

Counting the Homeless in Hungary

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1. Experiences with counting the homeless in Hungary

1.1 The definition of “homeless” in Hungary and the ETHOS definition of FEANTSA

In Hungary, the *Act III of 1993 on social administration and social services* has been in effect for 16 years, and it states that

„(1) *homeless people shall be persons without any registered place of residence, except for persons whose registered places of residence are accommodation for homeless people*”;

and

„(2) *any person shall be deemed to be homeless who spends nights in public areas or premises not designed for housing purposes*”.

In the light of these two definitions, the persons concerned may receive all the financial benefits and social services that are regulated by the Act, and also provided to other people in need. The status of homelessness as defined by the above-referenced Act is also considered in the provision of healthcare and free healthcare services.

According to the legal definition provided above, Hungary officially regards persons belonging to Category 1.1., 2.1., 3.1., 3.2., 3.3., 4.1., 7.1., 11.1., 11.2., 11.3., 12.1. of the ETHOS typology to be homeless people alongside with persons belonging to ETHOS Category 7.2 in view of certain supports and programmes.

Homeless people within the meaning of the Hungarian Social Act			
1	People living rough	1.1	Public spaces or external space
2	People living in emergency accommodation	2.1	Night shelter
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless hostel
		3.2	Temporary accommodation
		3.3	Transitional supported accommodation
4	People living in Women’s shelter	4.1	Women’s shelter accommodation
7	People receiving long-term (housing) support (due to their being homeless)	7.1	Residential care for older homeless people
11	People living in temporary/non-conventional structures	11.1	Mobile homes
		11.2	Non-conventional building
		11.3	Temporary structures
12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation

(The first definition of the Social Act – wherein the homeless status is identified with the lack of the official reporting/registration of the place of residence, or the given form registered (homeless

hostel) – is not associated with ETHOS. This definition has the only purpose to indicate the administrative body that should indicate the given social problem.¹⁾

The definitions show, that the Hungarian legal classification is not sufficiently differentiated, therefore Hungarian experts, along the ETHOS typology use the following definitions, with a view to be introduced in the relevant legislation²⁾:

1. "roofless" are those, who:
 - spend their nights in a public place, under the open sky, or in a place not suitable for habitation.
2. "effective homeless" are those, who are:
 - "roofless";
 - who do not have a stable, permanent dwelling, and have to "work for it" day by day to have a place to spend the night - it can be either a flat, providing accommodation as a favour, or some other place, not a flat, but a suitable dwelling (one of the institutions for the provision for the homeless, as an example).
3. "flatless" are:
 - the "roofless";
 - the "effective homeless";
 - who have a stable dwelling, which is not a flat but is suitable to live in (hostels for factory workers, jails, inhabitations, etc.);
 - who have a permanent place to spend their nights in, but they are not in the disposal of the uninterrupted use of the flat (they are not owners or tenants but lodgers, sub-tenants, night-lodgers, grown up family members, having been accommodation as a favour or just having been given shelter to).
4. "homeless" are collectively those, who are:
 - "roofless";
 - "effective homeless";
 - "flatless";
 - who live in a flat, that is not suitable for creating a real home and raising a family in (either because the flat is overcrowded or because of the physical conditions of the flat/building).

1.2 General framework of homeless counting in Hungary

There are no coordinated, regular official data collection systems on the clients of homeless care service providers in Hungary. The relevant laws outline the client data to be registered and on the other hand, there are limitations on the collection and management of data, due to the strict data privacy act. In between the two endpoints, all service providers have the possibility to shape their own data acquisition and processing system. The individual service operators do collect data on their clients, but these are never collected by any organisation for any official purpose. If there

¹ SPC „Questionnaire to Member States concerning homelessness and housing exclusion in Hungary” 2009.

² Györi-Maróthy: Which Way to Go On? Potential Framework of a National Homelessness Strategy, Bp., 2008.

were no other data collection programmes available in addition to the official system, we would not possess any kind of empiric information on the demographic and social composition as well as the life situations of homeless people.

To fill this gap, a working group, named “3rd February” started working in Budapest in 1998. The working group consisting of a few independent experts and social workers is an independent voluntary research team which collects a complete range of data for its research purposes from the clients of the homeless care service providers on 3rd February each year from Budapest only.³

1.3 Countings by the “3rd February Working Group” – an independent voluntary research team in Hungary

Since 1999, on February 3rd every year a survey is conducted among homeless people in Budapest. Its purpose is in the first place not the collection of scientific data, but rather a more efficient and conscious organisation of social care services, charting and understanding the problems of homeless people. The survey among the homeless people living in Budapest shelters, answered by the people on a voluntary basis, beyond the demographic ones, seeks every year different data: How are the medical conditions of homeless people? How is their network of connections? How did they become homeless? What do they think of the institutions and the social helpers providing care for them? Do they have any addictions? What kind of items do they possess (do they have a change of clothes or photos of their family)? The survey was designated to find people spending the nights on the streets, in public spaces: in the first years people standing in queue for the so called “tea-lines” were interviewed (in 1999 less than 50 persons among them were roofless), since 2005 street social services have been interviewing their own clients living in public spaces, so data are available also on them (in 2007 more than 1,000 people living in public spaces answered the questions). In the meantime the survey was extended to the day centres, and also on the homeless clients of some institutions from the countryside interested in the issue.⁴ The studies made up of the surveys serve now as a basis for the organisation of the services and the homeless strategy.

1.4 The Homelessness Strategy in 2008

In 2008 a Homelessness Strategy was established, based on the one hand on real facts, on the other hand on the research findings of the “3rd February working group” and the needs emerging from the regional expert consultations and the long debates. Its efficiency can be regularly monitored.

1.5 National dissemination of the Hungarian homelessness strategy

The results of the strategy cannot be evaluated due to the short time passed since its creation. However the dissemination is an important step that has been playing an important role in the information and sensitization of the direct target group.

³ Péter Győri: Comprehensive review, analysis and assessment of the data collection and statistical system on the issue of homelessness in Hungary, 2006.

⁴ Fehér Boróka: Hajléktalan emberek Magyarországon, 2008.

1.6 Counting as an instrument in the battle against homelessness

The standardized/coordinated counting is merely an instrument in the fight against homelessness, but its role is essential in achieving the goals under point 1.5.

1.7 Client data collection

The experiences show that the collection of data should be extended and coordinated in the following areas⁵:

- the coverage of services not defined in legislation by data collection on service providers and clients;
- the collection, analysis and maybe the linking of the anonymous client data on a broader scale;
- linking of the anonymous client data related to financial support and use of services;
- the transferring of client data in a closed system in order to enhance performance of support mechanisms;
- harmonisation and probably collective analysis of the data collection systems of the homeless care and other services like healthcare, medical, employment, child protection, residential, etc.

2. Strategies, planning, evaluation

2.1 The role of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour

Homelessness issues belong to the scope of responsibilities of the **Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour** coordinating social services and benefits. Its activities embrace the drafting/preparation of the legal regulations determining the operating conditions of the institutional system for homeless people (certain legal regulations may as well be issued by the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour), and in addition it makes proposals to the Government in relation to the orientation of development in the given field, as well as measures to be taken. The same organisation is responsible for the implementation or coordination of these programmes, as well as financing them partly at the account of its budgetary sources. Under the commission of the Ministry, certain programmes are frequently implemented by two public foundations being active in the field of services to homeless people: **Public Foundation for Homeless People** and **“Solidarity” Public Foundation for the Houseless and Homeless** in Budapest. Programmes implemented by non-governmental organisations are monitored by the Ministry.⁶

⁵ Péter Győri: Comprehensive review, analysis and assessment of the data collection and statistical system on the issue of homelessness in Hungary, 2006.

⁶ SPC „Questionnaire to Member States concerning homelessness and housing exclusion in Hungary” 2009.

2.2 Actors concerning planning and strategy development

Ministry Commissioner for Homeless Affairs

In November 2002 the Minister of Social Affairs appointed a Ministry Commissioner to deal more efficiently with the issue of homelessness. The Ministry Commissioner filled his function until his resignation in 2007. Since then this function has not been filled again.

National Professional Council for Homelessness

After one year of preparation, a National Professional Council for Homelessness, the advisory body of the Minister for Social Affairs for homeless issues was set up. This Council consists of three parties. It has 12 elected members (6 from the countryside and 6 from the capital), representing the homeless care organisations on the side of the professionals. On the side of the Ministry it is represented by the Ministry Commissioner and the responsible Ministry department, in some cases by the Minister or his State secretary, the third party consists of permanent (national methodology) and occasional invited persons depending on the given subject.⁷

Due to the complexity of the issue of homelessness, other Ministries are also concerned. Since this issue is of different weight and focus for every single actor, consultation and coordination between them is a very complex task.

2.3 Targets

The strategic programme for homelessness proposes steps and governmental measures that can be implemented in the middle term – or to put it in a more lucid way, in about five years. Therefore these goals and objectives have to be determined by government decree. The expected impacts may appear partly within that time period, and partly following that. It would be spectacular in the good sense of the word and also desirable to set numerically formulated targets (indicators) such as for example “the number of people living in public spaces will be decreased by two thirds in five years”, or “the number of those living on the very verge of becoming homeless will be decreased by 20 %.” However, we find the formulation of such indicators too early at present. Still the aim of establishing the regulatory and financial means as well as documentation and registration processes on the bases of which such strategic goals can be developed and executed in five years, is an aim that can be formulated and reached on the middle term. Determining concrete steps to be taken in order to strengthen the security of dwelling, prevent people from becoming homeless, decrease the number of those living in public spaces is also a goal that can be formulated and reached in the middle term (the present strategic programme contains proposals concerning those); concrete numerical indicators can be established for projects involved in the executive processes.

The authors of the Homeless Strategy believe that homelessness is unacceptable in a solidary (integrated) society. Hence the proposition builds on the presumption, that the respective governments and municipalities of the Republic of Hungary are committed to the prevention and ending of homelessness.⁸

⁷ Maróthy Márta: Beszámoló a hajléktalanellátás helyzetéről, 2002-2006.

⁸ Győri-Maróthy: Which Way to Go On? Potential Framework of a National Homelessness Strategy, Budapest, 2008.

2.4 Consequences of EU legislation on the level of concrete measures

As third strategic area the Homelessness Strategy proposes the reduction of the number of roofless people and those living in public spaces through the introduction of the programme „Opening to street”, including the following:

- Introduction of positive zero tolerance, that is, the determination of conditions threatening the life of those sleeping in the streets to such an extent, that homeless people cannot be left on the streets;
- Prevention of returning to street through the establishment of cooperation and monitoring systems together with family help services, children’s welfare institutions, psychiatric and addict care institutions and penal institutions;
- Opening of temporary shelters and night shelters for rough-sleepers with a low threshold entry, changing of opening times, and special programmes;
- Active care in day-time centres;
- Establishment of entry services and rooms in temporary homes and night shelters for people that have been living in public spaces for a long time.⁹

2.5 Hungarian specifics¹⁰

- Establishment and development of a regional system;
- Institutionalization of street social workers: legal regulation, training, funding;
- County crisis cars;
- 24 hours health care services and convalescence;
- Social junction for the homeless people in the Nyugati Railway Station subway;
- Heated street – low threshold shelter;
- Supported housing (tenancy programme) for 900 homeless people;
- Host Village - a pilot programme for ending family homelessness;
- Setting up of a Ministry professional advisory body;
- The distribution of tender funds by public foundations, funds earmarked for homeless care are exempt from budget cut-backs;
- Funding based on capacity-regulation;

⁹ Győri-Maróthy: Which Way to Go On? Potential Framework of a National Homelessness Strategy, Budapest, 2008.

¹⁰ Maróthy: Report on the situation of Homeless care, 2002-2006.

- Professional and inter-professional co-operations (between the police, ambulance services, the National Health Insurance Fund, National Public Health and Medical Officer Service).

Resources earmarked to certain programmes, objectives and target groups are primarily included in the support schemes of the EU Structural Funds. Until 2013, only for projects designed for the employment of homeless people and their independent housing the country will spend cc. HUF 5 billion from EU funds (including national co-funding).¹¹

¹¹ SPC „Questionnaire to Member States concerning homelessness and housing exclusion in Hungary” 2009.