

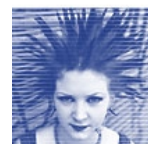


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Preventing and Tackling Homelessness

Comment Paper, Luxembourg



on behalf of

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DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities





1. Introduction

In March 2002 the Danish government established a special action programme in the field of homelessness which targeted the most vulnerable groups. We thank Professor Henk Meert for his analysis of the programme and the presentation of some discussion elements which should contribute to improving the situation of the homeless in Luxembourg.

2. A brief assessment of the possible relevance of the policy/measure

2.1 Policy level

During recent years the situation of the homeless in Luxembourg has been getting worse because of some major changes in the structure of society.¹ In Luxembourg policies in the field of social exclusion and homelessness are implemented at two levels:

- Government funding of NGOs' activities in the field of social exclusion;
- In the context of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The strategy is co-ordinated by the Ministry of Family and Integration in collaboration with other ministries and the NGOs. In the field of homelessness three ministries are involved: the Ministry of Health (drug addiction and mental illness), the Ministry of Equal Opportunities (women), and the Ministry of Family and Integration (social exclusion and distress situations).

At both levels, a lot of measures have been launched to improve the situation of the homeless:

- Owing to a lack of available data, the Ministry of Family and Integration has commissioned a survey of the situation of the homeless in Luxembourg;
- The number of emergency beds has been increased by the creation of an emergency night shelter for drug misusers. The streetwork in Luxembourg City has improved its orientation service and the main night shelter in Luxembourg has launched a new supported housing project in 2004;

¹ We can name for example the atypical situation of the employment market in a European and global context, the difficult access for people with low wages to housing and the passage from an industrial society to a post-industrial society.



- A decentralisation process of the support services from Luxembourg City to other municipalities is in progress;
- Restructuring of support services in the different fields of drug misuse, mental illness and supported housing;
- Those active in the field of mental illness have noticed a change in the profile of their clients: they are younger and with heavier symptoms that need more intensive and longer-term support. The service providers have launched restructuring actions in order to adapt their services. The changing profile seems to result from the deinstitutionalisation process of psychiatric care which started in the 1990s.

As indicated in the report, the Danish model reflects the trend of the ideal model, which moves away from crisis intervention towards policies that recognise structural and agency factors that underlie homelessness.

Some parts of this trend are already included in the social policy process in the context of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in Luxembourg and in the publicly funded NGO sector.

Each of the three ministries (Health, Equal Opportunities, Family and Integration) has its own structure of publicly funded NGOs with different support levels and temporary supported accommodation. At the moment, the process of restructuring homelessness policy is at an early stage and it could be useful to analyse how the emergency shelters in Luxembourg are embedded in an integrated approach or in a stairway of transition as presented in the report.

2.2 Agency level

The Danish model is based on user involvement and tailored support. Examples are longer and intensive resettlement programmes for long-term rough sleepers and drug misusers, and flexible solutions for people with mental illness. Other illustrated proposals are 2-week treatment guarantees for homeless people and 24-hour support.

In Luxembourg, some NGOs have started restructuring programmes in order to adjust their support to the situation. In general, intensive resettlement programmes and long-term support are based on:



- Trained and sufficient staff: staff qualification is an important element in work with homeless people, especially with those homeless people in the target groups who need intensive and tailored solutions;
- Time: time is also a key element in work with long-term rough sleepers in order to understand their needs and to establish a co-operative relationship between the staff and the homeless people. This is important if we want to involve homeless people in the development of satisfying or alternative housing solutions;
- Enough available temporary and supported dwellings to enable staff to quickly redirect homeless people to the place where suitable help could be offered.

This is especially important for the emergency shelters to avoid people having to stay for long periods in an uncertain solution and in sub-standard living conditions.

These items are core elements for individualised solutions, as illustrated by the Danish model, but they are also very costly and should be integrated in an overall and well co-ordinated strategy.

In addition to that, case studies should be undertaken to find out how services could be improved. For example an IN/OUT analysis of homeless people could be very useful in determining the level of responsibilities for resettlement failures.

2.3 Personal level

Multiple factors and their complex combination are often responsible for resettlement failures and the author has underlined that the common point of such failures could be challenging behaviour as a result of these factors.

The phenomenon of resettlement failures is also a reality in Luxembourg and some of the users of the emergency shelters and the temporary housing structure need an alternative solution.

The experience with multiple resettlement failures is evidence that cannot be ignored. To expect a linear resettlement career that leads homeless people from the street to permanent housing is sometimes an impossible mission that could end in vicious circles of rough sleeping and temporary housing.

Could it be expected that homeless people, after long periods of rough sleeping and resettlement failures, can be reintegrated into society in order to have a



'normal' life? If this is not possible, then we have to accept that "integration does not necessarily demand normalisation",² and that there should be a satisfactory solution to interrupt the endless coming and going between emergency shelters and living on the street.

2.4 Homeless population and target groups

Owing to the lack of data in Luxembourg it is difficult to know exactly the profile and the institutional history of the homeless population. But we know the trends from interviews with the staff and from the activity reports of the various departments and social organisations. We can confirm that drug misuse, mental illness and alcohol misuse are major causes of the problems of the homeless, especially of those who are using the emergency shelters.³

The staff of the various service providers should be able to identify those homeless who need a more satisfactory solution than their actual situation.

2.5 Problem solving

From the Luxembourg point of view a special housing scheme could solve some problems. It could:

- Offer a human, satisfactory and permanent solution to those with multiple resettlement failures;
- Free a number of beds which are blocked in the emergency shelters and the temporary housing structure;
- Protect newcomers in the emergency shelters who are not yet in contact with drug and alcohol misuse by separating these groups. This is especially important for young people;
- Offer the opportunity to refine the supported housing scheme (by adjusting the support at different levels to the needs of the homeless) and to increase the amount of long-term/permanent housing.

This last item could be the starting point to check out the dimensions of the problem in Luxembourg and to determine whether such a strategy is needed or

2 Brand, Preben, 'Reflections on Homelessness as Seen from an Institution for the Homeless in Copenhagen', in *Coping with Homelessness: Issues to be tackled and best practices in Europe*, FEANTSA 1999, edited by Avramov, Dragana

3 To complete the information on the users of the emergency shelters we can notice that young people and ex-prisoners are well represented. In addition to that, an increasing number of women has been registered.



not, and under which scheme alternative housing could be established. It is also very important to know which of the homeless population could be resettled by improving the support and services and which need an alternative housing scheme.

The thematic report underlines that the aim is not to reproduce existing housing schemes. But some of the alternative housing projects in Copenhagen were not different from conventional housing.⁴ Accordingly, the solution may just have been linked to user involvement, tailored support and possibly the quality of the accommodation.

For those who cannot be resettled by the normal support system, it should be possible to integrate unconventional housing schemes in the overall process of social policy. The supposition is that homeless people with resettlement failures have the capacity to live on their own when tailored support is provided. In that context, before such a strategy could be implemented in Luxembourg, a few questions have to be answered:

- Is there a social policy interest and enough tolerance for such a project in Luxembourg?
- Especially if the accommodation is different in nature, as is described in the report?
- Who will have the responsibility, given the number of departments and NGOs acting in the field of homelessness, and the current decentralisation process?
- Should there be a centralised place, with the danger of stigmatisation, or on the contrary, is there a risk of isolation if the scheme is made part of the decentralisation process?

3. Transferability

Participation in this peer review programme could be a good opportunity to learn from the Danish model and to improve Luxembourg's strategy in the field of homelessness.

4 Annex 2 of the thematic report: 'Weird houses for weird existences', a translation and summary of the research paper by Busch-Geertsema, Volker.



As regards the special practice of alternative housing for alienated people, there is a possible⁵ need in Luxembourg for permanent housing with tailored support for the target groups described. The process of decentralising homelessness support services to a more local level is at an early stage and maybe this is the moment to integrate an alternative housing programme into the negotiations.

But given the population of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (+/- 450,000 inhabitants) and hence the possible number of users of such a programme, the actors and decision-makers should work out the appropriate solution and involve the homeless if possible.

4. Questions

- Is special legislation needed if buildings lack the safety/standard equipment required by existing legislation?
- How can it be ensured that alternative housing with sub-standard equipment does not replace permanent supported housing in the more expensive primary housing market?

5 As mentioned above, there is no data available at the moment.