



FEANTSA

“Multiple barriers, multiple solutions: Inclusion into and through employment for people who are homeless in Europe”

National Report Belgium (Flanders) - Annual Theme 2007

How to get homeless people in motion ?

Belgium report, Flanders region
about employment of the homeless

Lescrauwaet D., editor, Van Menxel
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Introduction

This report is the contribution of the Flemish region (Belgium) to the annual theme 2007 of Féantsa, the European umbrella organisation of the homeless sector. This annual theme goes about employment of the homeless.

The report is based on the Féantsa questionnaire but also on our experiences concerning day-activities, training and employment of the homeless.

The facts and figures about the homeless refers to the Ethos categories houseless (those living in centres for the homeless and supported accomodation).



1. The homeless in Flanders and the labour market

1.1. Facts and figures

Indication	value	source
Homeless with income from employment	12 %	Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk, Tellus, cliëntregistratie 2006
Degree of activity of Belgian population (15-64)	66 %	Welzijnsbarometer, Brussel, 2006
Homeless, level of education of maximum lower degree of secondary school	71 %	Van Menxel, G., e.a., Verbinding Verbroken, Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk, 2002
Flemish region, population, level of education of maximum lower degree of secondary school	38 %	Ministerie Vlaamse Gemeenschap, Algemene directie statistiek, 2002
Employed homeless with employment contract of unlimited time	25 %	Van Menxel G., Verbinding Verbroken, 2003
Employed homeless in supported employment	33 %	" " "
Homeless , income from social security because of illness or disabled	20 %	" " "
Homeless long term unemployed (+ 1 year)	55 %	Van Menxel G., Meervoudige kwetsbaarheid CAW cliënteel, 2006
Long term unemployment, flemish region	43 %	Vranken J., Jaarboek armoede en sociale uitsluiting 2006, acco

The degree of activity of the homeless is five times less than the degree of activity in the Belgian population.

Homeless have a far more low level of education : 71 % of them have only finished the lower level of the secondary school. In the flemish region only 38 % has only finished the lower level of secondary school.

Only 25 % of the homeless who are employed do have a contract of unlimited time. The supported labour market is very important for the



homeless : 33 % of the homeless with a job is employed in supported employment.

One in five of the homeless people are not able to work because they are ill or disabled.

The level of long term unemployment reaches 10 % higher within the homeless population in comparasion with the unemployed population in the Flemish region.



1.2. The homeless are low skilled and long term unemployed

The homeless suffers from the same barriers to employment as other unskilled unemployed groups in society. This is aggravated by some macro-economic and social developments ¹:

- On the economic level there is globalisation. The actual social security systems are made on the size of national countries. When economic borders are becoming more loose one risks to lose grip on the economy. Examples are displacement of employment to lower income lands and a growing population of immigrants.
- Also the labour market has changed by an evolution of employment contracts of unlimited time to more precarious forms of employment : limited time, interim-jobs
- By the growing knowledge based society a large group of people with lower educational skills risks to become economical unnecessary. They stay long term dependent of a social security income. This economical exclusion goes together with exclusion on the social, cultural and even the political level. A larger group of excluded people doesn't succeed to connect with the main-stream culture in society who is dominated by the middle class. Even if we succeed in giving this excluded groups some kind of social security and an income, the main problem is still not solved.

1.3. Homeless suffers from specific barriers

Between the social excluded groups the homeless suffers from some specific barriers to employment.

A lot of homeless men have lived a longer or shorter period of their life in institutions (youth institutions, prison, psychiatric institutions, ... Their way of life is influenced by institutionalisation. Homeless women suffers from specific barriers because they often become homeless as a consequence of domestic violence.

Institutionalisation causes² :

- loss of sense of responsibility

¹ Cantillon, B., e.a., De nieuwe sociale kwesties, Garant, 2003

² Grunberg, M., Shelterization, How the homeless adapt to shelter living, Community psychiatry, 41, 1990



- neglect of personal hygiene
- increased passivity
- dependance

The scientific name of this process is called shelterisation. Also a long term living in homeless shelters, with too less attention for day-activity, training and employment, can lead to shelterization. The homeless sector itself has a responsibility to not continue this process of shelterisation and this by the way it runs its services for the homeless.

Victims of domestic violence suffers often of :

- health effects
- sense of loss
- negative self image
- no supportive networks
- personality traits and social skills

These are extra barriers to employment.



2. The homeless sector can help people to overcome barriers to employment

When the homeless sector has too less attention for day activities, training and learning it can become itself a barrier to employment because it causes shelterization.

On the other hand the homeless sector can also help people to overcome barriers to employment.

For that we need to know how do people learn and wich competences are necessary for daily life in our society ? The homeless sector need to know this acknowledgments for putting forward goals in social guidance but also for the way we are dealing with our clients.

2.1. How do people learn ?

There are 3 important form of learning³ :

Formal learning with the following characteristics :

- predetermined learning goals
- set porgramma
- evaluation (tests, papers, exams)
- guided learning process
- formal recognition (degree, diploma, certificate)

Informal learning with the following characteristics :

- open goals
- interactive learning process
- participant helps to determinate content
- it is intentional learning

Experience based learning :

- no explicit intentio to learn
- incidental acquirement of knowledge and skills
- in contact with environment
- examples : social life, family, friends, leasure activities

Experience based learning is the most important way of learning ! This way of learning can be applicated also in homeless centres by giving people chances to be involved in daily life activities. For the kind of

³ Vercruyse, A., ABC-gids levenslang en levensbreed leren, VCOB, Ministerie Vlaamse Gemeenschap, 2005



activities we are organising, we need to know which competences are necessary to function in society.



2.2. Which competences are needed to function in society ?

If we want to help homeless people to overcome the barriers to employment we need to know which competences are needed to function in society.

The OECD has the following definition of competences⁴ : ' The skills to meet complex needs in specific contexts by mobilising psychosocial aids of a cognitive and non-cognitive nature'.

The focus in this definition lays on the results the individual achieve by actions, choices, ways of dealing with situations at work, in a social role or as part of a personal project.

The competences needed for daily life can be acquired through learning processes. But the needed competences depends of the type of society. In Flanders the OECD sees 14 key competences who are needed to function in society :

Social competences :

- the ability to participate in society with respect for cultural diversity and equal opportunities
- communicative competences (including assertivity, independence, maturity)
- the ability to work with others

Positive selfimage :

- to possess a positive self image with an eye to self development (including self confidence)

The ability to think and act autonomously:

- competences in processing information and using it (including ICT skills)
- problemsolving competences
- selfsteering and self regulation (including sense of responsibility and the ability to make choices)
- critical and reflective thinking and acting

Motivational competences :

- Dare to explore and to learn
- Sense of initiative

⁴ VCOB, Trendnota levenslang en levensbreed leren, 2006



Mental suppleness :

- creativity and inventivity
- flexibility and capacity to adapt

Functional competences

- linguistic competences / linguistic skills
- technical competences/ability



2.3. Homeless people in motion ... a client first approach

' In order to know the taste of the pear, one will have to eat one ' (Mao Zedong)

To get people in motion to (supported) employment, we need to change our services for the homeless into learning environments for our clients. This supposes⁵ :

- A good overview and collaboration with educational services and job centres. Here we have still a way to go. In Flanders only 33 % of the hostels have permanent cooperation agreements with social employment agencies⁶ .
- To spend enough attention to clients learning needs and skills. In Flanders only 32 % of the hostels organise training tailored to their clients.
- To have a policy what you can offer yourself and for what you can work together with other services . For example : is the shelter going to prepare all the meals themselves or are you going to collaborate with a social restaurant who can offer on the job training in cooking ?
- One needs attention for child care so that clients with small children can attend training activities or employment.
- Also the house rules must encourage day activities, learning and working . At least they may not hinder those kind of activities.
- In homeless centres one can make more use of media such as newspapers, magazines, tv, internet to maximise learning opportunities.
- Helping clients to participate in local cultural life and sports.
- More opportunities for client participation for example by giving client the opportunity to do the shopping for the shelter and to manage the shelters housekeeping budget.
- ...

Social workers also need enough skills to apply process models of behavioural changes such as the one of Prochaska and Diclemente⁷. To

⁵ Base don good practices in our members services

⁶ Lescrauwaet, D., Project herankering thuislozen, startpeiling, Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk, 2006.

⁷ Motiverende gespreksvoering, cursusmateriaal leren activeren, NIZW, 2002



motivate clients we need to know the wishes, the possibilities and the barriers to employment, training or day activities. Often the clients themselves are not conscious of their possibilities, because they have fear for the future or are too concerned by the problems they experienced in the past. Homeless people often don't know enough about their own competences.

Social workers need to turn these barriers into positive but realistic steps to the future. In the social guidance the priority should not be only the problems from the past, but the possibilities for the future. This supposes very often that social workers need to motivate the client for this in an adapted way. The behavioural changes model of Prochaska and Diclemente learns us that clients goes to different steps before there is a behavioural change :

- One is not conscious that he or she has a problem
- One is become to experience that there is a problem, but one takes not yet a decision to change
- One is taking actions to change : there is a decision.
- There is a real change in behaviour.
- The changes in behavoiur are integrated in daily life.

Often people goes several times trough this process, because there is fall back.

Not knowing this behaviour change model can lead to the folowing mistakes :

- pushing forward your own solutions to clients wich ellicts resistance
- offering solutions to quickly so ones skips phases in behavioural change
- arguing is rarely effective
- if the balance between knowing, feeling and behaviour is wrong this is uncomfortable and unpleasant for the client

So the question is not a housing-first or an employment-first approach, but a client first approach, by helping the client to reach the goals for wich he is motivated for.

For the long-term unemployed the homeless sector needs cooperation with the unemployment agency. For clients with psychic problems we need also coöperation with the health sector.

But the homeless sector itself can work on social skills and assertivity. The communal living in centres offers also lots of opportunities. Homeless people with psychic problems we can help to understand their limitations : what are they, what can the client cope with, how to deal with obstacles, learning social skills by practising in a safe environment.



3. Policy and legal context to overcome barriers to employment

3.1. The right to work

People who have no income do have in Belgium a right on social integration by employment or by giving them a social welfare income. The right to employment means a decent job with respect to all the laws concerning employment. Iff employment is not (yet) possible one can get a social welfare income.

Iff you apply for a social welfare income, you have on the other hand to approve you are ready to work, unless its not possible because you are ill⁸.

When you are younger then 25 years old and don't have an income you are a priority group concerning the right to work : within 3 months after your demand you have a right on employment.

3.2. Employment and homelessness policies

The employment dimension is a part of a larger anti-poverty strategy in Belgium. Belgium doesn't have a global homelessness strategy. So there is no specific employment policy for people experiencing homelessness. But in most cases the homeless are considered as part of marginalised groups for who exist specific employment schemes.

3.3. Employment schemes accessible for homeless people

In Belgium there exists a lot of employment schemes for disadvantaged groups. The most relevant for the homeless are the folowing⁹ :

- Special counselling programmes, also by using internet, for the unskilled unemployed
- Activa start : reintegration of young unskilled unemployed by giving the employer a reduction on the salery cost.
- On the job training in public services and ngo's supported by the government.
- Vocational training in the company without any salery-cost for the employer.

⁸ Wet van 26 mei 2002 betreffende het recht op maatschappelijke integratie

⁹ www.aandeslag.be



- Support for local governments to employ unskilled unemployed people.

As we saw in the section facts and figures supported employment is very important for homeless people. This sector is also called 'social economy'.

In Belgium there are 45.000 people employed in the social economy and the sector has an annual turn-over of 1 billion Euro ¹⁰.

The social economy will be an alternative for the classic economy with its strong economical laws. Also the respect for the environment gave a boost in the social economy.

There are many employment schemes in the social economy like salary reductions and supported employment in social workshops and centres for labour care.

Social workshops do create employment by a combination of productivity and attention for the specific needs of the employees. They are as well a kind of business and an employment project.

Their philosophy is based on the fact that employment is a main source for reintegration in society.

Tailor-sized employment is a main goal for social workshops. In this way they are different from a commercial business.

Their target group are the unskilled long term unemployed.

Actual there are 101 social workshops in Flanders. They employ 3000 unskilled unemployed people.

One in 3 is active in the recycling business. Another main business is preservation of environment.

Social workshops do still have a growing potential, but need for that more support from the government.

One of the main reasons social workshops do not always succeed in reaching the weakest unemployed groups, is that they have a degressive way of government support for the people who are working there. After 2 years the person must be more economically productive.

Centres for labour care are meant for those who can not be employed in the mainstream or social economy, because of personal problems.

Centres for labour care try to give a person the right to employment, by a large scale of activities. There is no pressure on economic productivity. A lot of persons with psychic problems and long term unemployed, are working in centres for labour care.

¹⁰ Ministerie Maatschappelijke integratie, sociale economie, 2007.



3.4. Indicators and succes factors of the employment schemes in Belgium¹¹

Prof. Ides Nicaise has made a cost-benefit analysis of the social economy in Flanders and one of his main conclusions says that the social economy and supported employment has enduring effects. His research was based on some employment schemes in the social economy sector.

In the most succesfull scheme the employment rate was 38 % as high, then for those who didn't enter such a scheme. He saw also possitive effects on the (family) relationships. Working experience gives people also a better chance to a stable job.

But here are also some critical sounds. On the long term the possitive effects seems to disappear and we see that people after several years working experience in social workshops and centres for labour care tends to have more risks to become again homeless.

But for the weakest under the unemployed those social workshops and centres for labour care are often their last chance on employment. With a better management and better support for those workshops and centres , by engaging for example experienced managers, the results could be better. This is also the case for the centres for labour care.

Those centres concentrate on the weakest group of the unemployed. But the governmental support for those centres is far enough not sure and stable¹² .

¹¹ Rubbrecht, I., e.a., Social tewerkstelling in Vlaanderen : effectiviteit en maatschappelijk rendement op langere termijn, interview met Ides Nicaise, Hiva, 148

¹² De Wolf, K., Arbeidszorg in Vlaanderen, Tertio, 2006.



4. Conclusion¹³

To solve the barriers to training and employment the homeless sector needs a good collaboration with training and employment agencies. A lot of homeless services (66 %) don't yet have such a collaboration. Training and employment are one of the most important solutions to a decent income and reintegration in society.

The Ministry of Welfare of the Flemish government is supporting a project, lead by the Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk, to ameliorate the services for the homeless. The project is based on cliënt needs. More collaboration with employment agencies and more attention for day activities and training in het homeless services are one of the targets of this project. Centres for labour care , sometimes runned by homeless services, don't have the target to reintegrate the cliënts into the mainstream labour market.

Those centres for labour care are usefull when the person involved doesn't have the competences to work in the mainstream labour market. But a lot of homeless people do have those competences (but those competences are not always seen by social workers). In a more empowerment inspired approach of the homeless, there is more attention for the possibilities of people. We presented some steps to such an approach, by organising services for the homeless as a more learningfull environment, then its actual the case.

¹³ Van Regenmortel, T., e.a., Zonder (t)huis, Sociale biografieën van thuislozen getoetst aan de institutionele en maatschappelijke realiteit, Lannoo, 2006.

