

# Counting the homeless – improving the basis for planning assistance

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## 1. Experiences with counting the homeless

### 1.1 On the definition of Homelessness

In Slovenia massive homelessness is rather new phenomenon – especially capital (Ljubljana) and some other cities are discovering it in past 10 years. Within those years also a lot of new organisations and services have been developed. But still there are mostly emergency services (food supply, shelters) and not enough integration programmes or different housing solutions.

So the rather new problem is the reason that ETHOS definition hasn't been recognised by the Slovenian authorities in the past although policy makers from Ministry for Labour, Family and Social affairs are familiar with it and aware of it's broader meaning. ETHOS definition has been used by a couple of researchers (Filipovič, Razpotnik, Dekleva), who are currently active in this field. This definition is very useful in broadening the previously narrow definitions.

### 1.2 Preconditions for countings and studies

There has been study carried out concerning the territory of the Slovenian capital Ljubljana (Dekleva and Razpotnik, 2007). Till now it have not seemed that the Slovenian authorities would be seriously interested in this topic or in commissioning a study doing it.

Very practically speaking there should be a funder for carrying out such studies, but for them to be of any use, there should be present a broader framework for using them, like a homelessness policy or strategy. It should be initiated and developed probably by our ministries for Labour, Family and Social affairs or Environment and Spatial Planning.

There is monitoring going on for the European observatory on homelessness (Filipovič and Mandič) within Feantsa and Slovenia is included within the MPHASIS project (Mutual progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems (Filipovič).

### 1.3 Countings and studies commissioned by public authorities

There has been one study of this type carried out, in the town of Ljubljana. The general findings of this study (in which the counting issue was only one of many issues) were taken into account in developing the strategy of the town Ljubljana regarding social welfare, but not specifically the findings from the counting part of the study but mostly the part concerning needs of people. Few services (like day centres, street paper and also resettlement programme) have been carried out as a result of the research. Most of those programmes are carried out by the association Kings of

the street (Association for help and self help of homeless people) and are financed by Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and Municipality of Ljubljana.

#### **1.4 Did studies lead to a change of strategy?**

This study contributed to the heightened interest of the local and national authorities to fund programmes in the field of homelessness. Also in the public (professional public and general) it opened up the issues of homelessness and they had been discussed more also in the media.

#### **1.5 Impact of the study**

If this study influenced the heightened interest of the local and national authorities to fund programmes in the field of homelessness than it meant better access of the homeless to services. As findings from this one study were often quoted by the media we can suppose, that it actually heightened the general public's awareness of the problem.

#### **1.6 Is it really possible to steer the battle against homelessness through standardised/harmonised counting?**

Yes, findings of such studies could represent additional pressures/initiatives for developing other means (programmes) in this field and engaging other authorities.

#### **1.7 Data collection**

There are no data on the number of homeless people of any category except those who use general (night) shelters and residential institutions for specific groups of homeless people (e.g. safe houses for women victims of violence).

## **2. Strategies, planning, evaluation**

### **2.1 Who is developing the strategies for assisting the homeless?**

At the national level it should be the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (in cooperation with the relevant institutes and professional and civil society bodies), and at the local levels the local authorities. Ministry for environment and Ministry for health are also important stake holders – first didn't yet responded on this issue and second – Ministry for health financed one small survey on Homelessness, health issues and accessibility of health care for homeless people (Razpotnik, Dekleva). So those are also subjects who provide funds.

## 2.2 Who are the actors concerning planning and strategy development?

The actors should be the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, relevant institutes, universities, professional and civil society bodies, but I do not know of any such activity at the national level. So there is nobody coordinating this task.

At the local level Ljubljana has the leading role from all the cities (as the problem is the most seen in the capital), where there was a couple of years ago a project going on with the aim of producing five-years strategy in the field of social welfare. That one-off project was coordinated by an appointed researcher (Leskošek).

## 2.3 Are there any targets at local or national levels?

No explicit targets were set.

## 2.4 The European Parliament has adopted a declaration calling for an end to street homelessness by 2015. What consequences does this have on the local and national levels? How do EU legislation, processes and exchanges of best practice influence the local and national levels?

It is hard to say. We have seen no explicit consequences. But we suppose that some people are aware of this declaration and are beginning to think what could be possible influences and pressures stemming from this declaration to their fields of work. European year to combat poverty (2010) is being dealt with within certain Ministries and one research (but not of large scale) is being planned (Institute for social care).

## 2.5 Have there been any specifics looking back on a certain time frame? (taking into account economic, judicial, structural and societal conditions, housing and labour market, migration, income, tenancy law, etc.). How is evaluation carried out?

As there is no explicit homelessness policies and no counting there could hardly be any evaluation. But looking-back has clearly appeared in some (rare) research reports and monographs (Mandič, Filipovič, Razpotnik, Dekleva).