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**A description and analysis of the 'Rough Sleeping' strategy in England on street homelessness with a view to the broader European social inclusion strategy and policy context and the French strategy**





## Executive Summary

As a result of the Social Exclusion Unit's Report on Rough Sleeping (SEU, July 1998), a specific government strategy on sleeping rough was developed. The Prime Minister set the target of reducing the number of people sleeping rough to as near zero as possible, but by at least two-thirds, by April 2002. The base-line number is that from June 1998: 1,850 people sleeping rough in England on any single night (including some 620 in Greater London). This number is used to assess the impact of the strategy.

Six key principles, and a number of 'key proposals for change' to realise these key principles, were defined.

- o Tackle the root causes of rough sleeping;
- o Pursue approaches that help people off the streets, and reject those which sustain a street lifestyle;
- o Focus on those most in need;
- o Never give up on the most vulnerable;
- o Help rough sleepers to become active members of the community;
- o Be realistic about what we can offer those who are capable of helping themselves.

Have the targets of the RSS been reached? The quantitative target was reached one year earlier than expected. By November 2001, the number of rough sleepers was down to 550. This means that the introduction of a strictly quantitative target has had positive effects.

However, this focus on one quantitative target could lead to a one-sided strategy, and undervalue the wide range of initiatives developed within the RSS. Therefore, more diverse and longer-term targets and appropriate result indicators are needed, for factors such as health, housing, work, and maintaining high-quality services. It is also important to develop tools to regularly monitor the population and to ensure that services are correctly implemented. This implies the development of data collection systems with the help of local authorities and service providers, to harmonise the nature and kind of data collected at local level, thus leading to a set of comparable figures and statistics on the regional, national and even European levels.



CATs or 'Contact and Assessment Teams' were seen as one of the major successes of the RSU strategy and have been central to reducing the number of rough sleepers. Their work was seen as being much more focused and assertive than most previous outreach work. The following key factors have been identified: time spent on the streets, persistence in contacting rough sleepers, detailed action plans with a limited goal and a focus on achieving targets, team work, close work with other agencies, diversion of newcomers to their home areas.

Prevention was strongly stressed in the RSS and the strategy was certainly successful in this respect. Rather than simply responding to crisis situations, it anticipated them by getting rough sleepers off the street before they could occur. However, the RSS focused on short-term prevention and has neglected mid-term and long-term prevention, which would imply cutting off or at least slowing down the production lines of rough sleeping.

The reintegration of people sleeping rough into society requires an integrated approach. The RSS emphasised a range of actions wider than housing, supported by regular inter-agency work bringing together actors from CATs, the police, hostels, social services, health services, housing services and Tenancy Sustainment Teams (TST). The co-operation between different agencies and between different professional groups and volunteers provided the flexibility needed to meet the specific needs of individuals sleeping rough.

The involvement of a national authority guarantees continuity and an equal provision of services by local authorities so that delocalisation effects, resulting from uneven provision at the local level, are avoided. Indeed, migration is an important characteristic of rough sleeping and homelessness. To a large degree, co-operation between national and local levels was realised in the RSS since all local initiatives were part of a national strategy co-ordinated by the Rough Sleepers Unit (RSU). The RSU provided both funding and strategic leadership.

An important step towards a more sustainable homelessness policy was taken with the Homelessness Act of 2002, the most extensive legislation since 1977. It constitutes the main part of the government's new strategy for tackling homelessness. A bill introduced into Parliament on 8 December 2003 has further reinforced the preventive aspect.



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## Description of the main elements of the strategy

Both the first and the second Joint Report on Social Inclusion (2001, 2003) state that homelessness is perhaps the most extreme form of social exclusion. This statement is in line with the UK government's definition of rough sleeping as one of the most severe manifestations of social exclusion. Its reduction and even eradication can thus be considered a test case for a government's effort to foster social inclusion.

This report focuses on the specific government strategy on rough sleeping – also called 'Coming in from the Cold' – but refers to the wider context of homelessness policy when relevant.

### *What were the reasons for developing the strategy?*

The 1991 census found 2,703 people sleeping rough in England and Wales, of whom almost half (1,275) were in Greater London. The amount of rough sleeping or street homelessness and the real and/or perceived problems it created, led the government to establish a 'Rough Sleepers Initiative' (RSI) to work with street homelessness in London. The initiative was replicated in other English cities in 1996 and in Scotland in 1997. Although in the first phase the number of people sleeping rough did diminish, thereafter the number reached a plateau. In 1998, there were still an estimated 1,850 on any one night in England, of whom around one-third (620) were in Greater London ((Randall and Brown 2002).

In July 1998, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) published a 'Report on Rough Sleeping' <sup>1</sup>, setting out the way for reducing rough sleeping in England. Some months prior to this policy report, DETR published a review of the research on rough sleeping by Randall (Randall 1998). The purpose of this review was to summarise existing knowledge on rough sleeping, in order to inform the work being undertaken by the SEU. The publication covers numbers and patterns of people sleeping rough, their characteristics and background, causes and contributory factors of rough sleeping, the nature and effectiveness of current interventions, international comparisons, and gaps in the research<sup>2</sup>.

- 1 The use of 'rough sleeping' instead of 'rough sleepers' is important. It refers to a situation rather than to the people that are subject to it and thus does not further contribute to their 'culpabilisation'. The need to make a distinction between homelessness and homeless people is also underlined by M. Marpsat (Marpsat, M. (s.d.). Homelessness research: definitional issues and first mapping of methodologies. *INED*: 7.
- 2 It would be useful to repeat this effort.



As a result of the SEU's report, a specific government strategy focused on sleeping rough was developed. Sleeping rough was defined as one of the extreme manifestations of social exclusion, which implies that its reduction and even eradication was considered a test case for the government's efforts to foster social inclusion. The Prime Minister set a target of reducing the numbers of people sleeping rough to as near zero as possible but by at least two thirds by April 2002.

In the meantime, and probably because of the success of the programme in reducing the number of people sleeping rough, this strategy seems to have been reintegrated into an overall homelessness policy. At least, in the 'Prevention of homelessness policy briefing' of June 2003, this reduction in numbers was included as one of two 'key targets, relating to the most extreme manifestations of homelessness' (Directorate 2003). Moreover, according to this document, 'these targets address immediate problems in homelessness but in the longer term more support needs to be available to people who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless' ((Directorate 2003).

This seems to confirm our impression that the use of the word 'strategy' in relation to rough sleeping has been deliberate, and that this strategy was indeed meant to obtain a very specific target in the wider context of homelessness policy (which in its turns is part social inclusion policy). The stress on prevention anyhow invites concern for the societal 'lines of production' that lead people into situations of (extreme) social exclusion?

*What is the baseline situation against which the policy will be measured?*

Figures about people sleeping rough are based on a combination of the most recent street counts and estimates<sup>3</sup>. The baseline number is that from June 1998: 1850 people sleeping rough in England on any single night (including some 620 in Greater London). This number is used to assess the impact of the strategy.

Milestone targets were defined in the Annual Report on Rough Sleeping ((DETR 1999):

3 A Written Parliamentary Answer on 19 May 1999 (*House of Commons, Official Report, Column 355*) set out the methodology for calculating the figures. Rough Sleeping counts are conducted by local authorities in partnership with local homeless agencies, street counts provide a snap-shot of the number of people sleeping rough in a given geographical area on a single night.



- o A reduction of one tenth by December 1999
- o A reduction of one quarter by December 2000
- o A reduction of one third by June 2001
- o So as to arrive at the target of a maximum of 620 people sleeping rough by April 2002 (reduction by two thirds).

We will not discuss in this report the evident problems that arise when trying to count a category of people that is so mobile and hidden as people sleeping rough<sup>4</sup>. Let us just mention:

- o The difference between 'stock' (one night count) and 'flow' (period count) figures, where the latter could be as high as ten times the former, if the period is one year (Randall and Brown 2002). They also rightly indicate that the flow figure will give an indication of the level of demand and services and accommodation. The objection that much of 'flow' is repetitious sleeping patterns rather than truly 'new' cases, rather strengthens this argument;
- o It is recognised that single night counts will not find all people sleeping rough, but if they are conducted thoroughly by staff who know the patterns of rough sleeping in the area they are likely to find the great majority. Certainly, CAT staff believes that they know the great majority of people sleeping rough in their areas.
- o Single night counts may not capture the larger number of people who have some experience of sleeping rough over the course of a year, but they enable to measure changes over time. A good indicator does not always need the highest degree of validity.

#### *Which problems does it intend to solve?*

The strategy intends to reduce the number of people sleeping rough to a minimum, to prevent 'newcomers' to join the population, and to guarantee the lasting integration of the former 'rough sleepers' into society. Indeed, 'the SEU report showed that of the 2.400 people who sleep on the streets of London over the course of a year at least 1.800 are new arrivals'.(DETR 1999). Apart from some questions about this figure<sup>5</sup>, it demonstrates the high proportion of

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4 These methodological problems have been discussed in many publications; see Randall, G. (1998). Rough Sleeping. A Review of the Research. *Housing Research*. (London), DETR (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions): 42.

5 The yearly flow figure was an addition to the nightly counts. The purpose was to establish an internet database of all known people sleeping rough in central London, later extended to the whole of London. This



newcomers in the population sleeping rough (at least in London) and the urgent need to stop this continuous inflow.

Also, 'a new and coherent approach was needed' (DETR 1999), implying that the previous approach had become bureaucratic and piecemeal and that responsibilities were spread over too many actors.

### *Goals and target groups of the strategy*

From the documents we consulted, it is difficult to clearly identify the goals and targets of this 'rough sleeping' strategy. This tends to complicate the choice of 'reference points' for evaluation. Indeed,

- o goals and targets are defined on several 'levels';
- o the relation between goals and targets on these different levels is not always clear;
- o they seem to have been adapted, specified, or 're-prioritised' during this period - although not in the sense of numerical outcomes.

Six key principles were defined for the government's strategy on rough sleeping:

- o Tackle the root causes of rough sleeping.
- o Pursue approaches that help people off the streets, and reject those which sustain a street lifestyle.
- o Focus on those most in need.
- o Never give up on the most vulnerable.
- o Help rough sleepers to become active members of the community.
- o Be realistic about what we can offer those who are capable of helping themselves.

In order to realise these larger goals, a number of 'key proposals for change' were defined

- o To make more bed spaces available for rough sleepers, with the right sort of help for those who need it most. (...)

was to assist with support work to each client and to track their progress from the streets to hostels to permanent housing, or back to the streets again. It also enabled an assessment of the numbers of people sleeping rough over periods of time. The data is recorded by 62 projects, which work with people sleeping rough. Each individual person is given a unique identifier to avoid double counting. On single night counts there will be a smaller proportion of new arrivals and a higher proportion of longer term homeless people, because they will have a higher probability of being present on any one night (with thanks to G. Randall).



- o To be imaginative about how rough sleepers' needs are to be met, and create more flexible options for people coming off the streets.
- o To develop a focussed, more targeted approach to street work, so as to give priority to helping people off the streets
- o To ensure clear lines of responsibility and accountability for those working with rough sleepers
- o To ensure that street lifestyles are not reinforced but to provide opportunities for ending them
- o To provide services when rough sleepers need them most
- o To help those in most need, such as those with mental illnesses, or who misuse drugs and alcohol
- o To ensure a continuum of care, so that there is a clear route from the streets to a settled lifestyle, with the right number of organisations and individuals involved
- o To provide opportunities for meaningful occupation, to help give people the self-esteem and life-skills to sustain a lifestyle away from the streets
- o To improve the incentives to come inside, both by offering provision which meets people's specific needs and by refocusing services away from those that sustain a street lifestyle
- o To put in place measures to prevent rough sleeping, so that new people do not see the streets as the only option.

Complementary to this general goals, preventive measures were targeted at certain groups 'at a high risk of becoming homeless', because that would provide 'the best chance of reducing the numbers of vulnerable people who end up on the streets' ((DETR 1999). The 'vulnerable' groups are: care leavers (1/4 to 1/3 of the population of rough sleepers), other vulnerable young people, ex-offenders (1/2), ex-Service personnel (1/5 to 1/4). The preventive actions are presented under following headings: care leavers, guidance to school youth homelessness action partnership, ex-offenders, and ex-Service personnel (DETR 1999).

In the end, the key sentence with respect to the government's strategy on rough sleeping is: Prevention is the only means of ensuring a lasting and sustainable end to the problem of rough sleeping. So, the frame of reference for evaluating these policies is its preventive character (see further).

Apart from the definition of 'vulnerable' groups above (care leavers, other vulnerable young people, ex-offenders, and ex-Service personnel (DETR 1999),



target groups are defined statistically and in terms of support need. Statistically, they are groups with a high 'incidence of rough sleeping' (Randall 1998). In terms of support need ((Randall and Brown 2002), following subgroups are identified: people unlikely to require long-term support (life crisis type), people likely to need medium or long-term support of the type offered by TSTs (substantial deep-seated problems with a serious commitment to tackling their problems), and people in need of more intensive support (substantial deep-seated problems, but not being realistic about their resettlement prospects and about the support they might need).

In a certain sense, the wider community could also be seen as a target group, because they do not want to have people sleeping rough and thus contribute to their identification as a social problem. We should, indeed, never forget that a situation only becomes a social problem if it is defined so by important actors and the 'public opinion' is, more than ever, such an actor. Any strategy then would, at least implicitly, be addressed at the many volunteers working in daycentres and shelters, at the potential clients for 'social business' (social economy) initiatives which provide opportunities for people sleeping rough to integrate into employment and the wider community and at the general public who should well understand the message that services were not aimed at sustaining people on the streets, but rather were intended to help people move away from sleeping rough.

#### *Legal and financial provisions to implement the policy*

The 'Rough Sleepers Unit' (RSU) – see below – had an integrated budget of £ 145 million (about € 219 million) for London over three years, which 'is a significant net increase on the resources that were originally earmarked over this period for the Government's programmes targeted on rough sleepers' (DETR 1999). For projects outside London, £ 34 million (about € 51) was available over a period of three years under the Homeless Action Programme<sup>6</sup>. Although 'priority was given 'to schemes which were supported by their local authority as part of their local strategy for preventing and dealing with rough sleeping', it is clear that only part of this budget would go to this more specific target.

6 £ 27 million was allocated immediately, a second tranche 'over the coming months to national and local schemes in response to recognised need' (DETR (1999). Annual Report on Rough Sleeping. London, DETR: 27.



At least at the start of the strategy, a dual approach thus existed: focus on rough sleeping in (Greater) London, inclusion into homeless programmes outside (Greater) London. 'To complement the Homeless Action Programme, the Department of Health announced a programme of grants under the Homeless mentally Ill Initiative and Drug and Alcohol Specific Grants to help rough sleepers with these health problems across the country outside London' ((DETR 1999)

### *Institutional arrangements and procedures of implementation*

The responsibility for co-ordinating the overall strategy on rough sleeping was given to the DETR (Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions). Within this Department, the 'Rough Sleepers Unit' (RSU), was established in April 1999; its head was Louise Casey, former Deputy Director of Shelter. It assumed responsibility for national rough sleeping policy from September 1999 on. Its task was to implement the recommendations of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), by working on a radical new approach to help vulnerable rough sleepers off the streets, rebuilding the lives of former rough sleepers and preventing new rough sleepers of tomorrow. A strict quantitative target was defined (see above), which was reached in November 2001 ((Randall and Brown 2002)

On the political side, a Ministerial Committee was established (headed by Hilary Armstrong, Minister for Local Government and Housing). This Committee includes/included ministers from the Home Office, from the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Employment, the Department of Social Security, the Ministry of Defence, and HM Treasury. Its responsibility is to track the action and achievements of Government and the progress towards the target.

The establishing of such a Committee indicates 1° the recognition that the ultimate responsibility for the strategy lies with policy-makers and 2° that the problem is a multi-facetal one which can only be effectively combated by an integrated approach. 'This Ministerial Committee did meet twice and helped to raise key policy areas from Departments with an interest'.

The means created to achieve goals and targets can be subsumed under four headings (illustrated by a selection of very specific measures):

#### **Street work**

Around 25 CATs (Contact and Assessment Teams) were created in key areas both inside and outside London. CATs are multidisciplinary teams run by the



voluntary sector but with statutory involvement, such as from mental health specialists ((RSU 2000). They take responsibility for discrete geographical areas, with the highest concentration of rough sleepers. They are expected to operate from midnight to early morning, when people sleeping rough are most receptive to help. CATs are described as a wholly new approach to street work in London.

(The 'Contact and Assessment Approach' was integrated into the work of daycentres, who were funded to take responsibility for rough sleepers in their area).

### **Hostels**

850 new hostel bed spaces for rough sleepers in London, including additional specialist help. In addition to providing new hostel beds, an important part of the programme has been to ensure that priority for hostel beds is given to people who have been sleeping rough and to providing support in the hostels so that people do not return to the streets, a major problem in the past.

### **Permanent housing**

Around 1.000 new housing association homes in London targeted on people who have come either from the street or via special supported hostels. These 1000 new homes were in addition to 4000, which had already been provided under earlier programmes for people sleeping rough.

### **Health care and other support**

- o Over 4.000 bed spaces nationwide formerly funded by the DSS more directly in use for those living on the streets
- o 60 new specialists for rough sleepers with drugs, alcohol or mental health problems, or multiple needs
- o The most vulnerable people will be looked after at all stages as they move to a more settled life
- o 6 Tenancy Sustainment Teams (TSTs) were set up in London (and some also outside London)

### *The case of France*

#### **Definitions of homelessness**

France has no official definition of homelessness, though most surveys use a common definition. This lack of an official definition of homelessness means that there are no categories (homeless mothers, etc.) that could be targeted



(via positive treatment, positive discrimination) in public housing, education, or employment policies (Marpsat s.d.).

Recent homeless surveys, conducted by INED at the local level and by INSEE at the national level, are based on a definition of the homeless as people who, at the time of the survey, are sleeping in the street or in other places unfit for human habitation, and persons living in shelters, hotels or flats paid for by NGO or public agencies (Firdion and Marpsat s.d.)<sup>7</sup>. The 'literally homeless' ('sans-domicile au sens restreint') then are people who combine the 'lowest end' of housing type (living in shelters or rough sleeping) and occupancy status (living with others out of necessity) (Marpsat s.d.).

Most studies define homelessness as a special case of the housing situation. Other factors, such as the employment and family situation, are considered as causes or correlates of homelessness or as having the same roots (Marpsat s.d.)<sup>8</sup>.

#### **Homelessness policy in France and its context (Firdion and Marpsat s.d.)**

Social protest movements often inspire public authorities to pay extra attention to deprived population groups – who then are again perceived as 'les classes dangereuses'. May 68 led to programmes to suppress unhealthy accommodations (1970) and an act that created shelters for social rehabilitation. In the 80's, social programmes are set up, of which the 1987 'Winter Plan against Poverty' is the most relevant one for our subject because it subsidized and coordinated (low requirement) emergency shelters in each 'département'. NGO's and municipalities manage these shelters and they also have been involved, at one time or another, in demonstrations or in lobbying on behalf of homeless people. Homeless people could apply for the Minimum Insertion Income (RMI - 1988) on condition that they have a residence at specific local organizations.

In the 1990's, the Besson act on formal housing rights is the start for a series of more specific measures, such as the act on eviction orders (1991) and the Accommodation Act (1994), which enlists local authorities to provide (temporary) accommodation to the homeless. Subsidies are conditional upon an annual evaluation.

7 Firdion and Marpsat (Firdion, J.-M. and M. Marpsat (s.d.). Homeless research in France: definition of homelessness, research, and legislation and its last developments: 12.) mention some interesting differences between both definitions.

8 For a detailed review of research in France, see Ibid.



Since 1993, many urban municipalities publish local measures forbidding begging, which imply repression by the police. At present, the recent act on 'Interior Security' defines new offences concerning 'aggressive' panhandling and wandering. In large cities, public transport corporations organised the transport of these 'undesirables' to emergency shelters.

Around the same time, the first initiatives to collect statistical data on the number and characteristics of 'literally homeless people' are taken (1993) and the SAMU-Social is created (1994). This organisation intends to direct homeless people found in public places to shelters or to specialised centres for young mothers, young people. At the end of the century, two important acts are passed that should have an indirect but strongly preventive impact on the generation of homelessness: the Act against Social Exclusion (1998) and the Universal Health Insurance Act (1999).

*Which aspects of the EU Social Inclusion strategy are addressed by the strategy?*

The 2001 Joint Report on Social Inclusion ((EC 2002) does not mention rough sleeping (except for two national numerical estimates); the homeless are mainly referred to for illustrative purposes, besides other vulnerable groups. Homelessness is very much linked to housing/accommodation; only once is it approached from a multidimensional view. The latter approach would connect homelessness in general and rough sleeping in particular with the core subjects of the NAPs/incl (National Action Plans on Social Inclusion) – employment, education, housing and health – but also with the use of (quantitative) indicators, the preventive character of policies, and co-operation between public administrations and NGOs.

Was more attention paid to rough sleeping and homelessness in the second Joint Report on Social Inclusion published in 2003 (EC 2004)? Did the approach develop in a more inclusive direction? As for rough sleeping, it is only mentioned in relation to the English and Scottish initiatives. As for homelessness in general, much more attention is paid to it compared with the 2001 report.

Homelessness is mentioned as one of the negative trends that seem to be increasingly common in several countries, together with rising unemployment levels, increasing numbers dependent on minimum income schemes and an increase in mental health problems and in problems related to addiction. Its



perceived increase is again linked to accommodation, and in particular to growing housing waiting lists. Furthermore, according to this 2003 Joint Report, the risk factors associated with poverty and social exclusion identified in 2001 are confirmed in the 2003 NAPs/incl. Here again housing problems and homelessness are closely connected and mentioned alongside long-term dependence on low/inadequate income, long-term unemployment, low quality or absence of employment record, low level of education and training and illiteracy, growing up in a vulnerable family, disability, health problems and difficult living conditions, living in an area of multiple disadvantage, immigration, ethnicity, racism and discrimination.

The first Joint Report on Social Inclusion mentioned that, in spite of its importance, information on homelessness in the NAPs/incl is generally poor. The situation has not significantly improved since. According to the second Joint Report on Social Inclusion, "in the absence of clear, common definitions, and given the difficulties of counting a population which slips under the radar of the normal censuses, it is difficult to establish precise and comparable figures. The efforts made since 2001 by certain Member States (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Netherlands, United Kingdom) and by Eurostat have still not yielded harmonised statistics, and despite the recommendations of the Laeken European Council, many Member States do not present 'tertiary indicators' of homelessness in their NAPs/incl. The estimates are therefore based more on administrative data (numbers of persons dealt with by the homelessness services) than on exhaustive data."

Moreover, whenever indicators are available, they often reflect administrative concerns and outputs instead of focusing on outcomes. Most Member States admit that they know too little about either the magnitude or the nature of the problem, which also prevents them from developing more strategic and preventive measures against homelessness.

As for the quantified targets of the English RSS, they meet the conclusions of the Barcelona European Council that invited Member States "to set targets, in their NAPs, for significantly reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 2010", an invitation that was elaborated in the Common Outline agreed for the 2003/2005 NAPs/incl by the Commission and Member States. It stated that quantified targets should be set for reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. These should draw as appropriate on the commonly agreed indicators but also take into account other



issues such as deprivation, housing and homelessness and literacy and numeracy. Member States were invited to use third-level indicators defined at the national level to highlight specificities in particular areas not adequately covered by them, and to help interpret the primary and secondary indicators. Because the Social Protection Committee has not yet been able to propose a commonly agreed indicator on the key dimension of housing, it was agreed that in the NAPs this dimension should be covered through tertiary indicators, namely those describing the issues of decent housing, housing costs and homelessness and other precarious housing conditions.

Although somewhat widened, this close connection between homelessness and providing accommodation is kept intact in terms of policies. The first Joint Report on Social Inclusion (2001) had stressed that for all Member States the need to guarantee everyone access to decent housing was one of the eight core challenges of their policies against poverty and social exclusion. It stated that: "Access to good quality and affordable accommodation is a fundamental need and right. Ensuring that this need is met is still a significant challenge in a number of Member States." However, "in addition, developing appropriate integrated responses to both prevent and address homelessness is another essential challenge for some countries".

What does the second Joint Report on Social Inclusion tell us about preventing and tackling homelessness? Homelessness is recognised as a multidimensional problem, which calls for an integrated and holistic approach. This includes, besides housing, health (especially mental health), employment, training, justice, and social protection. The 2003-2005 NAPs/incl all agree that decent housing, at an affordable price for households and in a safe, dynamic environment offering appropriate social support and an environment where children can grow up in good conditions, is a central plank in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The social and economic cost of the absence of decent housing, though not yet evaluated at European level as the absence of social protection has been, appears to seriously compromise the dynamism of a country or region.

All Member States describe in their NAPs/incl efforts to improve the emergency reception and temporary housing of homeless persons and to alleviate their day-to-day difficulties. Some also emphasise the preventive dimension (Germany), but only four have introduced strategies designed to eradicate homelessness completely (Austria, Finland, Ireland, United Kingdom), while three are preparing such strategies (Belgium, France, Portugal).



These strategies for preventing and combating situations of homelessness are based on two pillars. The first is about improving social emergency mechanisms, providing more temporary accommodation, setting up multidisciplinary mobile outreach teams, networking between public authorities, health care and psychiatric institutions, emergency shelter institutions and social housing agencies, co-operation with NGOs and a guaranteed re-housing capacity by the public authorities; the second refers to sustained efforts by professionals and volunteers to help with social integration and reintegration.

We will encounter a significant number of these proposals in the English RSS that is the subject of this peer review, which contributes to the RSS' relevance to the EU scene. However, in spite of the growth in information on national policies to combat homelessness and of indications of the exchange of good practices, there is still a long way to go before arriving at an overall and integrated EU policy response to (street) homelessness.

### **The results so far and a first evaluation**

At first sight, evaluating policies in the UK is relatively easy because of a strong tradition of independent evaluation. The evaluation of government strategies & policies regarding rough sleeping is no exception to this rule. Even rather official publications, such as the progress reports, include critical remarks such as 'the prime Minister's target may be simple, but the solutions to deliver it are complicated' (RSU 2000). Once confronted, however, with the fairly pragmatic approach (resulting in a wide range of very diverse initiatives and responsibilities), the task becomes much more complicated.

#### *The quantitative results of the strategy*

This part seems easiest to evaluate. Given that the baseline number is 1850 people sleeping rough in 1998 and the target is to reduce that number by at least 2/3 by 2002, the strategy (policy) was successful. Indeed, the number of people sleeping rough already was down to 550 one year earlier, by November 2001 (Randall and Brown 2002). The first progress report (RSU 2000; RSU 2001) mentions that the intermediary milestone (reduction by 1/10 by December 1999) was met.

The most recent national estimation from the ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) is that, as at June 2003, there were 504 people sleeping rough in



England on any single night, the lowest recorded level. Albeit this figure does show a further 10 per cent reduction, it is at a slower rate than in the previous three years.

As services improve and numbers on the streets reduce, those who are left will be people who are more difficult to help. This is so because they are refusing accommodation and support for a range of reasons or because the strategy is not adapted to their specific needs. These could range from the accumulation of problems ('the hard core') to the (relative) attractiveness of street life (companionship, anonymity, novelty). More recent research by Randall & Brown (for the homelessness charity 'Crisis', not yet published) suggests that, while the very young (under 18 years) and the older homeless people (over 40) are now rare, an intermediate group remains on the streets whose major problem is addiction to heroin and crack cocaine.

Randall & Brown ((Randall and Brown 2002) mention that 'the remaining rough sleepers have high levels of support needs, including mental health and substance abuse problems, particularly the use of hard drugs'. This could mean that a more intensive and focused approach will be necessary. That they are to be given up does not seem to be a real alternative.

### *Other results and achievements of the strategy*

Results regarding the other goals and targets are more difficult to assess. We will focus on the stated goals and targets.

In the first progress report (RSU 2000) some realisations are already mentioned, but most of the report still is about intentions and plans. This is clearly stated in the introduction:

- o The development of 'plans for new services to be put in place across the country that help people move away from the world of rough sleeping and into employment, education, training and active lives as citizens in the community'
- o The writing of 'a clear action plan to deliver across Government the prevention of tomorrow's rough sleeping problem'.

A 'final' evaluation was written by Randall and Brown (Randall and Brown 2002). We focus on some items that are eligible as 'good practices'.



### **About CATs**

'CATs were seen by most agencies reviewed as one of the major successes of the RSU strategy and have been central to the reduction of the number of rough sleepers. (...) Their work was seen as being much more focused and assertive than most previous outreach work.' ((Randall and Brown 2002). More specifically the authors identified as key factors: time spent on the streets, persistence in contacting rough sleepers, detailed action plans with a limited goal and a focus on achieving targets, team work, close work with other agencies, diversion of newcomers to their home areas.

This is the average picture. Randall and Brown mention differences in reduction between areas – and discuss some explanations (operational policies or management, different client profiles, number of contacts per CAT).

That CATs contained specialist staff focusing on substance abuse, mental health, and young people's problems was considered as useful, although it is difficult to assess their impact. On the other hand, diversion work could be enhanced – but then, it is important to have made arrangements with agencies in the home areas to provide access to accommodation and services. Diversion also occurs in a more perverse way, when more assertive policing and town centre management policies simply result in displacement to adjacent areas (even housing estates). Therefore, it is important to provide alternatives (hostel beds, day centres, off-street drinking facilities).

What about the increasing involvement of the police in some areas in town centre management, and rough sleeping programmes ((Randall and Brown 2002)? Positive is that rough sleeping or homelessness and criminal activities, which often are identified with one another, were progressively being approached separately; the police dealing with begging, street drinking and drug use. Public perceptions that people who are begging and street drinking are always homeless however affects the ability of the police to take action; it is – wrongly or rightly - regarded as attempts to remove visible poverty from the streets by use of law<sup>9</sup>.

In some areas, the police referred homeless people to specialist agencies. Close working relationships have been developed in many areas; it was, however,

9 The Home Office's 'Anti-Social Behaviour Unit' (2003) has as one of its key themes to reduce begging in city centres. It now leads the policy in this area, in recognition that begging is not a symptom of a homeless problem but rather a street drug market.



considered not effective for CATs and police to patrol together, for obvious reasons.

The reduction of the number of people sleeping rough is but one of the strategy's targets. To what extent was the production line of 'rough sleeping' cut off or at least slowed down? To this important question, no answer seems yet available. The research that has been done in the UK (Randall 1998; Randall and Brown 2002) suggests that the causes of homelessness might stretch back in some cases to early childhood and it will be a long-term task to tackle them. In the meantime, immediate triggers of homelessness can also be identified and action taken on these. It is also not always clear how the impact of preventive programmes can be evaluated.

#### **About the preventive character of the strategy**

We should ask two questions here, which are clearly part of the concern of the authors of the many reports written and consulted:

Has sleeping rough become less attractive? Or: has the pull effect had less impact? This implies a set of related measures:

- o Sending a message that services were not aimed at sustaining people on the streets, but rather aimed to help people move away from sleeping rough.
- o Destroying the mythical dimension surrounding sleeping rough (camaraderie, adventure, freedom). It seems that the work of some voluntary groups could reinforce street lifestyles (soup runs); they should become more involved in the rough sleeping and homeless strategies, 'so as to channel their efforts into more productive provision' (Randall and Brown 2002)
- o Counteract the willingness of the public to give to beggars.

Have the push factors become less strong and/or better been controlled?

- o This refers to the (often related) general exclusion processes that exist in many societal fields, such as education, work, social networks, and housing.
- o There are, however, also trajectories that are leading people from other specific forms of social exclusion to this most extreme form, such as from homelessness to rough sleeping.
- o Rebuilding the lives of former rough sleepers ('empowerment') through education, training, and employment could mean an important contribution to develop a grip on push factors



### *An integrated strategy through the development of trajectories?*

The idea of 'trajectories', which is implied by many initiatives, should be used more explicitly as a structuring device. A good illustration is given by 'wet day centres', which allow drinking on the premises. Such initiatives only have a lasting effect if they are not only used for removing disturbing behaviour from public places, but are supported by careful management (to assess the needs, to access services). The very wide array of day centres, night centres, hostels should be integrated in such trajectories and thus focus on definite stages in the re-integration process of (some types of) people sleeping rough.

- o From street to short-term hostel
- o From short-term to long-term hostel
- o From hostel to permanent housing. A programme for moving people from hostels to permanent housing is an integral part of the rough sleeping programme.

Some local authorities are now developing integrated strategies for street people, not just those who are sleeping rough, which involve a range of agencies in joint work<sup>10</sup>. The need to develop 'trajectories' underlines the need for comprehensive programmes, which provide help from moving people off the street through to permanent housing and in some cases long term support. These programmes must include a systematic follow up of former rough sleepers, until an acceptable degree of certainty is obtained that they are safely and soundly re-integrated.

### *An assessment of the obstacles and constraints encountered*

#### **At the general level**

- o Better, regular, and more in-depth information
  - The usefulness of one night street counts does not imply that other indicators should not be developed, such as 'flow' counts and the development of other indicators, including more qualitative ones
  - Regular 'state of affairs' such as the 1998 review of research by Randall (Randall 1998)
  - Research on the processes and trajectories
- o More diversified set of indicators (see above)

10 Information provided by G. Randall



- o An integrated and 'positive' approach
  - Integration of any specific strategy into homelessness policies and general employment policies, etc.
  - The dimension 're-integration' has not received the attention it deserves; too much focus on the visibility dimension
- o A preventive approach, that implies the establishing of a permanent task force to monitor the 'production lines' of sleeping rough and to co-ordinate efforts to control them

#### **At the service level**

- o The capacity of some generalist hostel staff to manage former rough sleepers with high support needs, due to the low status of the job and related work conditions and payment;
- o Further and generalised development of trajectories: an integrated approach at the individual level that implies closer and well-organised collaboration between all kind of services (social, labour, education, health, police).
- o How to improve co-ordination between services in different localities (such as in case that people sleeping rough in London are 'returned' to their place of origin).

#### **At the population level**

- o Better use of the resources available in order to promote 'empowerment'
- o How to avoid the creation of a 'street culture'?
- o How far can we go in 'patronising' people – even if the choice they make seems unacceptable?
- o How to steer the general public's behaviour?

#### *From strategy to a sustainable policy*

The government recognizes that the reduction in the number of people sleeping rough will need a lasting (sustained) effort (Minister 2003). An important step towards a more sustainable homelessness policy was taken with the Homelessness Act of 2002, the most extensive legislation since 1977. It constitutes the main part of the government's new strategy for tackling homelessness. All local authorities in England had to produce homelessness strategies by the end of July 2003 to help sustain reductions made in rough sleeping, end the use of B&B (bed and breakfast) accommodation for homeless families with children, and prevent and tackle homelessness.



- o It amended the definition of violence, to include all violence that leads to homelessness;
- o It introduced new duties for local authorities – such as to work in partnership with other agencies, both statutory and voluntary, in combating homelessness;
- o It introduced the duty to assist the statutory homeless until the household secured permanent accommodation;
- o Local housing authorities were also allowed to offer accommodation to non-priority need homeless households.

To this end, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has published two key resources outlining the new strategy and also providing guidelines for local authorities: *More than a Roof: A Report into Tackling Homelessness* and *Homelessness Strategies: A Good Practice Handbook*. The first document contains a (brief) chapter on rough sleeping, which indicates that the somewhat artificial separation between homelessness in general and its most acute form is being reconsidered. The report also mentions some of the weaker points of government policy ((Minister 2003). It accepts the meeting of the quantitative target of 'reducing rough sleeping in England by at least two thirds by 2002', but at the same time it points out that 'Whilst this is a tremendous achievement, there is still much to be done'. The report points out two important issues:

- o That 'there are a number of people still sleeping rough and more needs to be done to establish why they are out there, and what the most effective response should be' ((Minister 2003)
- o At the same time, it indicates the main weakness of the strategy. '... all (strategies and/or areas) will need to have a greater emphasis on preventing rough sleeping and rebuilding the lives of former rough sleepers' ((Minister 2003)

This institutionalisation implies co-ordination between different actors (public and private – voluntary organisations and others), different fields (which means, within the administration, collaboration between departments and with other related actions), and different levels (national, local, taking into account the differences between local situations).

- o The role of local agencies and of inter-agency work
- o National co-ordination and steering

Moreover, a bill has been introduced in Parliament on 8 December 2003. This bill will help the most vulnerable and help create a fairer and better housing



market, but will also strengthen the government's drive to meet its 2010 decent homes target.

What about the inclusion of the RSS in the UK NAPIncl, which is a good indicator of its importance, since it has to compete for attention with many other initiatives? Its last version (2004) mentions that 'in England, important changes have been made since the last NAP. By the end of 2001, rough sleeping was reduced by more than two-thirds, compared with 1998. A new Homeless Directorate is working with local authorities and others to develop more strategic approaches that deliver sustainable solutions. In particular, it is committed to sustaining the reductions achieved in rough sleeping (...). New legislation strengthens the rights of homeless people, removes certain limitations on local authorities, gives additional powers to authorities to assist homeless people who do not have a priority need, and widens the groups who do have a priority need for accommodation'. This widening includes 16- and 17-year-olds, care leavers aged 18-20, people who are vulnerable because of time spent in care, the armed forces, prison or custody, and victims of violence – most of them important target groups for the rough sleeping strategy.

### **The policy debate**

With the available documents, it is difficult to identify the main contenders with their points of view in the policy debate about homelessness/rough sleeping. The main items in any policy debate about homelessness, however, are fairly common and closely related.

- o The definition of homelessness
- o The count of homeless people (particularly of rough sleepers)
- o Explanatory models: is rough sleeping/ homelessness only about housing?
- o The approach needed to tackle (specific forms of) homelessness.

Definitions have a much wider impact than the world of research, as is the case with counts or explanatory models. They set out the framework within which policies and actions take place and provide important guidelines for them.

### *The definition of homelessness & rough sleeping*

Two related questions arise in this respect. Firstly, what is the main element in the definition of homelessness/rough sleeping and secondly, does this defini-



tion stand alone, or is it integrated in a set of forms of 'homelessness' in the larger sense?

According to Marpsat (Marpsat s.d.), in France (as in the USA) the definition is mainly based on the housing situation. The alternative would be that the definition includes other factors, such as social networks, insecurity, etc.

As for the insertion of specific forms of 'homelessness' in a wider set of forms of homelessness, the definition used by Feantsa – the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless – and its European Observatory could be used as a standard illustration. Rooflessness (rough sleeping) is defined as the most visible form of homelessness; people with chaotic lifestyles or unsettled ways of living may be disproportionately represented among the roofless population (Edgar, Doherty et al. 2002). At the other end, houselessness refers to situations where, despite access to emergency shelter or long-term institutions, individuals may still be classed as homeless due to a lack of appropriate support aimed at facilitating social integration.

For (Edgar, Doherty et al. 2002) 'housing vulnerability' constitutes the wider framework. This comes close to the French case, where different degrees of homelessness are related to a detailed classification of housing situations (Clanché 2000): housing type (living in shelters or rough sleeping), occupancy status (living with parents or friend out of necessity), housing quality (no access to running water), stability and insecurity (risk of being evicted). The 'literal homeless' ('sans-domicile au sens restreint') are people who combine the 'lowest end' of the housing type and the occupancy status classification (Marpsat s.d.).

In the UK, this (USA) concept of the 'literal homeless', to include both street homeless and shelter homeless, is not used ((Smith 2003). 'Rough sleepers' are defined and counted differently from those living in shelters. This means that the homeless population at large consists of three subgroups; apart from the 'rough sleepers' there are the statutory homeless (households accepted as homeless because they pass four tests and thus are recognised to be in priority need) and the non-statutory homeless (those to whom no duty is owed because they are deemed intentionally homeless, or are not in priority need categories)<sup>11</sup>. Homelessness at large is related to occupancy status (as in France)

11 See the old distinction between 'deserving' and 'non-deserving' poor.



and (in)security of possession (different from France, but one of the criteria in Clanchés classification).

Very interesting is the statement by (Smith 2003) that “whereas the homeless persons legislation included rough-sleeping as part of its definition of homelessness, the establishment of the Rough Sleepers Initiative and then the Rough Sleepers Unit had promoted a view of rough sleeping as the most extreme example of homelessness’.

### *Conclusions for EU policies*

Rough sleeping or street homelessness certainly constitutes an extreme form of social exclusion, but this implies that the population concerned is relatively small in number compared to other target groups. It is a well-known fact that numbers are an important factor in creating a high ranking on the political agenda. Moreover, strategies for combating street homelessness throughout Europe are very diverse and include a wide range of services – crisis services, post-emergency services, resettlement and reintegration services, occupational and professional training services, empowerment and sheltered housing – as well as immediate prevention and long-term prevention. Both characteristics will inevitably affect the transferability of the Rough Sleepers Strategy to other Member States and certainly the role that the EU can play in helping to develop an appropriate strategy, taking into account that homelessness is not just a housing issue and, in most cases, the root cause is not housing. Developing such a strategy is an urgent matter since, according to FEANTSA, European strategy has so far addressed homelessness inadequately.

What, then, can be done at the level of EU policies? The increased attention paid to homelessness in the second Joint Report on Social Inclusion certainly constitutes a good practice in itself. What is still missing in the NAPs/incl is a focus on street homelessness or rough sleeping, a systematic linking of this ‘extreme form of social exclusion’ to homelessness at large, and the development of appropriate trajectories (pathways) from street homelessness into society. ‘Extreme forms of social exclusion’ should also be used as the ultimate test for the efficiency of policy measures regarding work, housing, education and health care.



What could also be provided at the EU level is 'strong and effective leadership'. 'Extreme forms of social exclusion' need authorities at the highest level to keep them high on the political agenda, to foster solutions and to provide the (financial) resources to carry them out.

- o The exchange of good practices concerning homelessness within the OMC (open method of co-ordination) is a useful instrument to reach these goals. In order to be relevant these good practices should answer a number of requirements:
- o They must rest on a solid regulatory basis to ensure the effectiveness of policy measures and enable their operation to be monitored;
- o They must target the homeless in order to be able to respond adequately to their problems and organise their follow-up;
- o They must consider homelessness in all its multidimensional aspects and provide solutions for each problem, such as housing, health, work, mental illness and education;
- o They must deal with the problem both before it develops and while it is being dealt with – be preventive and curative at the same time;
- o They must keep a balance between universal entitlement and targeting services at those most in need;
- o They must rest on a working partnership between public authorities and NGOs at all relevant levels of decision-making;
- o They must be informed by a more harmonised set of homelessness indicators at the European level and by a national or regional knowledge process.



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