

The Finnish National Programme to reduce long-term homelessness

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The homelessness strategy itself: What are the similarities and differences of homelessness strategies in those Peer Review countries, which have a strategy and what are the obstacles for developing homelessness strategies in those countries, which have not (yet) done so (role of homelessness as a policy theme, political will, governance questions, resources etc.).

In Slovenia in the last few years awareness of the growing problem of homelessness raised and, consequently, a series of organizations, services and projects dealing with this phenomenon has developed. Since the year 1993 the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs support on the basis oh within the annual public tenders the projects of those NGO's which are dealing with the homelessness. However, the strongest, dominant or even sole engagements in this field are of curative nature, which means that government is trying to deal with homelessness (harm reduction, etc.) and not reduce or solve the problem or search for systematic solutions and/or pathways out of homelessness. In Slovenia there is still nothing like national systematic research on this field (first national expertise on extend of homelessness and housing exclusion, following ETHOS, was carried in 2010, by Dekleva, Filipović, Nagode, Razpotnik and Smolej¹). There were some discussions in the past encouraged by FEANTSA or/and in cooperation with others Slovene institutions (research institutes, ministries, NGO etc.) For example: two days research seminar organized by research institute (at Faculty of Social Sciences University of Ljubljana 2006; Faculty for Social Work, April 2010, Faculty of Education, June 2010) or ministries (Ministry of Health, June 2009) etc. Results of these activities are published in different ways, but as also no serious commitments led in this way. There is yet no strategy on homelessness. Up to the June 2010 Conference on homelessness and social exclusion (which was dedicated to the development of national strategy by engaging all the relevant stake-holders) there was no serious discussion on national homelessness strategy in Slovenia.

Homeless are mentioned in strategic documents such as Resolution on national programme of social protection from 2006–2010 (ReNPSV06-10), p. 4192 where homeless individuals are listed as one of the vulnerable groups who need the special treatment/care (strategy G, 1st Aim).

Under “Public social protection services” of the Resolution on national programme of social protection from 2006–2010 (ReNPSV06-10) the network of shelters for homeless people with common national capacity of at least 250 beds is provided; besides it 80 beds in shelters for homeless drug users is provided.

1 Dekleva, Filipović, Nagode, Razpotnik in Smolej (2010). Ocena obsega skritega in prikritega brezdomstva v Sloveniji, MDDSZ. In English: The Estimation of the Extent of the Visible and Invisible Homelessness in Slovenia, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia. The study was encouraged by the ministry in the framework of the activities of the European Year to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010.

Homeless people are mentioned in national programme of combating poverty and social exclusions (from 2000).

In national housing programme (NHP)², social instruments in housing stock are intended to make the acquisition and use of housing easier for those individuals or families who are not able by their material situation of resolving their housing problem on their own, or who cannot cover costs of use, i.e. rent and other costs, including the costs of maintenance of flats and residential houses. These are primarily families with several children, young families, people with disabilities and families with a disabled member, and other families and individual persons with low or no income. Social instruments in the housing area must also be adjusted to the prevention and reduction of homelessness, particularly hidden homelessness, with a view to preventing, reducing and gradually eliminating it. The two basic instruments of social policy in the housing area are mentioned: opportunity to rent social housing and to receive aid for use of the housing unit.

The principle of “Housing First”: How is it understood in different national contexts? What role does it play in homelessness policies? What are the potentials and caveats of this approach? How can the preconditions for a successful implementation (such as access to suitable housing, flexible and assertive support, acceptance of harm reduction approaches etc.) be met in countries with less favourable conditions? To what extent and for which circumstances will temporary accommodation continue to be needed?

Paradigm of “Housing First” has been introduced in Slovenia mainly through implementation of the programme “individualised housing support for homeless” which has been running by Kings of the street, association for help and self help of homeless people since July 2008. First (pilot) phase of the project was supported by EEA funds and NFM (Norwegian financial mechanism), since then it is financially supported by Ministry of labour, family and social affairs (MLFSA) and Municipality of Ljubljana. This is the first supported housing service for homeless people in Slovenia, so far there have only been shelters as housing facility for homeless. Programme is mainly meant for long-term homeless individuals. Flats are rented by the NGO Kings of the street on the private rental market. Expenses for rent represent the single biggest financial item of the project and it is also not easy to find land-lords willing to rent apartments for this programme. People can in principle stay in apartments for the transitional period of a year and a half. In this period they are supported to make steps towards independent living. The major obstacle on pathways out of homelessness is a huge gap that exist between supported apartments programme and independent living (be rented or purchased). This step is nearly impossible for many people. Association Kings of the street together with Public housing stock of Municipality of Ljubljana just developed a joint programme where Public housing stock offered a house to the Association. This house is meant as a housing solution for those who finished a year and a half resettlement programme and are on a waiting list for municipality flats (called also emergency units). This solution is only very partial and is not the precedent solution for homeless people in need for permanent housing solution.

² Pursuant to Article 77 of the Housing Act (Ur. l. RS, 18/91, 18/91-I, 19/91-I-amendments, 9/94 - CC Resolution, 21/94, 23/96, 24/96 - CC Resolution, 44/96 - CC Resolution, 1/2000 and 1/2000 - CC Resolution) and Article 168 of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly, the National Assembly adopted, at its session on 10 May 2000

In smaller Slovenian cities (others than capital Ljubljana), shelters are opening in past few years, as the first facilities to react on or to tackle homelessness. It seems as the first step where municipalities are faced with the growing extend of phenomenon. Only in Ljubljana there was a shift in paradigm which tries to favour more permanent housing solutions from shelters. But "Housing First" paradigm is not yet used in any official documents of strategies.

The focus on long-term homelessness and prevention: Is it an adequate focus? Are the prevention objectives relevant in other national contexts? Which amendments and precisions would be needed for a transfer? Which alternatives should be considered? What are the gender consequences (often lower share of women among long-term homeless people, gender specific support requirements)?

The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (MLFSA) is supporting programmes that are designed to offer services to homeless people, like shelters, space for personal hygiene, food, drop in centres and similar. The Progress in improving capacity and quality in the field of providing housing for vulnerable groups of the population has been made compared to the situation in the beginning of the year 2000. This includes³:

- the network of maternity homes and shelters for women was expanded by 22 places, which makes for a 7.5% increase (by the end of June 2007 the total capacity stood at 121 rooms with 312 beds, which means that the intermediate goals of the strategy have been achieved);
- the network of residential groups for people with long-term mental disorders was expanded by 22 places, which makes for a 12% increase (by the end of June 2007 the total capacity stood at 202 places, which means that the intermediate goals of the strategy have been achieved);
- the network of centres for advisory and consultancy services for people with longterm mental disorders was expanded by 40 places, which makes for a 16% increase (by the end of June 2007 the total capacity stood at 290 places, which means that the intermediate goals of the strategy have been achieved);
- the network of programmes supporting independence of the disabled was expanded by 90 places, which makes for a 112.5% increase (by the end of June 2007 the total capacity stood at 170 places, which means that the intermediate goals of the strategy have been achieved);
- the network of therapeutic groups and other programmes providing housing for drug addicts has been expanded by 15 places, which means that the intermediate goals of the strategy have been achieved (in 2008 the network was expected to expand by 6-8 places as part of the establishment of an reintegration centre for former drug addicts);

³ Source: Amended National Report On Strategies For Social Protection And Social Inclusion 2006-2008, prepared by MOLFSA, September 2007, p.10-11, Data refers to the growth in capacities for the entire 2006 and the first half of 2006, since the strategy was adopted in mid-2006. Later, the report on the progress achieved until the year 2010 is not available in English language.

Available at:

http://www.mdds.gov.si/fileadmin/mdds.gov.si/pageuploads/dokumenti__pdf/nap_soc_zascita_dop_an_sep07.pdf

- the network of centres and homes for the homeless was expanded by 26 places, which makes for a 35% increase (by the end of June 2007 the total capacity stood at 101 places, which means that the intermediate goals of the strategy have been achieved);
- the network of centres and homes for homeless drug addicts was expanded by 4 places, which makes for a 22% increase (by the end of June 2007 the total capacity stood at 22 places, which means that the intermediate goals of the strategy have not been achieved);
- a public call for applications for licenses for occupational activity centre (VDC) was published in April 2007, with the process of selecting the licensees expected to be concluded by the end of 2007. Capacities are thus expected to grow in 2008, with calls to be issued for 100 new positions, including 50 for day care (paid for by the national budget) and 50 for institutional care in the centres (paid for by the users and municipalities).

Currently there are 21 programmes (in sum of 639.000 euro): 4 of them are long-term programmes on homelessness supported by MLFSA (in sum of 276.000 euro) and rest of them (17) one year programmes (in sum of 363.000 euro). MLFSA does not have sufficient influence on housing policy and cannot provide homeless people with permanent accommodation. Ministry for Environment and spatial planning (MESP) is responsible for housing. There is so far no sufficient cooperation between two ministries, what some experts (e.g. Leskošek, 2010) understand as governmental attitude to homelessness as a social problem that is solved with turning homeless into the clients of different services and not someone who is entitled to an independent housing outside social control system.

The government is aware of the insufficient availability of low-income/available/affordable and permanent accommodation, especially in large urban areas. There is an evident need to build integrated strategy to tackle homelessness as a separate and recognised problem. It has to be based on the access to affordable and permanent accommodation.

In 2007 research on street homelessness in Ljubljana, there were 15% of respondents of the survey female and the rest were male. We do not have other data on gender of homeless people in Slovenia, but we can assume that women are more often found in different forms of hidden homelessness. There is a considerable lack of emergency housing (shelters) for women, there is much more capacities for man only or for both genders. There are emergency housing solutions for women who are under direct threat of violence but not for them who are not. There are also no emergency solutions for homeless families; in case of homelessness families are usually divided, child is given in care institution/foster family.

Adequate types of housing (and support) for long-term homeless people: what is needed and what has proved effective? Does long-term supported housing fit with the "Housing First" approach? Is floating support in regular scattered housing a better alternative? Or are both options meeting the needs of different groups? How can access to housing be secured for the target group? Are models like the Y-Foundation and rental social agencies transferable approaches? What role can mainstream social housing play? To what extent could the European Regional Development Fund be used for improving access to housing and support for homeless people in Central and Eastern Europe?

There are three types of housing in Slovenia: for-profit, non-profit and temporary emergency accommodation. In Slovenia the term social housing is not in use since 2003, when the new Housing Act was adopted. New law informed the term "non-profit apartments". Local communities are responsible for the investment and delivery of non-profit housing. They also have to provide temporary emergency accommodation for the "most socially disadvantaged individuals and families". There is no data on how many of that kind of accommodation was given to homeless, because their status is not registered as separate category. Standards for temporary emergency accommodation are set lower than in other types of housing: divided into residential units with shared bathrooms and kitchens, residential units with own bathrooms and shared kitchens and residential units with own bathrooms and mini-kitchens. Such kind of accommodation is given also to families that were evicted from non-profit housing, mostly because they didn't manage to cover costs of the rent (despite of possible subvention). Although the Slovene legislation well protects tenancy, there is a significant number of evicted families and individuals (Leskošek, 2010). Because homeless are not recognised as a separate category, they are in the same or worse position as others when applying for non-profit housing. There are several priority categories for non-profit housing, like: young families, families with several children, the handicapped and citizens with longer period of employment, who don't own a residential unit or are subtenants. (The latest is a negative criteria for homeless that do not have an income.) They can get a rent subsidy which can rich up to 80% of the rent. But, they have to have resources to cover the differences plus to pay all other expenses etc.

Rent subsidy is permanent solution and is not limited by time. A tenant is entitled to a subsidy until his/hers income level improves.

So far European Regional Development Fund was not used for housing. There is one project of social entrepreneurship, where homeless people are employer supported by MLFSA (in the frame off European structural funds), organisation Kings of the street is running the project (2009 - 2011). Possibilities in this regard (to invest in social) housing are unfortunately not used, there are not enough initiatives on national level and there is general fear that countries (ministries or municipalities) will not be able to co-finance projects and to support them also in future.

Intensity, type and duration of support needed for sustainable re-housing of long-term homeless people: What are the experiences in Finland and the Peer Review countries? Do we know enough about the profile and support needs of long-term homeless people and the effectiveness of different methods of social support in the different countries?

There are several most vulnerable groups amongst homeless detected through surveys (Dekleva and Razpotnik, 2007): people with dual diagnosis (combined problems, health problems, mental

health problems, drug addiction problems ...), youth, users of illegal drugs, people with difficulties in mental health, people with no status, immigrants, etc. Those groups are also the biggest challenge in terms of permanent housing support; they are more likely long-term homeless.

Governance issues:

- Ministry of Environment as coordinator and alternative approaches (funding agency, social administration, working groups including researchers and NGO's etc.)
- The role of different stakeholders (who needs to be included for developing an effective homelessness strategy?)
- Implementation at local level (role of letters of intent versus alternative models)
- Focus on ten largest cities (a valid transferable principle or perhaps even encouraging migration of homeless people to the centres?)

Background of the conference, organised by Faculty of Education and financed by Ministry of labour, family and social affairs (EU Year 2010 project) was the necessity to formulate and adopt a national policy which would establish a strategic and long-term consideration, set the national (measurable) objectives, and make (or at least allow) the shift from the current state of managing homelessness to a more ambitious target of ending or at least reducing its extend. The conference resulted in a proposal to the government to take the time defined commitment to develop and adopt national policy on homelessness, which actually already is one of the commitments of the Council of European ministers for social affairs. In this respect, it should appoint a working group to develop a draft national strategy on homelessness. In this group, besides professional workers on this field, NGOs, researchers, local and national government representatives and other stakeholders, people with experience of homelessness should be involved. Commitment of at least willingness was expressed also from the delegate of Ministry of labour, family and social affairs; delegates from Ministry for environment and spatial planning were not present at the conference. Since then (June 2010) no considerable steps were done. The main reason for it is supposed to be financial present insecurity on this field.

Sources:

1. Dekleva and Razpotnik (2007). Brezdomstvo v Ljubljani. Ljubljana: PEF.
2. Dekleva, Filipović, Nagode, Razpotnik in Smolej (2010). Ocena obsega skritega in prikritega brezdomstva v Sloveniji, MDDSZ. In English: The Estimation of the Extent of the Visible and Unvisible Homelessness in Slovenia, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia.
3. Leskošek (2010). Ocena vlade na področju brezdomstva. Konferenca o 'socialni izključenosti, revščini in brezdomstvu. Ljubljana: PEF.
4. The Resolution on national programme of social protection from 2006–2010 (ReNPSV06-10); The Official Gazette of RS, n 39/06 of April 13, 2006; available on the website of MOLFSA:
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5. Nacionalno poročilo o strategijah socialne zaščine in socialnega vključevanja za obdobje 2008-2010. MDDSZ,
http://www.mddsz.gov.si/fileadmin/mddsz.gov.si/pageuploads/dokumenti__pdf/npsszsv08_10.pdf; see also: Documents in English version: national strategies and laws in the MOLFSA website: <http://www.mddsz.gov.si/en/legislation/>
6. the Housing Act (Ur. l. RS, 18/91, 18/91-I, 19/91-I-amendments, 9/94 - CC Resolution, 21/94, 23/96, 24/96 - CC Resolution, 44/96 - CC Resolution, 1/2000 and 1/2000 - CC Resolution) and Article 168 of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly, the National Assembly adopted, at its session on 10 May 2000