Smith, 2004).

## Evaluative criteria

The following criteria were used to select approaches to tackling extreme housing exclusion and to assess their relevance for the UK:

- responsiveness to drivers of extreme housing exclusion;
- lack of, or limited, dependence on state funding; and
- availability of evidence relating to effectiveness of the solution.

In practice, we found that it was difficult for housing solutions to meet all of the above criteria, especially the second one. Although many of the approaches identified relied on some state subsidy, they are included in the study because they address drivers of housing exclusion, with some indication of success and cost-effectiveness. We also found that several successful approaches were inaccessible to some of the most disadvantaged groups in case study countries, either because they did not meet the eligibility criteria or because they require some financial resources. This is consistent with the findings of Leavy and Howard (2013), which reviewed 84 participatory studies of people living in extreme poverty and found that they are often less able to access formal support than those who are less economically disadvantaged. Solutions that serve less disadvantaged groups are included in this study because of their innovativeness and potential to reduce pressure on the housing market, and so indirectly assist in tackling extreme housing exclusion.

## Analysis

The shortlist of innovative solutions was linked to the specific drivers of extreme housing exclusion that they tackled and the target groups for each project, as shown in the first three columns of Table 1. The policies most relevant to each of these innovations are summarised in column 4, while column 5 indicates the chapters in which the innovations and their policy relevance are discussed in this report. The solutions were initially analysed within the context of the case study country, and then further analysed in terms of their relevance to the UK, including through input from stakeholder engagement events.

**Table 1: Drivers of extreme housing exclusion, innovations and policy relevance**

Specific drivers of extreme housing exclusion	Target group	Innovations	Relevant policies	Chapter in report
<p>Low income, lack of access to benefits and social housing, lack of access to financial support from family or friends and to credit</p> <p>Exclusion from the labour market or employment in low-paid work</p>	<p>(Refused) asylum-seekers</p> <p>Undocumented migrants</p> <p>Economic migrants</p> <p>UK nationals who are eligible but not prioritised for social housing and on low incomes</p> <p>People on low incomes</p>	<p>Providing new forms of low-income housing through converting empty buildings</p>	<p>Optimising the use of empty properties</p> <p>Supporting the growth of community-led communal housing solutions</p> <p>Enabling community ownership of land</p>	<p>Chapter 3: Facilitating access to housing through alternative approaches</p>
		<p>Formalising informal occupation of properties by individuals</p> <p>Preventing and responding to informal occupation of land</p>	<p>Extending homelessness responses to people indefinitely occupying land</p>	
		<p>Educating higher education students in the design of low-cost, sustainable housing</p> <p>Reducing size of housing to lower housing costs</p> <p>Designing 'unfinished' housing to allow individuals to buy cheaper homes and to complete building when resources allow</p> <p>Use of low-cost, environmentally friendly materials</p>	<p>Increasing the capacity of future built-environment professionals</p> <p>Supporting the design of unfinished homes, which can be finished as individual resources increase</p>	<p>Chapter 4: Designing homes for low-income groups</p>
		<p>Economic migrants employed in seasonal work</p> <p>Designing high quality, temporary accommodation</p> <p>Use of prefabricated panels to speed up the construction process</p>	<p>Diversifying the supply of low-cost accommodation</p>	

(Continued on next page)

Specific drivers of extreme housing exclusion	Target group	Innovations	Relevant policies	Chapter in report
Low income, lack of access to benefits and social housing, lack of access to financial support from family or friends and to credit  Exclusion from the labour market or employment in low-paid work	People on low incomes with the skills and interest to get involved in self-build projects	Support of community self-build approaches through technical advice and assistance	Diversifying the supply of low-cost accommodation; enhancing employability	Chapter 5: Supporting self-build approaches and enhancing employability
Lack of access to benefits and social housing  Exclusion from the labour market and from traditional forms of housing	UK nationals with complex needs	Housing First projects <i>Skaeve huse</i> projects	Preventing repeat homelessness by meeting complex needs	Chapter 6: Providing immediate access to housing
Gender-based abuse or trafficking	Women who have experienced gender-based abuse or trafficking	Immediate access to housing, support with employment and responsiveness to changing income	Reducing vulnerability to repeated gender-based violence, while incentivising employability	
Weak social links	(Refused) asylum-seekers	Use of host families	Supporting integration with the local population	Chapter 7: Building social links
	People using homelessness services	Client-led homelessness services	Ensuring effective delivery of homelessness services through user empowerment	
	People on low incomes	Designing built environments that facilitate interaction	Creating cohesive and sustainable communities, reducing vulnerability to homelessness	
Lack of 'voice' in influencing decision-making	People affected by extreme housing exclusion; general public	Lobbying to raise awareness of structural factors that contribute to extreme housing exclusion	Enhancing governance of housing through effective citizen participation	Chapter 8: Mobilising social change to tackle extreme housing exclusion

## Structure of the remainder of the report

Chapters 3 to 8 discuss the innovations in more detail, including their relevance for the UK and the factors that would enable them to work in this country. Wherever relevant, similar work that is already being carried out in the UK is referred to, in order to indicate the viability of the approaches and the scope for further transfer. Finally, Chapter 9 draws together key messages emerging from the review, synthesises the findings, considers the implications and concludes the study.

# 3 Facilitating access to housing through alternative approaches

Low or limited income, and lack of eligibility for Housing Benefit or social housing, may lead some people to develop their own informal solutions to meet their housing needs. For instance, they may occupy empty properties or vacant land, for indefinite periods of time. It should be emphasised that wherever possible, the need for people to resort to informal solutions should be avoided, through early identification of housing need and facilitating access to good quality, affordable housing. However, where this is not possible, it is important to consider alternative approaches. This chapter explores three possible alternative solutions – the use of empty properties, the use of vacant land and community-led communal housing – to enable people on very low incomes to access housing.

## Use of empty properties

One way of increasing access to affordable housing is through more effective use of empty properties. Here, there may be some value in considering what can be learnt from a historical example of the use of empty properties in Geneva, Switzerland, where there is a highly pressured housing market.

### **Box 1: From informal housing solutions to community-led communal housing – Geneva, Switzerland**

As many as 190 empty properties in the city were informally occupied in the seventies and eighties, including by people without access to homes and undocumented migrants. Usually, people who were living in these buildings were on low incomes and paid almost no rent to maintain the building.

The occupation of buildings in this way was made possible by: the tolerance and liberal politics of the city; the establishment of trust agreements between the state (either the city or the Canton) and the occupants; and a groundswell of public support and a policy of 'no eviction'. The occupation eventually came to an end in the nineties due to a lack of political support. However, by this time, public awareness of the structural factors that contributed to the shortage of affordable housing had been raised, and had contributed to a consortium in favour of associative actions related to housing (Rabinovich and Poschet, 2006).

## Identifying lessons for the UK

The informal occupation of buildings that eventually contributed to the development of community-led housing initiatives in Switzerland illustrates the potential for collective action once public awareness of the need to tackle the shortage of affordable housing has been raised. The case study also shows how empty properties can be used to address the shortage of affordable housing in areas where the market is highly pressured. If cost-effective, the use of empty properties may also shorten the queue for waiting-list applicants for social housing. Standards relating to safety, hygiene and the quality of accommodation are all obviously important, and acceptable standards may need to be negotiated with the regulatory body. Another strand of action may be to review the property rights of owners of large, empty properties, as part of a strategic approach that takes the view that in highly pressured areas, such buildings may be viewed as a potential resource. Such an approach is likely to involve legal experts working closely with local authorities and communities, and would require adequate resourcing.

Priemus (2015) has revealed that the use of empty properties is an important part of the housing strategy in the Netherlands. Stakeholder engagement carried out as part of this research revealed that the conversion of empty homes is already being undertaken by several local authorities in Scotland. The Scottish Empty Homes partnership is funded by the Scottish Government and housed by Shelter Scotland. Work carried out by the partnership focuses on enabling councils and their partners to bring empty homes back into use, by providing advice, tools and loans, and showcasing good practice.

In England, an evaluation of the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme (EHCGP) has found an increase in community-led work in bringing empty homes back to use, which benefited groups 'unlikely to be assisted through homelessness or social housing routes' (Mullins and Sacranie, 2014). Also relevant to optimising the use of existing properties is the use of licensed agreements with the landlord, as found by Petch (2015), in properties either owned by charities or provided to them and used by individuals with no recourse to public funds. In the Leeds area, the Canopy Housing Project has renovated derelict houses and worked in partnership with the local authority and housing associations to buy empty properties, for asylum-seekers and refugees among others.

Much of the work undertaken by these projects supports the findings of a Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) report (2004), which highlighted the value of a strategy to put the substantial number of empty properties in the UK into use, as a means of increasing the supply of affordable housing. The report argued that more attention could be paid to how legal instruments, including amended legislation, can help sustain the occupancy of individuals with few other alternatives to housing, where the buildings would otherwise remain unused. Stakeholder engagement revealed strong support for the use of empty properties, citing: a fit with the overall public sector ethos of 'best value' and a 'recycle and reuse' approach. The efficient use of resources and land, given the decline of high street retail and office spaces, and the existence of empty churches were also cited in support of this approach, as well as cost-effectiveness and benefits to the local community. Factors that were identified as facilitating the use of empty properties were: political will; a strategic approach to the use of empty properties as part of the local housing strategy; the willingness of planning authorities to approve the use of empty properties to accommodate homeless people; and the use of the derelict and properties 'at risk' register to identify properties. Providing advice relating to the conversion of empty properties and discouraging properties from being left empty, for example, through tax increases, were also identified as likely to encourage the use of empty properties. Compulsory Purchase Orders were identified as a possible mechanism that could be used to help ensure use of the properties. In Scotland, it was highlighted that the Community Empowerment Bill could give local authorities greater powers to deal with empty homes and buildings. Potential barriers included: the difficulty of tracing property owners in some cases; the need for additional resources establishing the feasibility of converting such properties into housing; and the need to comply with health and safety legislation.

## Indefinite occupation of vacant land

The occupation of vacant land in the UK is an area of concern, as indicated by Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG, 2015a). This document sets out the 'robust powers' available to councils and landowners to 'clamp down quickly' on such encampments, but also highlights how tent site licences can be used to license the use of the land as a site for movable dwellings. Local authorities are able to decide to license 'tented areas' on existing sites within the 28-day planning allowance period. If the land is to be occupied for a period exceeding 28 days in total in a year, planning permission must be obtained. Use of land for more than 42 days consecutively or 60 days in total in any consecutive 12 months must have a site licence. The same publication also makes reference to the use of Section 235 of the Local Government Act 1972, which enables the local district council or London borough council to make byelaws for 'the good rule and governance' of the whole or any part of the district or borough. However, references to the underlying reasons that lead individuals to informally occupy land, including homelessness, are missing.

A US-based study by Loftus-Farren (2011) reveals how religious organisations can be supported in accommodating homeless people on vacant land through legislation. It also documents a wide range of strategies that have been employed by local governments to accommodate people occupying land in encampments for indefinite periods of time, including temporary use permits, revised local ordinances, the relocation of encampments to locations more acceptable locally, or limits on the size of encampments. Only a small number of municipalities have actually changed local laws. Where ordinances have been amended, these have been accompanied by other requirements, such as the involvement of a host agency to facilitate links to key services and to help individuals find work, the need to apply for a permit, and compliance with health and safety regulations and codes of conduct. These approaches illustrate the range of strategies that can be used to support individuals who have not been able to afford available housing, while managing the informal occupation of land. A more recent US-based study

highlights that in most cases, municipalities have shut down camps without providing alternative housing or shelter, often arresting residents and destroying their property in the process (Hunter *et al.*, 2014). The authors emphasise that while the existence of encampments reflects a severe lack of affordable housing – and represents a violation of the human right to adequate housing – when adequate housing is not available, forced evictions of these communities may violate human rights.

## **Lessons for the UK**

The innovations considered above reveal how local authorities in Switzerland and the US have attempted to respond to manifestations of extreme housing exclusion in the form of informal occupation of property or land. It is important to note that in both countries, these phenomena were recognised as manifestations of the chronic shortage of affordable housing. Probably the most important lesson to draw from these examples is the risk that unless measures are taken to increase the supply of affordable housing in the UK, increasing numbers of people may find themselves with no alternative but to informally occupy empty properties or land. This would clearly be highly undesirable, not least because of concerns around the quality and safety of available accommodation, and the vulnerability of some of the groups concerned.

However, where people are found to be informally occupying land, the case studies reveal that it is possible to consider responses other than eviction or reconnection. Existing guidance produced by the DCLG already allows for occupancy of areas designated as ‘tented areas’ through the issuing of licences for fixed periods. Additional lessons then relate to ensuring access to health, educational and employability services, and enabling the individuals concerned to progress from their current accommodation. The study also indicates the scope for churches in the UK to play a greater role in supporting homeless people, including asylum-seekers, on vacant land that the churches own, provided they are able to obtain consent from planning authorities.

## **Community-led communal housing solutions**

Community-led communal housing solutions are of interest to this study because they provide an alternative route to accommodation for people on very low incomes, including those who are either not eligible for social housing or who would not be prioritised for such housing. In the UK, these ‘solidarity-based structures’ have already been identified as a viable way of increasing affordable housing (Chartered Institute of Housing, 2009, 2012; Gibbs *et al.*, 2013), but only exist on a very small scale.

While cooperatives remain a marginal tenure in Switzerland, constituting only 5% of all dwellings (although they constitute 19% of all dwellings in Zurich), they are encouraged by the government due to the sharp rise in rents in the last 20 years and the shortage of affordable accommodation. Milligan *et al.* (2009) identified several innovative financial instruments in the country, including a revolving fund financed by the state but operated by the sector, and federal collateral security granted to a mortgage guarantee cooperative established by the sector itself, which can also reduce the cost of lending for non-profit builders. However, innovative financing is not the only factor that contributes to the successful operation of cooperatives, as the example below illustrates.

### **Box 2: Community-led housing solutions in Geneva, Switzerland – the CoDHA project**

Like many housing cooperatives in Switzerland, the CoDHA (Coopérative de l'Habitat Associatif) project in Geneva has its roots in the squatter movement. CoDHA completed its first project, stemming from the purchase of a building occupied by squatters, with the help of a loan from a Swiss bank. Interest rates are kept low and the mortgage payment period is longer than average. The state gives cooperatives starting loans of a maximum of 10% of the project's value, which has been identified as crucial for the development of the cooperatives.

A share in the cooperative costs 100 Swiss francs, a small amount in Switzerland. As of September 2014, CoDHA had 272 tenants living in 190 properties, in nine buildings; all the residences are owned by the cooperative. It employed 7.5 full-time staff and has plans to develop a further 600 properties. Challenges identified by those involved in the project include the high costs of maintaining the buildings, and the difficulty of scaling up a strongly participatory project.

Almost anyone can become a member. Currently, people who come from outside Europe and do not have a work permit cannot become members of cooperatives in Switzerland. However, new legislation is expected that will enable them to do so.

Other facilitating factors include the willingness of a group of people to get off the property ladder, the involvement of a financial institution, the conversion of empty properties for this purpose, and the support of the Swiss government. For instance, the State of Geneva leases land to support housing associations and cooperatives, usually for a period of 99 years.

While Argentina has always had a rich history of cooperatives (International Cooperative Alliance, 2013), the economic crisis in 2001 led to a rapid rise in the formation of these organisations as a response to widespread structural unemployment and poverty. Similar to Switzerland, many cooperatives in Argentina arose out of social movements that emerged to challenge the eviction of low-income residents. The three axes of one of the movements, *Movimiento de Ocupantes e Inquilinos (MOI)* are self-management, mutual aid and collective ownership. The passing of Law 341/2000 by the legislature of the city of Buenos Aires, in response to calls from non-governmental organisations and cooperatives that were seeking to run housing-related projects, enabled public resources to be transferred to collective groups in order to self-manage housing for families in critical housing need.

### **Box 3: Community-led housing solutions in Argentina: the Self-Managed Cooperatives Federation**

The Federation was formed out of MOI in 2008 through the organisation of families living in occupied properties, working with a team of 15 to 20 professionals (architects, sociologists, lawyers, administrative staff and accountants). It develops housing projects in different parts of Argentina, maintaining contact with similar organisations in Brazil and Chile. Its partners include government agencies at the city and national level, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions and cooperatives.

The intervention model involves mutual aid, prior savings (as defined by each cooperative) and collective property as a permanent way of tenure. Skilled labour is provided by a worker cooperative, which is also constituted within MOI and supported by a multidisciplinary team. The projects carried out by the organisation within the Province of Buenos Aires are funded through a soft loans programme for self-managed housing that involves more than 12,000 families (Mello, 2013) and is implemented by the Province of Buenos Aires housing agency. Access to the land is made possible through the trust funds of Banco Provincia, which enable cooperative groups to apply for loans at an interest rate of 15%. Although this may appear high by UK standards and requires applicants to have access to some financial resources, the rate compares favourably with the average mortgage interest rate on the local market, which is currently above 20%. State support for housing cooperatives is also demonstrated. Projects are small to medium, consisting of an average of 40 to 50 units, which are reported to be better designed and cheaper than comparable housing. Challenges that the Federation has continued to face are the difficulty of sustaining mutual aid and self-construction over time, and political, economic and institutional instability.

## Lessons for the UK

While there are significant contextual differences relating to the operation of housing cooperatives in Switzerland and Argentina, it is possible to identify similar factors that facilitated the growth of these community-led housing solutions. In both countries, public awareness of the need for alternative forms of housing was high. Cooperatives also benefited from financial support from the state; multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary working, and the use of empty buildings. In Switzerland, the support of the state was a critical factor in enabling housing cooperatives to gain the support of financial institutions. Given the emphasis on community participation, the scale of housing is small to medium. Financial sustainability is a key issue in both countries, indicating the need for robust governance structures and risk management. In Argentina, Law 341/2000 illustrates the capacity for transformative change in tackling extreme exclusion arising from dialogue between the state and civil society. In the UK, more consideration can be given to the scope for scaling up the formation of cooperatives and providing them with ongoing support to widen access to the housing market.

Currently, home-ownership remains the dominant tenure. However, this is increasingly beyond the reach of a large section of the population, particularly young people (DCLG, 2015b), and the private rented sector is growing. This has led to calls for increased attention to the sector, including rent control, landlord regulation, scrutiny of accommodation quality (including houses in multiple occupation) and rental mediation schemes. However, it may be timely to explore the appetite for more community-led communal housing solutions, as part of a wider trend towards increasing 'bottom-up' innovations in housing policy (Gibbs *et al.*, 2013), localism and community empowerment. The scope for the planning system to take a more proactive role in providing affordable housing has already been established (Monk *et al.*, 2013). Moves in support of community land trusts and, in Scotland, the Community Empowerment Bill, are also congruent with developing more collective housing solutions. Stakeholder engagement suggested that such solutions could also reduce the stigma often associated with homelessness, reduce isolation and help develop neighbourliness in the long term. Housing cooperatives were also viewed as enabling the independence of groups of people and contributing to housing security, provided that robust governance structures were in place.

However, a key challenge would be to ensure that the housing developed through such schemes is accessible to people on very low incomes. Engagement with land-owning, faith-based organisations, some of which have traditionally played a role in providing services to homeless individuals, may help. Barriers that would need to be overcome are the mechanisms for funding these organisations in the current economic climate. It seems clear that in order for such organisations to flourish, more encouragement from government, working in partnership with financial institutions, is needed.

A major issue in providing alternative routes to housing that the study raises is the extent to which the innovations studied should be supported for the use of individuals whose legal or immigration status is either unclear or being determined, as in the case of asylum-seekers. Here, humanitarian concerns and obligations must be addressed. Close cooperation between mainstream homelessness organisations, migrant organisations (Netto and Gavrieldes, 2010) and immigration authorities will be helpful in identifying common goals. Greater public awareness is also needed of the circumstances that lead individuals to claim asylum in the UK, to counter the hostility that is often associated with asylum-seekers (Leudar and Hayes, 2008).

# 4 Designing homes for low-income groups

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, one of the major drivers of extreme housing exclusion is lack of material resources, due to the combination of little or no access to benefits or social housing, and very low incomes. However, innovations in housing design for low-income groups are relevant not only for the groups considered in this study, but more widely. In England, 70% of all private sector output is now being produced by the largest house builders, more than 500 units a year (FTI Consulting, 2012). While the number of house builders is falling, the number of smaller and medium-sized builders is shrinking at a much faster rate than the largest. In this chapter we explore how the supply of affordable homes can be diversified and increased through education and innovations in design, including that of temporary housing.

## Increasing the capacity of future built-environment professionals

Equipping future architects, planners and housing professionals with the knowledge and skills to work on affordable housing is an important means of influencing its availability. In the short term, providing students with opportunities to gain first-hand experience of designing affordable housing through working on 'real world' projects also generates additional resources for such work. It is also important that educational efforts to promote affordable housing are combined with investment in training and skills for building sustainable housing, to reduce the environmental impact of buildings. Morgan *et al.* (2015) found that skills shortages remain 'a critical issue at all levels from design to construction' in planning and delivering sustainable affordable housing.

### **Box 4: Building competence in working on sustainable, affordable housing – the EcoMod project, USA**

Rising property prices and widening income differentials are making it increasingly difficult for individuals on low and medium incomes to purchase their own homes in the US. The innovative design/build/evaluate EcoMod project, was pioneered by Professor John Quale, through a collaborative process that involved the University of West Virginia (UVA) School of Architecture, non-profit organisations and final year undergraduate students.

Focusing on prefabricated modular housing, the use of environmentally low-impact materials and energy efficiency, the EcoMod project demonstrates that it is possible to provide low-cost housing that is well-designed and sustainable. Of the 19 housing units, three have achieved the US Green Building Council's LEED Platinum rating, and two have achieved Passive House standard. Many students have gone on to take key positions in organisations to deliver affordable and sustainable housing.

Close collaboration with non-profit organisations that work with communities on very low incomes was identified as a critical success factor for enhancing educational opportunities, and also helped such organisations by generating additional resources. Professor Quale's work has been funded by a variety of sources, including in-kind funding in the form of salary, classroom, studio and laboratory space from UVA, and start-up grants from local foundations and the US Environmental Protection Agency. Efforts are ongoing to scale-up EcoMod designs at the University of New Mexico, where Professor Quale is now based.

### **Lessons for the UK**

In order to increase the capacity of future built-environment professionals in the UK to plan and develop low-cost, sustainable housing, higher educational institutions would need to place greater emphasis on

ensuring that students are equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to build such housing. This would help to address the crucial skills shortage that has been revealed in planning and delivering sustainable, affordable housing in this country. Professional bodies such as the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Royal Institute of British Architects all have a continuing role to play in educating their members on the growing need to provide affordable and environmentally sustainable housing. Part of this work may involve greater collaboration between policy-makers, higher education bodies, and the construction and house-building industry.

## Low-income friendly designs

Increasing diversity in the size, design and standard of finish in housing can potentially increase housing affordability. Due to the scarcity of land and demand for real estate development in many cities across the world, Savills Research (2012) has noted a rising trend towards much smaller apartments, sometimes referred to as 'shoebox units'. In Singapore, where the term was coined, substantial numbers of 300 square feet apartments are being developed, while in Hong Kong, these units range from 250 to 300 square feet. Viewed as a means of increasing access to affordable housing, such apartments have also attracted criticism on the grounds of their lack of appropriateness for the academic and social development of children. In Singapore, the planning authority has issued guidelines discouraging small or super small-sized apartments from dominating new developments outside the Central Area. However, such apartments continue to provide flexibility for home buyers with low or modest incomes, while measures are in place to prevent their proliferation in suburban areas.

In Canada, the Grow Home prototype – the design prototype for small homes that have the potential to grow as the incomes of their owners increase – has brought home-ownership within reach of people who were previously forced to rent. The prototype was designed to appeal to low-income renters who were willing to stay in well-designed, smaller properties, and to complete the construction of the property themselves when their resources allowed. While this process of incremental building was innovative within the North American context, it is, in fact, traditionally practised in many informal settlements in developing economies.

### **Box 5: Buildings homes that grow with household income – the Grow Home prototype in Canada**

Designed by Professor Avi Freidman and Witold Rybczynski, the Grow Home prototype, a narrow, two-storey, 14-foot wide and 36-foot long row home, represented a bold departure from the North American norm of large, detached houses. The basic, open-concept home is designed for buyers to 'grow' the home – for example, by installing partitions and building more rooms – as their resources increase over time.

The Grow Home prototype included a combined kitchen-dining area, bathroom and living room on the ground floor, and an unpartitioned first floor that could be converted into two bedrooms and a bathroom, when the owners had the means to complete this. An analysis of the profile of buyers revealed that the vast majority were renters (86.7%), including single-person and single-parent households.

The popularity of the homes has been attributed not only to its low cost, but to the simplicity of its design, which makes it easy to construct by small builders. Savings were achieved simply by restricting the size of the dwelling to 1,000 square feet, simplifying construction tasks, and standardising the dimensions of the structural and cladding elements. Homes can also be adapted over time according to the changing needs of individual households.

While the approach exemplified by the Grow Home prototype has the potential to widen home-ownership, it is acknowledged that people with little or no income might not be able to participate. Within the Canadian context, a patchwork of rent supplements is currently provided by provinces and municipalities, which differ dramatically in terms of programme models and funds allocated. In some cases, 'rent geared to income' programmes are built into social housing and cooperative models, but overall, the system is inadequate in addressing the housing burden experienced by 18% of all low-income households who pay more than 50% of their income on housing (Gaetz *et al.*, 2014). As part of a package of measures that propose increased investment by the federal and provincial programmes in housing,

Gaetz *et al.* (2014) propose costed, standardised federal and provincial programmes that provide rent supplements, including a programme to provide individuals with a 'housing benefit' that would involve a federal supplement provided directly to all low-income Canadians. This indicates that while the Grow Home prototype may play a useful role in bringing home-ownership within the reach of a wider section of the population, such innovations need to be developed alongside more investment by the federal and provincial governments to enable those with the least resources to meet their housing costs.

## Lessons for the UK

Routes into home-ownership – including through models that support incremental building such as the Grow Home prototype – are unlikely to be an option for people on very low incomes. However, house builders who are willing to cater to a (growing) segment of the population that is not able to afford the costs of conventionally built homes may help to relieve pressure at the lower end of the housing market, lower rents and reduce competition for social housing. This is likely to require either intervention from government to encourage large-scale house builders to diversify provision, or to support the setting-up of smaller house builders or housing associations that are willing to promote the sale of cheaper, unfinished homes that buyers can complete once their resources allow. Investment in raising public awareness of a new route into home-ownership through incremental building as financial resources increase would also be needed. While the concept of incremental building may challenge traditional conceptions of 'home' among first-time buyers, the benefits that these models offer in terms of lower house prices and the potential to adapt the homes with changing needs may outweigh initial reservations.

## Temporary housing solutions

Economic migrants often live in severely overcrowded, shared accommodation or in accommodation 'tied' to their employment, where they might be vulnerable to exploitation (Netto *et al.*, 2011). Temporary housing solutions can play a valuable role in accommodating migrant workers in need of short-stay, affordable housing in close proximity to their workplaces. However, little attention has been paid to how high-quality, temporary housing can be developed, despite innovations in technology and the increased presence of a mobile, low-waged migrant workforce in a globalised market economy (Netto *et al.*, 2014). The growing literature relating to the nature and types of temporary housing and of issues arising from the use of such housing as responses to major natural environmental disasters, for example, hurricanes and floods, provides an initial starting point.

A 'state of the art' review of temporary housing after disasters (Felix *et al.*, 2013) has observed that most temporary solutions are prefabricated, mass produced and standardised. Although standardised and technology-oriented solutions are often viewed as quick and economical to produce, several issues have been identified, including their impact on the environment, their appropriateness for different climatic conditions, and their compatibility with cultural conceptions of what constitutes a home. Costs are also associated with the need for new infrastructure to make such housing functional, including roads and electricity. It is also currently unclear as to whether such solutions are actually cost-effective.

## Lessons for the UK

It is perhaps worth highlighting that in exploring the scope for increasing the diversity of affordable housing to people on very low incomes – including temporary housing – it is not suggested that there should be compromises in the quality of accommodation available. Rather, the intention is to stimulate discussion around how options for good-quality, affordable accommodation, including in rural areas, can be increased. Many of the problems associated with providing temporary housing after disasters are likely to apply to the use of temporary accommodation for migrant workers. Recommended strategies that are likely to be relevant to the latter include the need for community participation, the use of local materials and construction techniques, and the development of solutions to reuse temporary housing units (Felix *et al.*, 2013). A key factor in ensuring re-use potential is to ensure this is considered at the design stage. Consultation with migrant organisations and migrant workers is also needed in order to gain more understanding of the extent of likely demand. The cooperation of local authorities would also be needed to designate plots of land for this purpose. While the development of temporary housing may challenge

conceptions of homes that are associated with stability and security (Clapham, 2005), such housing may widen the options available to people on short-term contracts.

Temporary housing may also be viewed as useful in meeting local housing need in the wider population, as can be seen in Lewisham, London, where the council is using modern construction techniques to develop high-quality 'pop-up' villages that can be quickly and cheaply built on brownfield sites and rented out. In this context, the provision of temporary housing is not only to meet temporary housing need, but also serves as a mechanism for enabling temporary use of land where land is very limited, in order to meet urgent housing need. When no longer required, the village can be disassembled and reassembled on the next vacant site.

# 5 Supporting self-build approaches and enhancing employability

Exclusion from the formal labour market, as well as weak social links, can contribute to restricted employment opportunities (McCabe *et al.*, 2013). This may lead some migrants to work in the informal economy (Bloch, 2014), where they may be subjected to forced labour or exploitation (Geddes *et al.*, 2013). Community self-build approaches that reduce the cost of housing and provide employment opportunities are hence particularly relevant to some migrants, but may also be relevant to people with complex needs, as part of approaches that seek to build individual assets and skills. Such approaches also promote choice at a considerably lower cost than conventionally-built properties.

Self-build approaches were pioneered in the UK in 1960 by Walter Segal, a community architect who, using a timber frame, built a home in his garden that cost £800 within two weeks. However, major barriers that self-builders continue to face include the price of land, the rigidity of planning and building controls, and access to mortgage loans. Current interest in self-build has been stimulated by 'Right-to-Build', introduced in England to stimulate the nascent sector. The Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 now requires councils in England to establish local registers of people interesting in buying plots of land to commission or build their own home. The Act also requires councils to take into account demand for self- and custom-build in planning housing, regeneration and land disposal functions. Signs of a growing appetite by government to support self-build approaches are evident.

The Scottish Government's housing strategy (2011) acknowledges the contribution that self-build can make to housing supply, and commits to enabling the sector to grow. Planning authorities have been instructed to consider the housing requirements of people seeking self-build plots and, where appropriate, to allocate (discounted) suitable sites for self-build (Scottish Government, 2010, 2014a). In Wales, an innovative funding scheme has been piloted to allow people on modest incomes to 'acquire a plot' at no cost (Self Build Portal, 2015). However, Anstey (2014) found little evidence that support for self-build in national-level planning policy was filtering down to the local level, indicating the need for more 'bottom-up' approaches. It is likely that more advice, support and encouragement is needed to encourage local authorities to consider how local communities can obtain access to land, for example through more proactive use of development plans. International lessons provide additional insights into factors that are likely to support community self-build.

## Community self-build in South Africa

Since the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa in 1994, the government has taken steps to redress the inheritance of deep, racially-entrenched social division and produce more socially-just outcomes. One of the mechanisms by which the government provides support with self-build is through the People's Housing Process, with participants actively involved in decision-making about the housing process and contributing towards the building of their own homes. The example in Box 6 is located near an informal settlement, where levels of unemployment were high and often compounded by drug and alcohol abuse.

### **Box 6: Building with local resources and enhancing employability – Ocean View in Cape Town, South Africa**

One of the aims of the project was to develop aesthetically pleasing housing that departed from the standard design for low-income housing. The distinctive stone houses that form part of the project are constructed from materials found on site. Another aim was to use the construction phase as a mechanism for tackling the high levels of unemployment in the area.

An opportunity to combine both aims and promote environmental sustainability was found in the innovative use of local stone to build new homes. Instead of bearing the cost of transporting the stone that was excavated from the site to prepare for the construction of new houses, the government invested in training local people in stone masonry and related construction skills, and employed them to construct the housing. Additional funding via the city's Expanded Public Works Programme allowed approximately 497 people to be trained and employed.

A crucial factor that contributed to the success of the project was the involvement of a multi-disciplinary team. In January 2011, a civil engineering contractor commenced the installation of engineering services, followed by the appointment of architects specialising in stone masonry design and construction. A non-profit organisation, Mellon Housing Initiative, was appointed as developer to build 543 houses and to facilitate the community consultation. This resulted in the construction of attractive, low-cost housing while providing employment and enhancing employability.

## **Community self-build in Serbia**

Initiatives that involve the Roma people are particularly relevant for this study, given extensive evidence of the difficulties they experience in gaining formal employment and access to housing (Netto *et al.*, 2011). In Serbia, such difficulties have been exacerbated by the internal displacement of people from Kosovo, leading to a significant growth in informal Roma settlements. At its peak in 2010, this reached a total of 210,000 internally displaced people. Within this context, the work of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO), a non-profit organisation in Novi Sad, Serbia, is worthy of study. The EHO works with the Roma community to develop dweller-driven approaches to upgrading settlements.

### **Box 7: Dweller-driven upgrading of substandard Roma settlements in Serbia**

The Roma Resource Centre (RRC) project was set up by the EHO in 2000 to advance the severely disadvantaged socioeconomic position of this community in Serbia. It is based on a holistic, participatory approach to upgrading private and public infrastructure, and aims to improve housing, employment and community development. The RRC provides materials for construction, training and consultancy, and monitors quality.

Key principles in running the project are the active participation of the Roma people and flexibility in planning to accommodate residents' specific needs. For every €1,800 invested by the EHO in the project, the Roma invest €700-worth of their own labour or provide construction materials. Residents can choose between contributing labour to the construction process or hiring experienced hands. They can also opt to use cheaper second-hand construction materials, with the savings gained used to obtain better-quality installations. Standardised technical bathroom plans help to reduce construction costs and improve the quality of construction. The project is funded by a number of international agencies and co-financed by the provincial government of Vojvodina.

An essential factor that has contributed to the success of the project is its partnership with the local authority, which actively participates in the project and co-finances it through investment in infrastructure, which may include electricity, road and water installation. Public municipal officers with engineering experience are involved, along with Roma coordinators.

Challenges identified by the project are: keeping individual projects within budget; achieving a balance between cost-effectiveness and good quality construction; and achieving a high level of commitment from municipal authorities.

## **Lessons for the UK**

While inner-city community self-build programmes exist in the UK, they form only a small proportion of the self-build output. This is surprising, given the number of benefits attributed to self-build, in addition to cutting down costs and enhancing employability. These include its potential to lower rents by acting as a competitor to commercial developers, and to contribute to more stable house prices, where self-build is widely accepted (Duncan and Rowe, 1992). The collective involvement of self-builders also allows users to design the kind of neighbourhood they want to live in, and construct a community in the process (Parvin *et al.*, 2011), which is of particular value to marginalised groups.

Lewisham Council has been exceptional in the UK in promoting self-build. In the 1970s, the council made land available to people on the housing waiting list in order to build their own homes, and it is currently trialling the 'Right-to-Build' initiative announced in 2014. As another example of community self-build in the UK, Redditch Co-operative Homes has supported vulnerable young people in building their own homes. In order to support self-build approaches more proactively in the UK, greater awareness would need to be raised among housing organisations of the benefits of doing so, and support made available through training and access to specialist advice. Benson (2014) also calls for the need for more conceptual clarity around the terms, processes and products that are related to a diverse landscape of self-procurement.

The availability of land has been identified as the biggest constraint to self-build in the UK (Morton, 2013). Land ownership is still heavily concentrated and owned by a small minority of wealthy individuals; two thirds of land is owned by 0.36% of the population (Cahill, 2011). Community land trusts offer a route for supporting self-build programmes through enabling community ownership of land. The Cambridge Centre for Housing & Planning Research (2012) has found that such trusts are, to date, very small scale and more suitable for rural areas, although they could potentially operate in urban areas. Furthermore, there is little evidence yet of the extent to which such trusts might serve the needs of those most marginalised from the housing market. In Scotland, the Community Empowerment Bill, if passed in its current form, would extend the right of community groups to buy land across Scotland, irrespective of the size of the settlement in which the land is located, or whether the land is in an urban or rural area (Scottish Government, 2014b). Other remedies to improve land supply include greater transparency in

the process for disposal of public land, more opportunities for self-build included in the Government Land Disposal and Development Strategy, and more recognition of self-build in development plans (National Self Build Association, 2011). Additionally, Morton (2013) has promoted the concept of land auctions to assist self-builders in competing against large developers for land. The creation of self-build districts, as in the Netherlands, would also increase the availability of land (Anstey, 2014). Self-build districts are areas of land that have been master-planned and subdivided into individual serviced plots of varying sizes, to be sold directly to households seeking to self-build.

A major barrier to the expansion of self-build in the UK is the availability of finance. Wallace *et al.* (2013) found that lending to self-builders dropped substantially during the recent recession, given the added complexity and risks of self-build mortgage products compared to traditional mortgage products, and the small size of the market. Benson (2014) adds that in addition to mortgage finance, financial products and services that facilitate the management and maintenance of cash flow for self-build projects would also be valuable, requiring greater awareness among lenders of this form of housing. Well-grounded evidence of the cost-effectiveness of self-built homes is also needed (Wallace *et al.*, 2013) in order to scale up the production of these homes.

Furthermore, the challenges of enhancing the employability of the most disadvantaged groups through self-build processes should not be underestimated. These include identifying participants who can engage in the self-build process with little support, as well as supporting those who may be willing to take up employment, but who have complex needs or low literacy levels, or face language barriers that need to be accommodated. The process would require extensive consulting with these groups. Should there be sufficient demand, self-builders would need to be supported by the availability of specialist advice and guidance in the planning, building and evaluation stages. Establishing closer links between self-builders with firms that specialise in prefabricated modular panels is also likely to facilitate the process by reducing the time needed to construct homes that are entirely or partially self-built.

# 6 Providing immediate access to housing

This chapter explores innovations that address drivers of extreme housing exclusion related to substance abuse dependencies or experience of gender-based abuse or trafficking. Three models of housing are considered: a model for supporting homeless people who face problems with substance abuse; an innovation that has demonstrated some success in supporting a small minority of homeless individuals where other approaches have failed; and one that supports women and girls who have experienced trafficking or domestic abuse. All three models prioritise immediate access to housing.

## Supporting homeless people with complex needs in independent living

In recent years, supporting homeless people with complex support needs, including mental health and substance abuse problems, has been a policy priority in the UK, coupled with a growing acknowledgement that they are disproportionately failed by existing services (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2012). It is also well established that these groups of people feature prominently among rough sleepers (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2012), and thus commonly experience extreme housing exclusion.

The Housing First (HF) model, which originated in the US where it was successfully applied to accommodate those with serious mental health problems, has been identified as an important intervention for supporting homeless people with complex needs. The defining feature of the model is that it bypasses transitional forms of accommodation, such as hostels, and places vulnerable people directly into independent tenancies with intensive support, without insisting that they first undergo treatment for mental illness or substance abuse problems. The model is now commonplace in service networks in the US, where it features in the ten-year plans to end chronic homelessness of almost 250 cities (Greenwood *et al.*, 2013). HF projects have been or are currently being developed in a number of countries, including Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark and Australia (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2012; Benjaminsen, 2013).

### **Box 8: Housing First in the Netherlands and Denmark – independent living for homeless people with complex care needs**

Between 2009 and 2014, 17 Housing First programmes have been started in the Netherlands, providing help to almost 400 clients (Wewerinke *et al.*, 2014), and such programmes are expected to grow. Discus Amsterdam was the first HF programme in the Netherlands, which began as a joint initiative of three organisations: Jellinek Mentrum (which provides treatment and counselling for people with mental health problems), Alliantie Amsterdam (a housing association) and HVO-Querido (a non-governmental organisation that provides housing assistance to homeless people and other vulnerable groups). It is financed mainly by the public sector. In addition to paying rent for their home, service users also make a contribution to the cost of their care, which typically ranges from €122 to €209 a month.

In Denmark, HF features as an overall principle within the national homelessness strategy that was adopted in 2008. A key component of the programme was to scale-up floating support for homeless people being rehoused in ordinary housing. One of the main aims of the programme was to develop and test evidence-based methods of floating support in a Danish context. One of the key outcomes of the programme was that a high number of previously homeless people could be rehoused in ordinary housing, provided they received intensive forms of floating support. As in the Netherlands, HF is almost universally provided in social housing. The approach has been positively evaluated in both countries, and found to produce successful outcomes among service users, housing providers and other stakeholders.

## Lessons for the UK

In the UK, Johnsen and Teixeira (2012) reveal that while stakeholders consider aspects of HF to be very attractive in complementing existing provision for extremely 'service resistant' rough sleepers, many are sceptical that the scale of positive outcomes recorded elsewhere would be reproduced in the UK. Many also remain firmly aligned to a 'treatment first' philosophy. This leads the authors to conclude that more substantial evidence of HF's effectiveness within the UK would be required if the model is to be widely accepted. However, the report of the Ministerial Working Group, *Addressing complex needs: improving services for vulnerable homeless people* (DCLG, 2015c), has indicated interest in exploring the 'impressive international results' achieved by the HF model and whether it can be replicated in England. This may be undertaken initially through a large-scale pilot, which may provide robust evidence of effectiveness, including cost-effectiveness of the project, and convince policy-makers and practitioners of the benefits of this model over more traditional models.

It may be worth acknowledging that other service models for people with complex needs – multi-systemic therapy, wraparound and link worker – also exist within the UK, with varying degrees of evidence for their effectiveness (Revolving Doors, 2015). In common with HF, these models emphasise community-based services, and promote choice and individualised services for service users with multiple needs. Multi-sectoral working within local areas, as advocated by the Homeless Link Making Every Adult Matter project, is also recommended. However, perhaps uniquely, the HF approach emphasises immediate access to independent tenancies, which is not conditional to successful engagement with services.

In Scotland, an HF pilot was developed by Turning Point Scotland (TPS) to address high levels of repeat homelessness among people with active substance abuse problems. Involving the provision of housing and support to 22 individuals, the pilot represents the first HF project to be developed in the UK, and one of the first internationally to explicitly target homeless people involved in active drug use. An evaluation of the project (Johnsen, 2012) found that the project has been highly successful in both retaining the involvement of service users in rehabilitation and in enabling the vast majority of them to sustain their tenancies. Stakeholder engagement as part of this study revealed considerable support for such approaches. Benefits identified included the potential to better engage with people with complex needs by providing them with stability and enabling them to work towards independent living at their own pace, to reduce repeat homelessness and rough sleeping and bring about greater cost-effectiveness in the long run.

## Supporting alternative lifestyles for people with complex needs

*Skaeve huse* models – the most appropriate translation of which is 'alternative housing' (Benjaminsen, 2013) – provide independent and permanent accommodation for people with severe addiction and behavioural problems who are unable or unwilling to live in either ordinary housing with floating support, or in supported accommodation. Originating in Denmark in 1999 as a pilot scheme, the model has now been adopted in Norway and the Netherlands. The target group is a minority of homeless people with complex needs who have not been able to be accommodated through more conventional mechanisms, and who have consequently experienced repeat homelessness. Projects consist of small groups of houses in carefully selected locations, where residents are allowed to live as they please without any expectation that they are obliged to engage in rehabilitation. In all three countries, the projects are supported by municipalities, working in partnership with health and social workers, and the police.

Evaluations of the projects in these countries (Bascon and Casa, 2006; Singelenberg, 2010; UN Habitat, 2008) concur that the projects are positively viewed by the majority of residents, housing providers and other stakeholders. Most residents appreciate having their own home, after a lengthy period of not living in permanent accommodation. Housing providers and other stakeholders value the contribution of these projects in serving a small group of people with very complex needs where more conventional or more dominant approaches have failed. In Norway, regular monitoring and evaluation of services used by residents revealed a reduction in the use of psychiatric services and hospitalisation, as health outcomes

improved with increased stability in the lives of residents. While a rigorous cost-benefit analysis of these projects has not been carried out, some savings may be expected from reduced staffing levels and healthcare costs, compared to more conventional models of supported accommodation.

Despite these largely positive outcomes, *skaeve huse* projects remain controversial. The project has attracted criticism from those who believe that it is wrong to isolate people with chronic mental health and addiction problems, including in remote locations. Yet other criticism stems from the view that the projects are 'giving up' on certain groups of people. However, this does not address the question of how else these people could be served.

### **Box 9: Supporting alternative lifestyles for people with complex needs – *skaeve huse* projects in Denmark and Norway**

Most residents of *skaeve huse* projects are single men over the age of 35, although there are also female residents. Rent is set at a level that can be paid for through individual housing benefits, and residents have a permanent contract for their homes. Many of the residents have such complex needs that there is no expectation that they will be able to leave the project or gain formal employment. However, many residents experience positive outcomes, including an improvement in their physical and mental health due to the opportunity to benefit from continuity of treatment. Staffing costs are low compared to other forms of (supported) accommodation for homeless people with complex needs, since staffing levels are lower.

Factors identified as contributing to the success of these projects are skilled staff, an optimal number of units in each project (that is, large enough to be cost-effective and contribute to a sense of community, but not so big as to be unmanageable), carefully chosen locations to reduce conflict with neighbours, and high level support from politicians and other stakeholders.

Challenges for *skaeve huse* projects include the difficulty of finding appropriate locations that are not close to existing neighbourhoods or too far from essential facilities. Overall, *skaeve huse* projects are seen to provide a cost-effective solution for a small group of people.

## **Lessons for the UK**

Promoting the greater autonomy of individuals facing extreme marginalisation in their own homes, combined with ensuring access to support, appears to be essential in making both HF and *skaeve huse* projects work. Evidence of this can be found in the high tenancy sustainment rates that are commonly associated with both projects relative to other mainstream projects. However, it is difficult to anticipate the potential for transfer of *skaeve huse* projects to the UK, despite its success where other approaches have failed. While the potential for cutting down costs through reduced staffing levels and providing continuity of healthcare is attractive, such projects may not be viewed as consistent with approaches that emphasise community-based projects and integration within social networks as a means of promoting mental well-being. If such projects are to find any support at all within the UK, they are likely to be limited to a very small minority of homeless people as a last resort, as in the case study countries.

## **Supporting women and girls in housing and employment**

Trafficked women and children, and female-headed households, figure prominently among the groups of people who are most likely to be affected by extreme housing exclusion in South Africa. The model of accommodation identified for this group of people provides insights into how immediate access to shelter can be combined with longer-term goals that can enhance employability and resilience, and can potentially be applied to others who have experienced domestic abuse.

### **Box 10: Supporting women and young girls in housing and employment – Pretoria, South Africa**

The Tshwane Leadership Foundation (TLF), which originated as a partnership of churches in Pretoria in 1993, works in collaboration with Yeast City Housing (YCH) to deliver a programme of support for women and girls at risk. TLF is responsible for the social care dimension, while YCH is responsible for providing 'special needs' housing.

Women and girls supported by TLF/YCH have typically fled domestic abuse, rape, trafficking or destitution, and are aged 12 years and above. Girls aged 12–18 are housed in a shelter called the Loreto House, while girls aged over 18 are housed in a shelter called the Potter's House. Housing and most services are provided to any woman or girl, regardless of citizenship status. On average, around 65% of the clients are South African, while 35% are foreign nationals. Services offered at the shelter include a crèche and preschool for the children of women staying there, a drop-in service and outreach work. It has 24 beds, accommodating about 100 women and 50 children a year. TLF has 63 members of staff.

YCH, which has 600 properties, offers a housing 'ladder' for women living in the Potter's House. When a woman starts earning an income (however small), YCH rents her a space within its own housing stock, starting with one room. This increases to two rooms and then, as the woman's income grows, a whole flat. Similarly, girls from Loreto House who reach the age of 19 can move into a YCH property, or into the Potter's House if they require more support from services. YCH employs 30 members of staff. In both organisations, employees include many former clients.

The key innovation in this project is that women are encouraged and assisted in enhancing their employability while benefiting from continuity of support and accommodation. Partnership and networking are identified as key elements that contribute to the success of the project. Funding is provided by the national and provincial government (40% of the total funding), the EU, international faith-based organisations, churches in Pretoria and private donations. A major challenge is financial sustainability.

## **Lessons for the UK**

Within the UK, the most established models for women who are fleeing from domestic abuse are refuges for women and children only, with some specialist provision for women from minority ethnic groups. A more recent innovation was the development of sanctuaries, where individual homes are adapted or fortified to protect women and children who have experienced domestic abuse (Pawson *et al.*, 2006, 2007; Netto *et al.*, 2009). However, little is known about other innovations for this group of people.

One element of the TLF/YCH project that should be considered for transferability to the UK is the continuity of support afforded by an approach that combines immediate need for shelter with the longer-term aim of gradually supporting service users into independent living through employment as their financial resources increase. Such programmes can be facilitated through partnerships between housing associations or organisations supporting women and girls fleeing from domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence, and other projects that focus on enhancing employability. The approach also has the potential to be extended to other vulnerable groups, including care-leavers.

# 7 Building social links

An important driver of extreme housing exclusion is weak social links, which limit access to support, opportunities for employment, and integration within local neighbourhoods. Research has illustrated the difficulties for people in or at the margins of poverty in establishing 'bridging' links with people who can create opportunities and advantage (McCabe *et al.*, 2013). The role of housing in providing the space for human interaction, relationships and development, not only within the home but also within the neighbourhood, (Netto, 2011a) is relevant here. This chapter considers four innovations that aim to facilitate interactions between (groups of) individuals who are otherwise at risk of isolation from others: the use of 'host' families to support displaced people and other vulnerable groups; client leadership in the delivery of homelessness services; private sector involvement in neighbourhood regeneration; and the use of design to build community links. These innovations are potentially relevant to all the groups of people considered in this study, though the social capital of individuals between and within groups is likely to vary considerably.

## Creating supportive environments for refugees and internally displaced people in Serbia

Serbia has the highest number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Europe, stemming from the outbreak of political unrest in the former Yugoslavia in 1991. Yet, within this context, a programme for integrating extremely vulnerable groups of refugees, IDPs and citizens of Serbia has evolved, mainly supported by international donor organisations.

### **Box 11: Creating supportive environments for refugees – the use of host families in Serbia**

The Social Housing in Supportive Environment (SHSE) programme consists of the construction of individual dwellings plus a supported component involving host families. Key organisations involved in the SHSE programme include the Housing Centre, a non-governmental organisation; the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; the Commissariat for Refugees, a national organisation with a mandate for supporting refugees and IDPs; and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

The programme has constructed 1,014 dwellings in 42 out of 168 municipalities. The accommodation consists of two-storey blocks, containing about eight apartments each. A 'supportive environment' is created through host families, who are themselves from refugee backgrounds or Serbian citizens. They play a crucial role in integrating vulnerable individuals, many of whom are single parents, older people, have disabilities or chronic diseases, or low levels of education.

Host families are selected by social work centres in the local municipality on the basis of well-publicised criteria. They are provided with training in communication, conflict resolution and supervision of those with mental and physical health problems. They are placed within each block to help facilitate the integration of their neighbours through practical assistance, advice and establishing contacts with others in the wider community, which can lead to jobs. For more professional support, host families can contact the social work centre. Host families are recompensed by the local municipality either through a small salary or through rent-free provision of their flats.

Another element of the programme that contributes to its success is the allocation of 80% of the SHSE dwellings to refugees and IDPs, and 20% to vulnerable groups within the existing community. This element of the model is reported to be crucial, since it helps to create buy-in. Local municipalities contribute towards the costs of the programme by providing land and infrastructure, and facilitating the creation of supportive environments.

## Lessons for the UK

The integration of new migrants, including asylum-seekers and refugees, poses particular challenges that are heightened in the UK by ongoing political and media attention to immigration levels. Sensitive approaches to integrating new arrivals are needed, especially in deprived areas where concerns relating to pressure on existing services and competition for limited social housing and jobs have emerged (Rutter and Latorre, 2009; Netto and Abazie, 2012). The need for ongoing practical and social support has also been evidenced among refugees who have already gained access to social housing, but are unfamiliar with the neighbourhood and local services (Netto, 2011b). Several initiatives involving informal host families and the cross-subsidy of housing for asylum-seekers with refugee housing are already underway (Hutton and Lukes, 2015). However, these initiatives are typically small-scale and scattered, and face formidable funding constraints. Stakeholder engagement carried out as part of this research revealed strong support for the use of host families to support vulnerable groups of people. Among the benefits identified were the ability to support vulnerable individuals at an early stage, build informal networks and reduce social isolation, promote tenancy sustainment, develop community resilience and facilitate integration. This form of support may be useful for other groups of vulnerable people, such as care-leavers. A potential barrier to implementing such approaches were institutional and professional barriers against the use of approaches based on peer support.

However, successful policy transfer of initiatives that support the integration of refugees or asylum-seekers is likely to require considerable investment in challenging the dominant representations of these groups of people in the media, which are typically negative (Leudar and Hayes, 2008; Lynn and Lea, 2003). This is compounded by lack of awareness of the factors that have contributed to their forced migration. Despite this, the valuable work undertaken by community organisations at a local level, including in areas of deprivation, should not be overlooked (Netto and Abazie, 2012), indicating the potential for such initiatives to work if adequately supported.

The other aspect of the SHSE programme that is worth noting for potential transfer to the UK is the formal specification that accommodation and support to refugees and IDPs is provided alongside services for people within existing communities. This element is particularly worth noting, given that asylum-seekers and refugees are often dispersed to economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where their arrival may cause resentment among existing communities. Ensuring that formal provision for such vulnerable groups is supplemented by support to existing communities may play an important role in reducing tension, and facilitate integration of the new arrivals.

## Enabling leadership roles among (formerly) homeless people

Involving service users in decision-making relating to the planning, delivery and evaluation of services is widely viewed as good practice (Revolving Doors, 2015). However, enabling service users to play a leadership role in the management of homelessness services, as revealed in Client Managed Shelters (CMSs) in the Netherlands, represents an innovation in the governance of homelessness services. Since the overall trend in the UK is towards more small-scale, individualised and local housing solutions, especially for people with complex needs, the lessons that may be drawn here relate to the extent and manner in which client empowerment can be facilitated, rather than to models of accommodation. Enabling homeless individuals to take on leadership roles may help in equipping them with management and team-working skills that would enhance their employability. However, less positively, concerns may arise related to the effective running of homelessness services, given the complex needs of some clients or service users.

### **Box 12: Empowering homelessness service users – CMSs in the Netherlands**

Three CMSs have emerged in the Netherlands in the cities of Utrecht, Nijmegen and Amsterdam, each housing between 16 and 40 people. In the first two cities, the CMSs are night shelters, while the last is a transitional 24-hour shelter. CMSs were first initiated in 1994 in Utrecht and in 1996 in Nijmegen, by homeless people who were dissatisfied with the services provided in existing shelters. In Amsterdam, the CMS was founded by a shelter organisation, HVO-Qeurido, in 2007.

The main initial challenges faced by CMSs were the lack of previous models, conflicts of interests and favouritism arising from personal relationships between managers and clients, and lack of experience in team-working. These issues were addressed by either providing training to managers to facilitate that change, or through involving social workers and a communications coach.

According to an evaluation of CMSs by the Netherlands Institute of Mental Health and Addiction (Boumans *et al.*, 2012), among the positive outcomes of the project are more connectedness and support among clients, which helps them to develop self-esteem, social skills and responsibility for each other. At a societal level, CMSs are also viewed as contributing to more positive perceptions of people who are affected by homelessness.

However, limitations identified by the evaluation include its lack of suitability for all service users. In order to contribute to the effective running of such organisations, clients need to be sufficiently motivated and free from severe multiple and complex needs. Complete autonomy also does not appear possible, since homelessness services need to conform to the municipalities' requirements with regard to quality of care, liability and financial accountability. To meet these requirements and cover their operational costs, the services in Utrecht and Nijmegen have merged with other services, in 2001 and 2006, respectively, resulting in some loss in autonomy and a 'professionalisation' of services. The (formerly) homeless people running the services have also reported some marginalisation in decision-making processes in the homelessness sector.

## **Lessons for the UK**

While client empowerment is a widely held principle, the Dutch model of placing (formerly) homeless people in leadership roles raises some challenging questions, especially with regard to people with complex needs. While it is acknowledged that this model of homelessness service is not suitable for people with 'severe' multiple and complex needs, in practice, it may be difficult to identify people with less complex needs who are interested in, and able to take on, the responsibility and demands of leadership roles. However, the model of service provision is useful in encouraging discussion around how people with complex needs can be supported in taking on a more active role in the running of services, perhaps with access to support packages, or support in building up relevant skills. It may also encourage deliberation around other kinds of support that may need to be provided in addition to what is currently available, for instance, in cultivating communication, conflict resolution or team-building skills, all of which may help service users to develop confidence and enhance employability.

## **Creating sustainable, revitalised communities**

Poorly designed and maintained social housing, coupled with high levels of poverty, can result in a decline in environmental conditions, which in turn can contribute to stigma, demoralised communities and increased risk of marginalisation. In Western Australia, the state government has acknowledged that accommodating large numbers of low-income households in tower blocks in the 1960s was a mistake. It has since converted large areas of social housing into mixed neighbourhoods and actively promoted mixed-tenure policies through the New Living Programme (NLP). Private sector involvement contributes additional human and financial capital.

### **Box 13: Revitalising deprived neighbourhoods – the New Living Programme, Western Australia**

The NLP has contributed to the revitalisation of deprived neighbourhoods, enhanced security and reduced crime. It has also built connections between different groups of people residing in the neighbourhood through improved local amenities, such as sports clubs and other leisure facilities.

Indicators that a neighbourhood could benefit from the NLP are high vacancy rates, incidences of anti-social behaviour, aging housing stock and high crime rates. Approaches to tackling such issues involve undertaking improvements to existing stock, demolition, new builds, and sales to existing social housing tenants to promote routes into owner occupation and tenure mixing. Low interest loans from the Housing Department are targeted towards Aboriginal communities, single parents or people with disabilities.

Two examples of NLP projects are the New Queens Park project and the South Hedland project. The former is located 11km from the Perth Central Business District, while the latter is in a more rural area, which had been built as a satellite city to the Port of Hedland, where the dominant industries were iron ore, salt, tourism, pastoral and light industry. Contextual factors, including the size and composition of the population, economic drivers, geographical location, history of the place, local service provision and cultural sensitivity all play an important role in determining approaches to building social capital.

Private sector involvement generates additional resources for the NLP and can take one of two forms. In the first model, consultants are contracted by the state government to project manage the process of revitalising a neighbourhood through an open tendering process. In the second model, the state government partners with the private sector in 'Joint Venture' projects and shares the costs and profits of land development through various funding packages. In both models, a sound business case and rigorous risk-assessment process are essential elements for ensuring financial viability and positive social outcomes.

The contribution of housing design to developing social links within the neighbourhood and with the wider community is evidenced through an innovation from the United States.

### **Box 14: Revitalising disused properties in rural areas – Windy Hills, Clyde, Wayne County, New York State**

The transformation of the Windy Hills apartment complex, from buildings that had fallen into a state of disrepair and become the site of criminal activity to high-quality, affordable housing, provides insights into how social links can be nurtured. After the non-profit organisation PathStone took over the buildings, it demolished two of the seven existing structures and carried out extensive renovations in the remaining buildings. It also provided on-site property management services and community spaces for residents to gather, engage in social activities and participate in resident service programmes that included housekeeping and parenting skills, and educational and medical services. These services are provided in collaboration with a range of agencies.

Improvements to the physical and social dimension of this complex have reportedly helped to create a sense of community within the neighbourhood and overcome resistance from the wider population. The organisation has also succeeded in keeping rents low, so that the housing continues to be affordable for 29 low-income families who live in the area. Funding for renovating the buildings was obtained from a mix of sources, including the federal and state governments. The main mechanism through which PathStone delivers good-quality housing for low rents is the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), a programme that provides an incentive to investors to inject capital into new construction or acquisition and rehabilitation of rental apartments for lower-income Americans. Funding remains a challenge to the organisation.

## **Lessons for the UK**

The approaches taken in both the NLP and the Windy Hills complex are consistent with an extensive body of literature on sustainability that recognises the need for social as well as physical and economic

sustainability. Recurrent messages emphasise the importance of meaningful community engagement at key stages of the process to identify local issues and carry out sustained community development work. As the innovations from both Australia and the US reveal, such work should not only be carried out in urban areas, but also in rural ones, where the challenges may be greater, given the typically smaller and more dispersed nature of the population, and the lack of easy access to amenities that offer opportunities for social interaction. The Australian-based innovation also illustrates the potential for public-private partnerships to not only provide additional financial resources, but also contribute to the management of assets, the valuation and marketing of real estate, and knowledge of environmentally friendly and sustainable design.

# 8 Mobilising social change to tackle extreme housing exclusion

In this chapter, we examine innovations that tackle the lack of political participation and 'voice' of people affected by extreme housing exclusion, as a driver of the phenomenon. More specifically, we examine the role of social movements in raising awareness of the structural issues that contribute to extreme housing exclusion.

After the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008, unemployment rates in Spain rose to 26%, leaving many unable to pay their mortgage or access other forms of housing. The Plataforma Afectados Hipoteca PAH-Madrid or Platform of People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) emerged to address these factors.

## **Box 15: Community activism in tackling extreme housing exclusion – PAH in Spain**

PAH was established in 2009 in Barcelona, in response to the loss of more than half a million people's homes through repossession by banks. It is led by people linked to the fight for the right to housing, but most participants are those affected by the foreclosure process. In the short term, it aims to respond directly to the immediate needs of people who have lost their homes, and to provide support as they find alternative accommodation. Part of this work is intended to counter the stigma that people often feel when they lose their homes, and to raise awareness that such losses are linked to structural factors. Among the techniques that PAH uses to raise public awareness are *escraches*, which are non-violent demonstrations, sometimes held outside politicians' homes, to protest against mortgage laws.

The movement played a key role in influencing the government to introduce a two-year moratorium on mortgages in November 2012. It is also campaigning for a change in mortgage legislation. Currently, if a property gets repossessed, any outstanding debt is not cancelled, unlike in many other European countries. PAH has been campaigning for a change in legislation so that after repossession, any outstanding debt is cancelled. In 2013, Spain's ruling Popular Party (PP) approved a new mortgage law that makes it easier for some poorer families to cancel their debts, but it does not go as far as the demands presented by PAH. The law will only permit households where every member is unemployed and the annual combined income is less than € 19,000 to give up their property in return for the mortgage debt to be cancelled.

The organisation is entirely run by volunteers who include journalists, lawyers, urban planners and social scientists, with membership estimated at 1300 people.

The work of All Together in Dignity (ATD) in Madrid is linked to the ATD Fourth World movement, which was founded in France in 1957, to support people living in extreme poverty through participatory action.

### **Box 16: Participatory action in tackling extreme housing exclusion – ATD Madrid, Spain**

The first Spanish branch of the ATD movement was established in 1992 in Madrid, with two other branches following in Barcelona and Seville. Among its key local partners are churches and social work departments. The organisation aims to facilitate dialogue between people affected by poverty and public institutions, and to put pressure on the latter to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. The branch in Madrid employs five members of staff and has around 50 to 60 volunteers. It is financed by the international ATD movement, and by donations from individuals.

In 2001 it supported more than 100 families (most of whom were Gypsies/Travellers) in the relocation process from the Pozo del Huevo slum in Madrid, from where they were evicted due to area regeneration. Currently, ATD Madrid continues to support the same families who have since been evicted from the social rented homes they gained access to in 2001.

One of the main challenges reported to be faced by the organisation is convincing people who are seeking shelter and have no experience of organised protesting that they can make a positive change through self-organisation and mobilisation. Persuading support agencies that more can be achieved through working together was also reported to be challenging. The organisation has been credited for transforming the problems faced by individuals into a collective problem, and helping to bring about an alternative discourse of the factors contributing to the housing crisis to that commonly found in official accounts.

## **Lessons for the UK**

As with the social movement in Switzerland, which supported the occupation of empty buildings in Geneva and other cities as discussed in Chapter 3, both PAH and ATD Madrid illustrate the important role that can be played by social movements in providing opportunities for the ‘voice’ of those affected by extreme housing exclusion to be heard. While the scale of people affected by lack of access to affordable housing in the UK may not be as large as that in Spain, lessons can be drawn relating to the critical factors needed to bring about change. According to Álvarez de Andrés *et al.* (2015), these include:

- the capacity to mobilise resources through recruiting a wide range of members and organisations at various levels, including the global, national, local and micro-levels;
- the ability to communicate effectively;
- mechanisms for engagement;
- the capacity to inspire trust and resistance;
- the ability to frame issues in ways that increase acceptance of claims;
- favourable public attitudes;
- the capacity to gain support among professional communities for new practices and processes; and
- the capacity to theorise, transpose and translate factors at play within one context to another.

The next chapter draws together international lessons that have been considered in this report and examines their relevance for the UK.

# 9 Conclusions and main implications

The starting point of the research was the increasing pressure on homelessness services and the difficulties faced by services in responding to groups of people who are either not eligible or prioritised for help from formal support services, and may consequently face extreme housing exclusion. These included diverse groups of migrants including (refused) asylum-seekers, undocumented migrants and economic migrants who lack access to social housing or housing benefits, and UK nationals with complex needs who are eligible for social housing, but are not able to successfully engage with available services.

Among the former group, we noted the interaction between several drivers of extreme housing exclusion, including low income or pay and marginalisation or exclusion from the labour market, lack of legal status and recent arrival, and the lack of affordable housing as contributing to extreme housing exclusion. Among the latter group, economic factors related to low income, pay or marginalisation from the labour market, combined with substance dependencies, contribute to the phenomenon. Weak social links were identified as a driver of extreme housing exclusion that cut across all of these groups.

The differential position of the groups considered within this study with respect to the welfare system in the UK calls for approaches that are sensitive to the groups' specific needs. The position of (refused) asylum-seekers who are not allowed to work is, for instance, substantively different from that of economic migrants. Yet, all groups of migrants and UK nationals require access to safe and decent housing. Innovations that addressed each of the drivers of extreme housing exclusion were examined in earlier chapters, including what makes them work and why, their (cost) effectiveness, and what would need to change in the UK in order for them to work. In this concluding chapter, we draw together the main lessons of the review and consider their implications.

## Preventing and responding to the need for informal solutions

The study has revealed specific contexts where the lack of affordable housing has driven people to develop their own informal solutions, including through indefinite occupation of land or property. This highlights the importance of tackling the lack of affordable housing and putting into place measures to avoid the need for people to develop their own solutions. However, where it is not possible to prevent this, there is scope for action to be taken by local authorities that builds on the guidance already issued by the DCLG (2015a) on responses to illegal occupation of land, and on lessons from the US that indicate the role authorities can play in supporting homeless individuals. Creative and proactive use of planning legislation can also play a part in making land more available for accommodating people facing extreme housing exclusion.

Of high relevance here is the role that organised forms of collective action can play, including through the evolution of housing cooperatives and use of empty buildings, particularly in supporting those who are not eligible for access to social housing, but also more widely. The crucial role that the state can play in supporting these innovations has also been revealed, including through providing finance and encouraging the involvement of the private sector as in Switzerland, and through passing legislation that supports the formation of these organisations, as in Argentina. Supporting community-led housing initiatives is likely to involve considerable time, resources and capacity-building, given their highly participatory nature, but does appear to hold potential in contributing to meeting housing need at a local level.

Yet other forms of collective action that have been shown to be effective in tackling extreme housing exclusion can be found in social movements that have raised public awareness of the structural factors that contribute to the phenomenon in diverse contexts. The study has revealed the important role that

can be played by such movements in mobilising support, engaging in dialogue with the state and contributing to positive changes that have supported community-led housing organisations and alleviated the extreme exclusion experienced by some sections of the population.

## **Diversifying the supply of affordable housing**

The study has also revealed the scope for diversifying the supply of affordable housing in the UK, including through maximising the use of available assets in the form of empty buildings and vacant land, especially in the commercial sector. It has also revealed that the potential role that community self-build can play should be investigated more closely, supplemented by action that relates to making more land available, for example, through development plans, community land trusts or self-build districts. Such strategies may be suitable for people with complex needs, as part of approaches that seek to build individual assets, as well as for some migrants.

Other alternative strategies for increasing the supply of affordable housing lie in innovative design of housing that supports low-income families, including through incremental building, which allows homes to be sold more cheaply and completed when resources allow. The use of modern and environmentally sustainable methods in constructing temporary housing can also potentially meet the needs of migrants employed in short-term work, as well as potentially cut down the cost of temporarily accommodating other groups of people.

## **The role of housing in tackling complex needs and building social links**

The study also revealed the role of housing in addressing drivers of extreme housing exclusion that relate to alcohol or substance dependencies, or experience of gender-based abuse or trafficking. Here, immediate access to housing was shown to play an important role in enabling individuals to engage with longer-term goals related to rehabilitation and health and wellbeing or, in some cases, employability, while ensuring continuity of support.

The role of housing in strengthening social links between and within vulnerable groups, and between disadvantaged groups and the wider population, also emerged as important in addressing the phenomenon of extreme housing exclusion. Innovations here include the involvement of host families, promoting a leadership role among users of homelessness services, and sensitive design of the built environment to provide opportunities for interaction and integration.

## **Main implications of the study**

The implications of individual innovations have been closely examined in earlier chapters. Here, we draw together the major implications of the study. Cumulatively, the innovations examined indicate the scope for a wider approach to tackling extreme housing exclusion than is conventionally practised in the UK. This approach involves maximising the use of available assets in the form of both physical and human resources, and exploring more closely how more creative management of land can contribute to increasing the supply of affordable housing. It also strongly indicates the value of collective action at a number of levels, including through community-led housing organisations and mobilising public support for addressing the lack of affordable housing. At a strategic level, the study indicates the value of a multi-faceted approach that tackles the multiple drivers of extreme housing exclusion.

This in turn indicates the need for housing policy to straddle other policy areas, including planning, land reform, employability, health and urban regeneration. This requires engagement with a broad range of stakeholders working in these areas. Most of the innovations identified through this international study – which included scrutiny of a wide range of sociopolitical contexts in both developed and developing economies – require some funding from the state. This strongly indicates that the state has an important role to play in alleviating extreme housing exclusion, however challenging this may be in the current economic climate. Encouragingly, most of the innovations considered demonstrate evidence of (cost) effectiveness in supporting extremely marginalised and disadvantaged groups. They can also contribute to

reducing the pressure on the housing market at a local level, thus widening the options available to less-disadvantaged groups. Finally, the study indicates the value of continuing to learn and share international innovations in tackling extreme housing exclusion, as well as discovering how and why they work.

## Future areas for research

Many of the diverse innovations discussed in this report are worthy of further in-depth examination, including attitudes towards community-led communal housing, incremental building and community self-build. Among migrant workers and others in need of temporary accommodation, attitudes towards high-quality, temporary housing can also be usefully explored. Research in these areas could investigate the cultural acceptability of the solutions proposed, and the institutional and other changes that would need to be made.

A major area where further research would be helpful is investigation into the design of built forms that encourage regular interaction among residents and facilitate the integration of diverse groups. There is increasing recognition of the role that urban design can play in creating more cohesive, vibrant communities, but a gap in understanding of how this can contribute to strengthening social links among severely disadvantaged groups.

Finally, another area that would be useful to investigate is the scale, role and nature of community housing-related activism that is currently ongoing within the UK, and what is needed to support the growth of such activism, especially in relation to the groups of people who are most disadvantaged (and the focus of this report).

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**Dr Filip Sosenko**, Research Fellow, has led and contributed to studies relating to minority ethnic poverty, housing and employment.

**Dr Harry Smith**, Associate Professor/Reader, has longstanding research interests and expertise in human settlements in the rapidly urbanising world, particularly Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa.

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