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

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Italian Federation of organisations for people who are homeless

Work and People who are Homeless: The situation in Italy

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1. WORK AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The theme of work in relation to social exclusion and extreme adult marginalisation has always constituted one of the key areas of social intervention. This intervention has become structured over the years around policies which have changed from support (mainly financial) for unemployed persons to new forms of incentives to work through the provision of specific services and programmes to activate and bring together supply and demand. This process has in fact followed European guidelines and has been implemented in Italian legislation with the reorganisation of responsibilities and of those organisations which strive to increase employment. It can nevertheless be said that what is termed the “workfare” approach has not been fully adopted in policies and actions at community and local level in Italy. Generally speaking much is still lacking in terms of the public sector resources needed to ensure the fluidity and effectiveness of the process. It is equally true that because of the very large differences in the economies of different geographical areas in Italy, it is difficult to draw up a uniform national strategy.

Before even beginning to analyse the problems that make the relationship with employment difficult for vulnerable groups in the population and/or groups that are already severely marginalised socially, we wish to underline a few aspects which, although they may be seen as marginal, we feel have a strong influence on the issues addressed here.

1.1. A perception which remains for jobs which are changing.

No matter how the processes that connect social exclusion with work evolve, the way the problem is represented politically and also in the mind of public opinion has not changed at all over the years. The economic changes in progress (e.g. the globalisation of production and trade) have not affected the role attributed to employment as a factor of social inclusion. They have rather constructed diversified approaches and strategies for access to work without ever asking questions in terms of priorities about the new meanings that work produces in the biographies of people and the side effects that the new organisation of work has on the daily lives of individuals, especially those most vulnerable in society.

In this sense it is emblematic to address the issue of work starting from the lowest groups on the social ladder in the western world. To address the issue of extreme adult

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marginalisation allows us to define a few specifics of the issue of work which must be examined in every detail in order to understand the difficult and often problematic relationship between work and those who do it. Despite this, it is important to look beyond the narrow focus on extreme hardship because otherwise it would be difficult to fully understand the relationship between work and social exclusion which affects larger groups in the population² (according to an approach dear to the sociologist Maurizio Bergamaschi³).

In the current situation which the western world and Italy, which is fully part of it, is going through, it seems important to underline three aspects of work which are increasingly more characteristic of the present moment in history. We refer to various lines of thinking in sociology and seek to draw conclusions on the basis of readings of the phenomena observed each day in the work performed by the local member associations of the FIOpsd.

a. Work is no longer able to give a person an identity

Historically work created a “status” for people, especially if adult and male, able to give them an identity as individuals even before any location in a social context, an identity in which each person could recognise their own particularity and attribute meaning to their experience perceived through the lens of their working roles.

In this sense social strata were created which allowed people to think of themselves in a manner that was perhaps simplified but often sufficient for them to define their identity. You were therefore “what you did”, because what you did was often clear, well defined and circumscribed in terms of times and places and linked to a firm and a social class which allowed forms of identification that were continuous and recognised at social and family level.

The crisis of the “Fordist”⁴ model of production on the other hand determined a particular crisis. The opposite is required today: the construction of your own identity must occur “a priori” with regard to the work which is to be performed and the higher the level of professionalism the more this is required. The construction of a working career occurs through the capacity of an individual to define a programme of training to exploit their best resources and to know how to adjust their own personal and professional identity to fit a labour market that is continually evolving and changing.

Personal identity must therefore be able to adjust to fit different contexts in which each individual is called on to interpret roles that are increasingly different and complex, perhaps in opposition to other areas of a person’s life (Luigi Gui’s⁵ thinking on this subject is interesting here).

The role of cultural and economic factors which push people away from subordination and dependency towards entrepreneurialism and autonomy. While this may also be a factor of personal development, it is nevertheless still a change which can lead (and there

² ISTAT- *relative poverty in Italy – report presented on 11th October 2006: in 2005 families in relative poverty numbered 2 million 585 thousand, accounting for 11.1% of families resident in Italy. They totalled 7 million 577 thousand individuals 13.1% of the entire population.*

³ Maurizio Bergamaschi, *Researcher in “Sociology of the territory” in the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Bologna.*

⁴ *See the writings of Marco Revelli a historian and sociologist, professor of political science at the University of Eastern Piedmont. He has worked, amongst other things, on an analysis of the twentieth century production processes and political forms.*

⁵ Luigi Gui, *a sociologist and social worker, a researcher at the University of Trieste in the department of Social Services Sciences, he is the secretary of the social politics section.*

is broad evidence of this) to the fragmentation of identities which upsets equilibriums and sometimes generates hardship in employed persons.

To put this perhaps in a banal manner, it is increasingly more difficult for children to describe their fathers' jobs. Often all that can be said is that their father is a worker, while it is even difficult to say who he works for and whether he works as an employee, a consultant, or a businessman, etc.. It is therefore difficult to say "who they are", because a job is no longer able (by itself) to represent a place which integrates and generates a concept of self.

b. Work is no longer able to ensure the stability of a person

It was anything but rare, until just a short time ago, to find people who had always performed the same work during their lives, even in the same firm, whatever their rank. The same occurred for those people for whom "home and work"⁶ were two sides of a single experience of life. The continuity and stability of the relationship between a person and work were values on which large part of the biography of each person was based.

The social and economic processes dictated by globalisation and by political decisions made at European level in the last 10-15 years have instead defined the "flexibility" of workers as a priority value intended as their capacity to adapt to changes in production processes, in market conditions and in the availability of resources. What before was taken for granted, the value of a person's working experience, is continuously put into question today by the acceleration of technological developments which rapidly make skills and technical instruments that are continuously updated obsolete.

Society has naturally always been distinguished by processes of development, especially in industry. However the acceleration of these processes has made the labour market increasingly more "fluid", with ill-defined limits, where the alternation between conditions of employment and unemployment has become a structural factor to guarantee the economic growth of firms and the market. In this sense we are seeing growing insecurity in individual working conditions, which spares no social groups and while on the one hand it facilitates the entrance of some population groups into the world of work (young people, those with a high level of professional skills), on the other hand it makes it increasingly more difficult for persons aged over 45-50 to keep their jobs, especially if they have not acquired professional skills during their careers that they can sell on the labour market.

A growing polarisation is being created between easy access for some and a rapid and dramatic expulsion of others of working age, who are therefore able to add to the numbers of socially excluded groups with a certain rapidity.

This phenomenon is particularly widespread in large industrial districts (especially in northern Italy) and in all southern areas of the country where the labour market has never been fully developed to create a sufficiently large supply of jobs.

The result is in fact the growth of forms of social insecurity which produce strong conflicts within and outside firms which continually find themselves needing to redefine their organisation charts and labour forces in order to adapt to the continuous evolution of processes determined by the market.

⁶ L. Gui, 2002

c. The ties between work and the local communities people belong to are growing increasingly looser.

Globalisation is compelling goods and people to move continuously more and more. We see (dramatic) traffic jams everyday in Italy on roads where trucks loaded with goods which act as “travelling warehouses” (based on a “just-in-time” approach) travel alongside innumerable private automobiles carrying workers who may even journey hundreds of kilometres each day to perform their work. Added to this there is the “psychological” delocalisation which takes advantage of the modern technology of the information society. What happens is that work is increasingly detached from the place to which each of us belongs socially and in terms of personal relationships. A firm produces objects (tangible or intangible) which are not destined to the community in which they are produced. However, neither do the financial flows produced in a given place have a direct effect on the local community in which they are generated.

Even the workplace itself is no longer able to create/be a community for workers. The outsourcing of production within a given firm has fragmented relationships between workers and their capacity to define unified strategies for action and conflict (trade unions). The identification of people with their work and company set in a given local community have increasingly lost any concrete meaning in the fragmentation of employment contracts, their length, the duties, working hours and responsibilities.

Furthermore if we look at the increasingly more predominant role played by multinational companies we find ourselves faced with the total crisis of the ties between work (production) and the local community. The numerous “restructurings” in companies and the mergers between them are based exclusively on shareholder profits and not on any connection with what is generated and consumed in a determined geographical and social area. In this sense, human capital is an economic variable that can/must be valued solely according to the criteria of the maximum profit. Workers who are wound up in these processes cannot participate in any way in the decision-making processes that govern a company. And the same role is played by public institutions which at national and local level must manage mechanisms which are exclusively those of the market and finance using the instruments of politics. We are therefore faced with the disappearance of ties between local communities and places of production which is inevitably affecting all groups in the population of the areas concerned.

The processes described in simplified form so far here certainly deserve further study. For example there are two dimensions which run across what has been stated that are of great significance in the relationship between social marginalisation and work:

- the economic dimension of income which is not safeguarded in the trend described and which definitely has its effect on the processes of impoverishment and exclusion, if not as a priority factor, certainly as a very important factor;
- the crisis of ties in the context of the affections (the family) related to the requirement for increasingly more diversified working hours and ways of working.

These transverse factors are the result, amongst other things, of increased job insecurity, of possible and repeated periods of unemployment, of the loss of worker bargaining power, of the increased costs of acquiring adequate skills or even of just reaching increasingly more distant workplaces, with working hours fragmented and spread over an increasingly longer working day.

It is fairly frequent to meet people who have fallen “victim” to an accumulation of these different factors in a framework of personal difficulties and a lack of support from the context to which they belong. Situations in which the capacity to choose and the pressure to move towards increasingly more difficult solutions have played an important role in building paths towards social exclusion and extreme marginalisation.

It is important also to underline that these processes have also affected the social services and workers who operate in the field of social exclusion. These people are experiencing the fragmentation of the contexts they work in and of their employment contracts, insecurity because social work is not considered as a priority in national and local politics and the greater weight given to a sector based more on voluntary rather than paid professional work. We feel, however, that these processes experienced in person by social workers themselves have not led to that true and in-depth consideration of the issues which would allow the relationship between work and social exclusion to be addressed as something that requires further examination. Naturally that is of course if the conditions are to be created to make the intervention programmed to help the most vulnerable groups in the population truly effective.

At this point we feel we must state that **work as an instrument for social inclusion has changed into a factor which is creating social vulnerability and often exclusion and is increasingly more rarely able to act as a factor that integrates and enables persons to attain an adequate level of well-being.**

2. THE SPECIFIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK AND HOMELESSNESS

After this general view of the relationship between social exclusion and work, we must now be more specific in defining the characteristics that concern homelessness directly. We have used FEANTSA’s ETHOS definition⁷ to assist us in this. It is a reference framework that has broadened the Italian vision of the figure of the homeless, which is often reduced to the image of the person living on the streets. The definition that emerges from ETHOS turns on the housing conditions of people which differ and vary in a framework of difficulty and insecurity. This framework allows us to identify specifics that are useful, amongst other things, in examining relationships with work and it also allows us to avoid the lack of precision surrounding the figure of the “no abode” and extreme social marginalisation to generate a document which matches the reality more reliably.

2.1. the employment profile of the “no abode”

It must first be stated that we are dealing with people, the large majority of whom have a (very) significant biography of work, with roles, responsibilities and income fully comparable with that of the average of citizens in census data. Their employment situation is different at the time when these people are intercepted by social services for the extremely marginalised.

We can say without doubt that the living conditions of the “no abode” and of the roofless (ETHOS 1.1, 2.1 and 4) are at a subsistence economy level in which the income is little or nil, generally below any statistical and economic level. It is not possible to provide

⁷ See the attachment ETHOS 2007, FEANTSA Brussels

exhaustive data, but we can definitely state that close to 90% of them have no income, especially no earned income, when they live on the street or in various night shelters.

The definition of “unemployed” can be applied as the most appropriate, in addition to the categories cited, also for those in insecure and temporary accommodation (ETHOS 3) in which some form of employment and work may be found in some cases that is able to provide an income sufficient to hypothesise housing (and living) solutions of better quality.

We can certainly find a fair and sometimes greater number of persons on social work support programmes which also cover employment and work in the ETHOS categories 3, 4 and 5. These are one of the most common means by which social services act for people suffering extreme social marginalisation when they enter facilities that provide at least night shelter and a social work support service (professional and/or voluntary).

All those activities which allow a person to recover skills that can be offered on the labour market therefore fall within this area, starting with the most basic, which are no less important than others: capacity to enter a production routine consisting of working hours, commitments and of work units organised in a hierarchy of responsibilities; the capacity to work continuously, to tolerate fatigue, to wait until wages are paid, to bear the frustration of results that are not always fantastic; finally also, if not the most important, the capacity to give work meaning again within a biography marked by a lack of confidence and the absence of future prospects in the circles of what is termed “normality”.

So the people who fall within these ETHOS categories often follow gradual programmes that involve them in activities within shelters and hostels as initial training for future employment. These activities are accompanied by counselling support and sometimes training support to acquire new and up-to-date occupational skills, often in co-operation with social welfare enterprises (type B social welfare co-operatives)⁸. Employment in free market firms, although in limited numbers, is not to be excluded for people in these ETHOS categories either.

As concerns the other ETHOS categories, all we can do is to refer to the general context of the labour market in Italy where the variety of types of job applies to all citizens independently of the housing situation. Clearly the influence of an insufficient income on life style as a result of insecure work has its effects on the possibility of possessing high quality housing.

We feel, however, that we can state that current employment insecurity does not manifest so much in the housing situation as it does in the impossibility of persons to make plans to progress in other vital areas of their biography⁹.

The housing situation therefore becomes a possible indicator of income and employment difficulties, but it is not directly proportional to them. Cultural factors have a much greater effect and vary greatly geographically between North and South where the meaning attributed to housing and housing standards can differ significantly.

⁸ This issue is discussed in more detail later in the paper. Type B social welfare co-operatives are co-operatives which have a labour force in which at least 30% of the workers are “disadvantaged” and they are therefore defined as a co-operative for the reintegration of persons into work.

⁹ Vital areas are intended as: the area of social relations, medium to long term planning, the capacity to collect and use resources of an economic nature, the area of citizens’ rights.

On the same lines we can cite the example of immigrants in this respect. They often live in overcrowded conditions, but for some, this is a condition forced on them by insufficient money, by the need to save, by the low propensity of landlords to rent to an immigrant. In other cases it is a choice dictated by both economic factors and by the importance attributed to the support offered by close and continuous relations with people of their own nationality within a biography marked by the abandonment of their roots, often a traumatic experience.

2.2. the barriers to access to work for the “no abode”

Specific barriers can be encountered in the condition of homelessness which prevent fast and substantial access to employment. They are barriers which taken singly and as a whole originate and develop differently and are often linked to individual biographies.

It is important to us to underline some aspects which affect those groups of persons which as member associations of FIOpsd we have most direct experience of (ETHOS 1, 2 and 3).

We have attempted to list them, although we are aware of the risk of giving definitions that are still generic:

- a. social stigma
- b. little and/or confused individual planning
- c. the physical and mental condition of the persons
- d. the lack of the administrative prerequisites
- e. the limits of the support offered by social services which work with the “no abode”
- f. insufficient legislation to support reintegration into work
- g. incapacity of the labour market to offer a dignified job to socially disadvantaged adults.

These points are examined more closely below.

- a. Social stigma: it is still today a great disadvantage to define oneself as a “person with no abode”, because this term used operationally and in the legislation is interpreted differently by public opinion. An adult living in this condition is generally called a *barbone* (literally “a big beard”, a vagabond or “tramp” in UK English), a word which indicates a choice of life which leads a person not to share the paradigms normally shared by people in society including those of having and keeping a job. The absence of this condition in the presence also of an image (clothes, personal hygiene, means of transport) which does not always come up to “normal” standards constitutes one of the greatest obstacles to finding a new job.
- b. Little and/or confused individual planning: at a time when a person is affected by a big biographical crisis which leads them to use public spaces as places to live and to build a survival adaptation strategy, we must not think that a plan to acquire and maintain a job constitutes a concrete possibility for emancipation. This is true even though a large part of the people in conditions of extreme social exclusion have a very respectable biography of work behind them¹⁰. When people are in conditions of maximum difficulty, they are unable, despite their own efforts, to organise their

¹⁰ M. Bergamaschi, 2002

own mental space and the (scarce) resources available to them to make a concrete search for employment. It is only through the supervision and support offered by social services that they can recover the ability to grasp significant job opportunities.

- c. The physical and mental condition of the persons: life on the street not only obliges people to adopt adaptation strategies, it also causes the deterioration of physical and mental health. A person not only finds it difficult to organise their mental space in order to set their resources in motion to find work, but they are also hindered by dietary disorders, infections, traumas and illnesses not properly treated. They are unable to manage their sleep-wake cycle properly and so on and all this makes it very difficult to meet the requirements of any type of paid work.
- d. The lack of the administrative prerequisites: access to the “formal” labour market is only possible if two documents are possessed, an identity card and a “fiscal code” number. While the latter does not cause great difficulties, the lack of an identity card or document remains an insurmountable problem. One of the first consequences of becoming of “no abode” is the loss of officially registered residence. Without this a person becomes “invisible” to public “institutions”, which cannot therefore certify the appointment of a person in a job who has *de facto* disappeared from their registers. Without the possibility of being “formally” employed, the path to “informal” (black market) employment opens up to the person of no abode, which does in itself constitute a further negative step within the condition of social exclusion.
- e. The limits of the support offered by social services which work with the “no abode”: this issue is particularly delicate but requires specific consideration. Despite the efforts of many social workers and of a few enlightened local administrators, the large majority of the services for the “no abode” in Italy aim at satisfying the so-called “primary” needs. Street units, night shelters, shower and change of clothes services are very widespread in Italy. There are also numerous counselling or “listening” centres which often respond with material assistance (food, cash benefits, etc.), while they are less often able to direct and support persons in a programme of occupational reintegration. In addition to this, there is also the way in which night shelter and canteen services are managed: because they are often run by volunteers, the opening and closing hours are rigid, predetermined and unable to accommodate the flexibility required of people in employment. The same is true for the length of stay which is often short (a few weeks, a month) and unable to guarantee long term accommodation sufficient to support work for further periods in accommodation. Basically the large majority of social services are unable to assist a person who meets the minimum conditions to obtain a permanent job in the search for it and in keeping it. In addition, in our opinion, none of the services cited is able to provide, by itself, the support necessary for a person of “no abode” to construct a path for reintegration in the labour market. Only a small percentage of the service providers in Italy have defined casework plans together with individuals which set out the steps required to find space for work in their biographies and which will guarantee effective reintegration in the labour market.

- f. Insufficient legislation to support reintegration into work: one specific issue for the “no abode” is the absence of support in the legislation to facilitate reintegration into the labour market for them. In order to gain access to a fastrack into work, a person must belong to one of the “protected categories” and the “no abode” are not cited as one of these. Law No. 68/99 is the main point of reference in the legislation in this respect, although it contains imperfections and is basically ineffective (see below).
- g. The incapacity of the labour market to offer a dignified job to socially disadvantaged adults: there are generally large differences in the labour market between the northern and southern regions of the country. It is important to consider that a large percentage of the “no abode” (difficult to define but definitely the majority) are not included in the official statistics of active/inactive and unemployed persons because they are invisible for the administrative reasons already mentioned. The place in which a person lives is in any case a determining factor in the possibility of finding work. While in fact the percentages of the unemployed found in the north of the country are almost “organic” or “frictional” (e.g. 3.7% in Lombardy)¹¹ southern regions did not fare so well with unemployment at around 11 - 12% in 2006. Furthermore, in addition to these numbers there are also the percentages of the “unoccupied” (i.e. people out of work who do not even seek work) which recorded good results in northern Italy in 2006, while the figure was again on the increase in central and southern Italy¹². In addition to these figures, there is the significant percentage of the unemployed aged over 50 who according to recent estimates amounted to 500,000 persons in Italy, too old for the labour market and too young for a pension¹³. Finally the “black market” for labour is still very large in Italy. Estimates speak of 5 million workers on the black market to which 3 million workers with “irregular” employment contracts are to be added¹⁴. The Ministry of Labour furnishes lower, but still worrying figures (2.7 million workers on the black market) and adds that “informal” work accounts for 18% of GDP!

Furthermore, the housing question deserves a separate chapter among barriers to access to the work because of the effect this basic factor in individual biographies has on gaining access to other resources, one of which is work. We merely wish to mention a few figures which indicate the difficulties encountered by those with an income as employees in finding dignified accommodation.

While they have built 300,000 accommodation units in France in recent years with a good 120,000 destined to public sector housing, a total of 1,500 have been built in Italy for this purpose! The cost of housing rose by 70% in Italy between 1999 and 2007 compared with an increase in incomes of 28%. Rents increased by 85% over the same period, while the percentage of households with mortgage debts amounts to 44% of the total today and that is not all: as many as 26% of people taking out a

¹¹ Website: www.regione.lombardia.it - 3rd May 2007

¹² *La Repubblica* (national daily newspaper) - 14th June 2007

¹³ Luigi Campiglio - Catholic University - Milan

¹⁴ IRES-CGIL Report 2006

mortgage have been compelled to sell their homes because they were unable to make the repayments¹⁵.

The situation of those who while they have a job, but nevertheless live in insecure, if not totally unacceptable housing conditions should now be clearer. For example the number of employees of government institutions who are living in automobiles after marriage break-ups is reported as increasing in Rome.¹⁶

3. THE POLITICAL AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT IN ITALY

Although Italy is a republic founded on work,¹⁷ there is no adequate corresponding legislation to implement this. Generally speaking the legislation, which has also been influenced by the trade unions, has sought to protect those persons already in employment (with priority given to firms with a “Fordist” organisational model) with particular reference to private sector firms with more than 15 employees and to the various types of government institutions. On the other hand the legislation favouring access to employment is extremely wanting, despite the recent labour market reform (Law No. 30/2003 known as the Biagi Law), which was enacted with the intention, at least declared, of favouring access to the labour market for all. The reform is still not fully operational and will probably be subject to amendments in this legislature. Numerous variables for access were introduced by Law No. 30, related, however, to even greater job insecurity for existing employment contracts. It is not therefore clear what effect it is having on the real possibility of modifying the relationship between social exclusion and inclusion in employment.

In addition to this, there is no legislative framework to protect and/or intervene in the area of extreme adult marginalisation with regard to employment. The only measures which make mention of extreme adult social marginalisation are contained in the general law on welfare (Law No. 328/2000) in which, however, no mention is made of work, but only of shelter and support for the “no abode”.

3.1. The “Minimum Insertion Income”

One of the serious failings in the legislation that we wish to underline is the particular situation that distinguishes Italy from almost all other countries in the EU: the absence of a “minimum insertion income” (a minimum social security cash benefit) for persons in conditions of social exclusion, a measure to support social reintegration which had been introduced in experimental form with particular reference to work as an inclusion factor. Generally the distribution of the “minimum insertion income” was in fact dependent of a strategy of supporting the beneficiary in recovering and maintaining an income from work and this included occupational retraining as a means.

Given the particular significance of this measure to the people who constitute the subject of this report, we have made a few notes below which reconstruct the tormented history of this legislation¹⁸.

¹⁵ Laura Pennacchi, economist – Conference on the Family – Ministry of the Family, Florence May 2007

¹⁶ Federico Bonadonna – responsible for intervention on behalf of the ‘no abode’ for the City of Rome.

¹⁷ Italian Constitution, Art. 1, “Italy is a democratic republic, founded on work”

¹⁸ Source: www.emiliaromagnasociale.it

¹⁸ Afterwards, the only region to provide a “minimum income” for citizens was that of Campania in January 2004 with a three year experiment for all families with an income of less than 5,000 euro per annum, who received a contribution of 350 euro per month. The law was not limited to distributing cash benefits but also included measures for free of charge access to services and intervention tailored for individual family members, ranging from study grants for occupational training.

The experimental phase of the “minimum insertion income” was enacted by legislative Decree No. 237 of 18th June 1998. The decree defined the “minimum insertion income” as a “measure to fight poverty and social exclusion through support of the economic and social conditions of persons exposed to the risk of social marginalisation and unable provide for those near to them and to their children for mental, physical and social reasons” (Art. 1, paragraph 1).

The beneficiaries had to be without income or with an income not greater than the poverty threshold of 258.23 euro per month (500,000 lire) for a person living alone (...) The experimentation involved 39 municipalities in all Italy, 5 of which in the North, 10 in central Italy and 24 in the South and islands. The five municipalities in the North were: Nichelino (Turin), Cologno Monzese and Limbiate (Milan), the Prà district of Genoa and Rovigo. Later the experimentation was extended until the end of 2002 and expanded to cover 307 municipalities (...).

The largest municipality involved as a whole as Naples. The municipalities that participated in the experimentation reflected the geographical distribution of poverty in Italy. The experimentation was entrusted entirely to municipalities, including the aspects concerning verification and control. The administrative work required of municipalities was therefore considerable.

Some figures on the results of the experimentation of the “minimum insertion income” from those already available were published by the commission for the investigation of social exclusion in its 2001 annual report and these furnished some significant numbers: 55,522 applications for “minimum insertion income” were made in the two years of experimentation; 34,730 were accepted for total of approximately 85,000 persons accounting for 1.5% of the population of the 39 municipalities with fluctuations ranging from 0.4% at Cologno Monzese to 15.1% at Orta di Atella. A total of 25,591 family units were receiving these benefits at the end of December 2000, of which more than three quarters had one or more members actually inserted in programmes for a total of more than 37,000 individuals. The experimentation identified a target of family units composed mainly of women alone or elderly persons alone in the North and of large family units in the South. The feasibility of the “minimum insertion income” emerged (it was also indicated as a “best practice” in the national plan for social inclusion presented in Brussels in June 2001) as a successful and reliable measure to fight poverty and social exclusion. The greatest difficulties apart from the administrative and organisational aspects were the programmes to integrate the beneficiaries in training courses and employment. Nevertheless, optimistic “qualitative” signals were recorded which did not emerge from the numbers, above all in relation to the recovery of dignity, self esteem and capacity to “get back into things” which the “minimum insertion income” had produced.

The entry into force of Law No. 328/2000 brought big changes to this project, with the extension by article 23 of the “minimum insertion income” to become a general measure to fight poverty, under which other income support measures would be included.

On 5th July 2002, the Pact for Italy was signed by the government and trade unions which, however, announced the disappearance of the “minimum insertion income” on a national

scale. At point 2.7, the signatories assert that the experimentation of the minimum insertion income “demonstrated that it was not feasible to identify persons with the right to benefit from this social security net by means of a central government law” and that they felt that it was preferable to jointly finance regional programmes “designed to guarantee a basic income to citizens not assisted by other supplementary income measures”. The agreement stated that “any continuation of the ‘minimum insertion income’ experiment must be consistent with the aims described above and with the objectives of fighting the hidden economy”. New methods of providing income support were therefore hypothesised through a new instrument “of last resort”.

The 2003 Financial Law halted experimentation of the “minimum insertion income”¹⁹. The 307 municipalities involved in the experimentation were deprived of substantial resources and of an effective instrument for fighting poverty. With them the approximately 200 thousand citizens who had benefited from the social and economic integration intervention remained with no answer. The compensatory intervention put in place subsequently did not, however, allow the “minimum insertion income” to start again. The subsequent proposals contained in the White Book on Welfare made the halt to experimentation more permanent.

The assessment made by regions highlighted the high costs of implementing the “minimum insertion income” which could not be performed without central government financial support. The government enacted the “income of last resort” in the 2004 financial law as an instrument of financial support for programmes of social reintegration, destined to family units at risk of social exclusion and whose members were not beneficiaries of welfare subsidies destined to persons out of work. The ambiguity of that measure (which amongst other things does not make it clear how it differs from the “minimum insertion income”) and the failure to issue regulations to implement it have prevented its progress. Just recently a new analysis of the “minimum insertion income” prepared by experts at the Ministry of Social Solidarity has been presented to Parliament²⁰. The note by the experts states that *“the minimum insertion income is almost always perceived as a “reduction of damage” against poverty. Four social categories have benefited from the law: people receiving welfare support for years, the elderly who received the “minimum insertion income” as a supplement to welfare cheques, people in informal, “irregular” employment who were able to participate in occupational retraining courses and finally the unemployed and job seekers who have no income.*

Implementation of the social insertion programmes provided for by the minimum income law was affected by the organisational failings of municipalities and a lack of trained personnel. In reality on the ground, the “minimum insertion income” was experienced in line with classic welfare traditions as just another cash benefit. The objectives of the 1999 law were only achieved where local administrations succeeded in integrating monetary transfers with services and training courses. Many families benefited from the “minimum insertion income” to gain access to health and social services from which they would otherwise have been excluded.”.

A few “cases of excellence” are cited. The report cited states that there were “a large variety of effects even from one municipality to the next. The difference depends on the degree of development of the administration of the municipality concerned. The most positive cases were Rovigo, Massa Carrara and Frosinone. There were few cases of excellence in the South, except for the North-Barese Ofantino community pact and the Province of Oristano. There were difficulties in the application

²⁰ Source: www.redattoresociale.it, 3rd August 2007

of the “minimum insertion income” regulations at Caltanissetta. Generally the “minimum insertion income” worked best in municipalities where the organisation of social welfare services was already working more smoothly and where more progress had been made in relations between representatives of social welfare organisations.”.

A huge contradiction can therefore be seen from what has been reported here and we would say it is a structural contradiction in how the law on the “minimum insertion income” was implemented in the experimental stage: while almost all the beneficiaries were individuals and families suffering from hardship (and in any case subject to assessment by the individual municipalities and services responsible), the experimentation of the “minimum insertion income” did not in fact involve persons of no abode! In fact adults suffering from extreme marginalisation fall outside the ordinary working area of municipal social services, especially when a social inclusion plan is defined which they could hardly be involved in given the cultural horizon of those social workers and administrators.

Therefore, although it is a measure which now belongs to the past and of which there is at present no trace in the policies of the current government, it is important in future to broaden the target of the beneficiaries to also include adults suffering from extreme marginalisation in a planning context similar to those developed for persons in the so-called “grey” area of poverty.

3.2. The possibilities of inserting the “no abode” in employment

As we have said, Italian legislation is fairly active in protecting workers when the firm in which they work enters a period of crisis. The same can be said of employees in permanent jobs who go through a period of poor physical or mental health. There is, however, little protection for the self-employed worker who is unable to keep his/her work and the same occurs for a permanent employee who decides to leave his/her job autonomously. When a person becomes unemployed, the authorities responsible for mediating between supply and demand are rarely able to provide adequate support. Despite the recent reform (Legislative Decree No. 297/02) of the “Placement Offices” which have been transformed into “Employment Centres” with a simultaneous simplification of the administrative procedures for access to work, no significant progress has in fact been made. On the contrary, national legislation has outsourced management of relations between demand and supply to the private “for profit” sector. Not only have the conditions been created to favour intermediation by private sector firms who have developed the “temp” worker market, which is extremely profitable for them, the government has also set up a special agency (Italia Lavoro) which operates on the intermediation market on a par with the private sector. More specifically, persons of no abode are among the “victims” of an employment system which at the moment is experiencing a rise in employment rates but in which most of the improvement is provided by temporary work which accounts for approximately 80% of the new employment contracts.

3.3. Social welfare co-operatives and the no abode

As we have said, it is not possible at present to speak of true and genuine strategies for the no abode. However it is possible to locate persons of no abode in social work supervision models of a more general character in the social exclusion area. This is because to be

“homeless” is not in itself a disadvantage factor with respect to work. That is why there must be formal recognition (by a public health service specialist) of addiction (to drugs or alcohol), of a serious form of mental illness, or of official imprisonment as grounds for inclusion in one of the legal categories of “disadvantage”. This requirement is in reality what is required for inclusion in the employment programmes of type B social welfare co-operatives. Social welfare co-operatives are particularly widespread throughout the country. The last official census available (ISTAT – Italian Office for Statistics, published 2nd March 2006) reports that on 31. 12 .2003 there were 6,159 social welfare co-operatives registered in Italy of which 1,979 were type B, i.e. those most involved in the reintegration of disadvantaged persons into work. Type B co-operatives are more widespread in northern Italy and were formed by the enactment of a specific law. Social welfare co-operatives are in fact regulated nationally by Law No. 381 of 8th November 1991, "Discipline of social co-operatives", which sets forth the basic characteristics:

“The purpose of social co-operatives is to pursue the general interest of the community for the human advance and social integration of citizens through: a) the provision of social, health and educational services; b) the performance of various activities – agricultural, industrial, commercial or service provision – designed to insert disadvantaged persons into work”²¹.

Some indications of the nature and aims of social welfare co-operatives are given below using excerpts from the law cited.

As has been said with regard to the integration of disadvantaged persons, adults suffering extreme marginalisation or adults of “no abode” are not cited by the law. This latter term was not to be found in any legislation and often not even in the terminology used by local social services at the time when the law was drafted.

The law nevertheless defines the characteristics of disadvantaged persons as follows:

*“Disadvantaged persons. - 1. In the co-operatives which carry on the activities mentioned in article 1, paragraph 1, letter b,) disadvantaged persons are considered as the physically, mentally and sensory disabled, the former patients of psychiatric institutions, persons under psychiatric treatment, drug addicts, alcoholics, persons under working age in situations of family difficulty, convicts admitted to measures alternative to detention (...).”*One first but fundamental inconsistency emerges which directly affects the extremely marginalised in particular, because a significant percentage of the no abode have spent time in prison with a hardship which increases when they are released from prison. The inconsistency lies in the intervention for prisoners who are considered disadvantaged while they are officially considered prisoners, but who lose all rights to assistance at the most crucial moment of their release.

On the basis of the census performed in December 2003 contained in the ISTAT report, the following percentages of users were found for type B social welfare co-operatives (in the country as a whole)²²:

- users with physical, mental or sensory disabilities 45,5%
- drug addict users 16,8%
- psychiatric patients 14,9%
- prisoners and former prisoners 7,8%
- unemployed 5,9%
- alcoholics 4,3%

²¹ Type B co-operatives are classified under the economic development and social cohesion sector of the ICNPO classification (International Classification of Nonprofit Organization) – sourced: note to the ISTAT report, page 14

²² ISTAT report - Table 17, page 15

- minors (under 18 years) 1.1%
- other users 3.8%

Another characteristic of type B social welfare co-operatives is that there must be a minimum percentage of disadvantaged persons and certification of the disadvantage is compulsory.

"2. The disadvantaged persons mentioned in paragraph 1 must constitute at least thirty percent of the workers of the co-operative and, compatibly with their subjective state, be members of the co-operative itself. The condition of being a disadvantaged person must be documented by the public administration, without prejudice to the law on confidentiality."

The certification is performed mainly by health services, while it is only rarely that municipal social services certify a social disadvantage, even though they constitute the basic services for defining a "multi-dimensional" disadvantage like that of the "no abode". Consequently a significant group of persons who cannot/do not manage to gain access to a specialist service are *de facto* excluded, as we will see below, from the possibility of obtaining employment within social welfare co-operatives.

Disadvantaged persons (in the percentages reported above) working in co-operatives numbered 23,575 in 2003, accounting for 46% of those employed (more than required by law).

The presence of members belonging to a certified disadvantaged category results in a substantial reduction in costs as summarised in the law:

"3. The total percentage rates for compulsory pension and social security insurance contributions due by social co-operatives, for the remuneration paid to the disadvantaged persons mentioned in this article are reduced to zero." These advantages do not apply to "uncertified" persons. This is the exclusion factor just mentioned. Social welfare co-operatives do in fact have to compete on the market and must keep down the costs of their labour (the service users), which often requires particular attention in terms of social work supervision and management. To be able to recover part of their labour costs is therefore an important requirement for the survival itself of co-operatives and the cause of exclusion for many persons of no abode.

Finally the law provides a few preferential channels for the acquisition of work which allows co-operatives to perform their social welfare tasks, i.e. the possibility of privileged agreements with local administrations which avoid the problems connected with awarding contracts to the lowest bidder. The law states: *"5. Conventions. -1. Public authorities, including economic authorities and publicly owned joint stock companies, even as an exception to the legislation on public administration contracts, may sign convention agreements with co-operatives which perform the activities mentioned in article 1, paragraph 1, letter b), or with similar bodies located in other member states of the European Community, for the supply of goods and services other than health and social services where the estimated sum net of the VAT is less than the sums established European Community directives for public sector contracts, provided those conventions are designed to create employment opportunities for disadvantaged persons (...)"*.

From what has been described, social welfare co-operatives constitute an extremely important resource in the field of employment for disadvantaged persons, but neither the law nor general practice shows a specific interest in adults suffering extreme

marginalisation, which reduces the impact that this sector exerts on the subject dealt with in this report.

3.4 Certification as disabled and persons of no abode

As we have seen the highest percentage of disadvantaged persons working in social welfare co-operatives in Italy are defined as “physically, mentally or sensory disabled”. Reference is made for this definition to the official certification of disability recognised on the basis of medical evidence which is obtained through fairly complex administrative procedures and which, when things go smoothly, require a period of 6-8 months. To obtain recognition of disability, and that is of a significant reduction in ones ability to work, involves a difficult administrative procedure for all citizens and is almost impossible for a person of no abode to tackle alone²³. What can be obtained from the recognition of a percentage deficit of personal abilities due to illness which affects a person’s chances of employment (for a percentage equal to or greater than 46%) is the enrolment in what is termed the “targeted placement” list enacted by Law No. 68/99.

Law No. 68/99 favours insertion and integration in work through support and targeted placement services. The objective of the law is the social and employment integration of disabled persons in order to place them in a job that is more fitting to their skills, aptitudes, potential and needs. There therefore exists an agency by law which is responsible for finding the best solution for disabled workers. However, its effectiveness is limited by a series of factors. We have listed the most important:

- every firm with more than 15 employees is obliged by law to appoint workers belonging to the “protected” categories up to 7.5% of its work force, but it is possible to pay a penalty and not fulfil this obligation. Many firms prefer this method which ensures that they do not risk having any “inopportune” workers;
- although they are required to, many firms neither fulfil their legal obligation nor do they pay a penalty, but are not subjected to any checks due to the inefficiency of the government agencies responsible and/or to insufficient staff;
- people on unemployment lists are usually called for jobs “numerically” (i.e. based on the order of enrolment), but this does not ensure that the mental and physical characteristics of the person are appropriate to perform the job and this is certified by a doctor employed by the firm itself. As a consequence a considerable percentage of disabled persons are declared “not able” by the firms that receive them;
- finally in order to be called for a job by the office, a person must have a domicile and this is not always possible for persons who live on the streets or in temporary accommodation.

²³ *The following is necessary for a person in order to present an application for certification as disabled: be officially resident, have a fixed domicile for communications, health certification prepared by a family doctor, detailed and recent health documentation of mental and physical conditions and ... the capacity to wait months between sending in the application, the convocation for the first meeting with the medical commission and the subsequent visits by specific commissions under Law No. 68.*

Speaking on the subject at a recent convention, the president of the CNCA²⁴ claimed that Law No. 68 had basically failed to function and also that its objectives were limited in relation to the multi-dimensional nature of the problems of disadvantaged persons.

Another law, Law No. 104/1992 and the subsequent amendments to it, can be used in parallel with Law No. 68 to support the reintegration of adults of no abode into work.

This law laid down provisions on the rights, social integration and welfare for the handicapped with the aim, amongst other things, of facilitating reintegration into work. In reality the use of this law to help adults of no abode is an extension, often improper, of Art. 3 of the law,²⁵ even if the jurisprudence (authoritative legal opinion) has defined handicap as a serious condition of reduced personal autonomy due to the joint presence of disorders or other factors which alter the conditions of life of a person and are such as to require permanent, continuous and overall assistance²⁶. This condition is not necessarily certified by official recognition of disability, but requires the opinion of a special commission.

This legislation is also used to obtain further rights under local regulations (municipal) which legitimate support for reintegration in employment but, as may be imagined, the law was hardly designed to fit the no abode and requires a high degree of intervention by social services since it is unusable in practice by individual persons.

3.5 Some examples of local legislation to assist reintegration into employment

Action targeted at disadvantaged groups has been implemented at local level. We cite some of the most recent (2006 – 2007) for information only without making any assessment of the effectiveness and quality due to the lack of sufficient data:

- the project “Social promotion income” in 9 municipalities in the Province of Milan for the integration into work of unemployed persons over 40, women living alone with children, young people with no educational qualifications and the mentally ill;
- the Adeline project in Turin for the computer literacy of immigrant women;
- the Province of Palermo has budgeted 2 million euro for minors, the elderly, the disabled and immigrants for employment integration projects, workshops, foster homes and social and mental welfare;
- the Region of Tuscany has set aside a regional fund of 500,000 euro for contributions to firms who convert temporary employment contracts to permanent contracts of employment;
- the municipality of Rome has set aside 1 million euro of incentives for firms who appoint former prisoners.

This last initiative underlines a totally Italian paradox which we have already mentioned concerning prisoners. In fact while a person is officially under prison regime they have the right to a series of supports provided by the legislation which mainly concern integration into work as a social inclusion factor. When the prison term ends, however, all the benefits

²⁴ Lucio Babolin , president of the Coordinamento Comunità di Accoglienza (co-ordination for accommodation communities).

²⁵ Persons eligible – A handicapped person who presents physical, mental or sensory defects, that have stabilised or are becoming progressively worse, which cause difficulty in learning, relating to people or integrating in employment and are such as to determine a process of social disadvantage or marginalisation.

²⁶ Source INPDAP

of the legislation end and the person must face the process of integration unaided (except for independent initiatives by private sector social welfare assistance where this exists).

4. PATHS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS OF NO ABODE

It is useful to first make a general premise in this section. It is that of distinguishing between paths to employment for the “no abode” and for those who although living in conditions of housing hardship (ETHOS 8 - 13), are not experiencing a biographical crisis but, more simply, must overcome a series of obstacles of an administrative, occupational or even just linguistic (e.g. immigrants) nature to gain access to the labour market.

With the persons in ETHOS categories 1 and 2 we must necessarily think of a series of services capable of performing some priority and consequential steps:

- accepting a request for help
- make it usable on the labour market through a programme which involves the deepest parts of the human experience of these persons;
- only subsequently are training and occupational programmes formulated;
- assess and calibrate the concrete possibility of employment in relation to the remaining resources of the person.

The focus of the support is therefore located “within” the person and on the capacity to restore meaning to work within a plan to rebuild a person’s life.

On the other hand, those who are following a migration project for example (who also have housing difficulties) are often forced to overcome obstacles posed by the external context (legislative, stigma, resources to be adapted to fit the new context of life). Possible intervention by social services is therefore to support the more carefully defined plans of the person and in most cases is intended to take place within a normal job in the labour market.

Given this premise, we can describe some examples of employment reintegration paths and the main instruments in use.

4.1 From the person to work

As has already been said, what prevails in the Italian experience in the field of extreme adult marginalisation is services that provide “relief” and assistance rather than the promotion of reintegration in society and work even if many service providers set this as their objective.

It is only rarely that these intentions take the form of organised intervention which allows genuine access to employment. This situation is not only affected by organisational failings and the poverty of resources but also by the difficulties service providers (the public and/or the private welfare sectors) have in grasping the real role played by work in planning the life of a person suffering from extreme social marginalisation.

It is fundamental to redefine the role of work in the present within the experience that a person is living as the underlying basis of a social reintegration plan. Work seems to be the solution to the multi-dimension nature of the problem in the representation of both service users and providers. This, however, is without taking account of the following factors:

- administrative difficulties (e.g. absence of documents) which direct people towards “informal” work which fuels the condition of exclusion;
- investing in work within the experience of a “desert” of personal relationships which cannot be filled by having a job or an income;
- often service providers collude with the desire of persons of no abode to regain a place in society through work without taking account of the mental and physical condition of people after a period on the street and after repeated failures (typical of the biographies of these people) in attempts to acquire and/or keep a job.

So the first step to take in an employment reintegration plan is therefore to restore the meaning and role of work in a greater overall vision. In concrete terms it means having to create the individual pre-conditions necessary to sew back together the “gash” that has opened up between the person and the world of work. In this phase social work and psychological skills are employed that are able to support the development of the persons and redefine their life plans. Social work is necessary alongside this which restores citizenship to the no abode through the use of appropriate supports service (e.g. specialist health services) and the recovery of the documents required to acquire a job (e.g. through the work of Street Lawyers)²⁷.

Subsequently, on the basis of the physical, mental and accommodation resources of the person, steps can be taken in the direction of an occupational training plan .

One of the pre-requisites is educational. In some cases a person may not have completed compulsory schooling and it is recommended that they enrol on an adult course to complete the school leaving examination. It is a necessary requirement for access to further education and training courses which at the same time will allow the reformulation of life plans interrupted in adolescence.

In other situations integration may be commenced in what are termed “protected” work places, generally supported by local public administrations or sometimes by specialists services (substance addiction, mental health). This is generally activity that takes place within the same organisation that provides the accommodation or which works with a partner, usually a type B social welfare co-operatives. Persons of no abode receive pay in these contexts by means of a widely used instrument, a “work scholarship”.

A *borsa lavoro* (work scholarship) is a cash benefit usually granted out of government subsidies. The amount of the “work scholarship” is not taxed and there are no pension or social security contributions with it. The amount of the “work scholarship” generally varies between 100 and 500 euro per month and it cannot be directly related to the number of hours worked and not even to the level of professional skills required. It is simply defined as a reimbursement of expenses for a commitment made by the person in observance of the contract signed. The objective of this part of the plan is not to give priority to precise occupational skills, but to help the person of no abode to acquire the pre-requisites necessary to enter the world of work as an employee (continuity, responsibility, presence, observance of rules and working hours, the capacity to respect and use the different components of a firm’s organisation, etc.).

²⁷ www.avvocatodistrada.it (also in English)

Very interesting examples in this area are to be found in the great variety of assembly workshops, in services for the organisation in which the no abode are given accommodation (e.g. laundry, warehouse, maintenance, etc.), in the responsibilities assumed by persons in the organisation of the spaces and schedules of organisations that give them accommodation, in employment in the collection and recycling of residential and industrial waste, in portering and house moving activities and in the maintenance of green spaces, etc..

Unfortunately, “work scholarships” happen to remain the only opportunity for employment open to the “no abode”. This is because of the limitations of individuals (e.g. mental illness, serious physical problems, age, etc.), because accommodation centres are unable to find a “real” job for these persons on the labour market and because of the reluctance of the “for-profit” market to take adults with a “difficult” biography and limited mental and physical capacities.

What therefore happens to a great extent with the no abode is that these “work scholarships” which are usually transition measures do in fact become the sole income for medium to long term periods for persons whose employment situation does not (or cannot) progress.

This regrettable process also occurs within type B social welfare co-operatives which are often unable to effect the passage of a person/worker from a “work scholarship” worker to a full time permanent employee.

This passage can only be effected through a mediation service which is organised to facilitate the matching of requests from (for-profit) firms with persons of no abode on social reintegration and training programmes. However, the most prevalent (re) entry channel still remains direct contacts between social workers and firms or between service users and firms.

Large part of the no abode continue in any case to remain excluded from this passage because of the lack of employment opportunities offered by for-profit firms. One of the exclusion factors lies in the high level of skills and aptitudes required of people in terms of the professionalism, individual capacities/skills, and mental and physical aptitudes requested. It is not possible to assume that the large majority of persons of no abode have sufficiently adequate characteristics in any of these field to gain access to the for-profit labour market. This is because of the fragility of the individuals which is increased by the severe hardship they have experienced and also because of the progressive reduction in employment involving simple repetitive tasks, without the pressure of deadlines, to be performed perhaps on the margins of the main production processes. They are all characteristics of production processes that are often delocalised or outsourced to firms (often actually to social welfare co-operatives) which are themselves positioned on the margins of production processes and of the main cash flows (e.g. everything that concerns the office, residential and industrial cleaning sector).

4.2 From work to the person

What we intend with this statement is to indicate the position of those (mainly non European immigrants) who manage to escape from social exclusion through work when they have the mental characteristics and aptitudes requested by the market and above all

when they are in possession of a “stay permit” for Italy, a document which allows them access to the “formal” world of work.

Educational programmes are available for immigrants in many areas and cities (adult education, Italian language courses given by volunteers, etc.) in which the acquisition of occupational skills (e.g. linguistic, computer, etc.) useful in the world of work are prevalent. In this case it is not so much the biographical dimension which must be intercepted as the mobilisation of personal skills and external (social) resources.

The administrative dimension (i.e. the possession of a valid permit to stay and work in Italy) is determining. In this respect there are voluntary associations active in all cities which run support programmes to obtain citizenship for immigrants, which is often a sufficient requirement for them to recover autonomy.

Unfortunately the legislation is still unfavourable towards the real mobility of people between states, especially between eastern Europe and Italy just as it is between Africa, Asia and Latin America and Italy.

We believe that almost all immigrants have passed through a more or less transitory period of being without proper documents and therefore working on the “black market” to then take advantage of a legal amnesty (always present in Italy, even during the apparently most restrictive legislatures on the issue of immigration) to emerge both in work and on official anagraphical registers²⁸.

In this case, therefore, access to work is not mediated by services that take responsibility for the whole person, but rather by services that support the person in terms of skills to sell on the labour market starting with the validity of their documents.

4.3 the role of social workers and public sector services

We have already stated the importance of social workers and social services in defining effective strategies at individual and collective level for social reintegration through work. Social workers and social services are defined in this respect as mediators between hardship and the chance to obtain work through the capacity to intercept the demand and offer concrete answers in terms of guarantees (social rights, citizenship rights) and access through a gradual process of mental and educational supervision.

We wish to underline here some characteristics of work in practice that we feel are priorities:

- the capacity to “read” the complexity of the hardship experienced by persons of no abode, avoiding simplification in the response which attributes a “magic” role in overcoming the condition of extreme marginalisation;
- at the same time the capacity to interpret the demand for social inclusion made by persons of no abode using employment and work in direct relation to the geographical, economic and cultural context in which the demand of the no abode is expressed;
- the need to create a network of contacts with a broad range of agencies and services with particular reference to organisations which operate in the “normal” field of work (“for-profit” firms, trade unions, trade organisations) to prevent further “ghettoisation” of these persons and a strong reduction in the concrete chances of gaining access to employment;

²⁸ The Martelli Law ('90) resulted in the emergence of 215,000 non EU citizens, the Dini decree ('95) 244,000, the Turco-Napolitano Law ('98) 217,000 and the Bossi-Fini law 650,000 in 2002.

- the capacity to manage the administrative and legislative dimensions which do not offer access to work by themselves but which are certainly able to facilitate paths to occupational reintegration.

Finally we wish to underline that the work of social services and of the social workers themselves (both as individuals and as part of local, national and transnational organisations) must necessarily comprise work on two levels:

- cultural to understand the condition of the "no abode" in relation to the multi-dimensional nature of the hardship and to the role that a job can actually play;
- political in the capacity to persuade legislators and administrators to govern the process currently affecting the world of work and which are always a source of significant processes of social exclusion.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The issue of work in relation to social exclusion and extreme adult marginalisation has always represented one of the cornerstones of welfare policies.

This role attributed to work as a determining factor in social inclusion policies is emphasised continuously at political level even though various elements and research studies underline that at this moment in history there is a strong risk that work itself is a source of new forms of social exclusion.

In order to understand these processes, which have a strong influence on the specifics of extreme adult marginalisation, it is important to broaden one's viewpoint to take in the large groups in the Italian population who live in the so-called "grey" area of poverty. We can point to some fundamental characteristics of work in Italy today:

- we have passed from work which guaranteed a "status" for a person, even in terms of identity (you were "what you did") to a condition in which the construction of one's identity as an individual and as a worker must occur "a priori" within a culture and an economy which is pushing people along paths of autonomy/entrepreneurialism which for many is unsustainable. Work is therefore increasingly losing its capacity to be a place which represents a concept of self.
- current labour market processes privilege "flexibility" as a primary value where the alternation between employment and unemployment is no longer the exception but risks becoming the rule. While on the one hand it seems that this trend facilitates access to work, it also makes the dynamics of expulsion from it more rapid, especially for persons over 45-50 years of age who find it difficult to find new jobs;
- the relationship between person/worker and the places people belong to (geographical, personal relationships) is coming unstuck with clear fragmentation also of the ties within the workplace itself;
- the trends cited are affecting the earning capacity of individuals and families and are causing a worrying level of impoverishment;
- furthermore they are contributing to the crisis of important bonds in the times and ways of relating to the world of work that are increasingly more fragmented.

These are the reasons why today we think that work as an instrument of social integration has changed into a place that is creating social vulnerability and is favouring the growth of greater fragility in individual biographies and increasingly greater inability to manage these processes at a collective level.

Naturally the specificities of the homeless as defined by ETHOS must be identified considering that what has been stated takes on extreme and clamorous forms the more life is lived in precarious conditions and/or on the street.

Persons of no abode are generally unemployed and live a subsistence economy life. Social work supervision programmes which gradually lead to reintegration into work are proposed to overcome this situation. For other ETHOS categories who experience housing hardship we refer to the labour market in general in Italy without identifying specific characteristics except for non European immigrants with their difficulties of an administrative nature.

For a person of no abode the barriers to access to work are many: stigma, confused planning, precarious mental and physical conditions, the lack of documents, organisational and resource limitations in support by services for the marginalised, insufficient specific legislation and scarce attention of the "for-profit" labour market to these persons.

The legislative framework which connects extreme marginalisation and work in Italy is very inadequate, specially in terms of concrete application. There is in particular the absence of a measure to support integration into work, which the "minimum insertion income" was, experimentally, a measure for the recovery and maintenance of a job through training programmes, amongst other things. Although this did exist, few persons of no abode actually benefited from this measure because of the difficult combination of the local social services in charge of it and the lack of administrative and individual resources by which the world of the no abode is still represented.

Even the government agencies responsible for bringing demand and supply together are generally unable to provide support for a person of no abode seeking work even if they operate in a market dominated by "temp" work.

One concrete opportunity for work is provided by social welfare co-operatives which define their role by law in favour of the so-called "disadvantaged" categories. To be a person of no abode is not in itself a "disadvantage" recognised by law. This reduces the chances of employment in social welfare co-operatives which often constitute a fundamental step in the path to social reintegration. This problem can be solved if the person is recognised as disabled and enrolled in the "targeted placement" lists (Law No. 68/99). It is an important measure of protection, but unfortunately its effectiveness is limited by the lengthy administrative procedures required, the unwillingness of "for-profit" firms to accept workers and the service providers which lack experience in working with persons of no abode.

Re-entry into the world of work is a long term project for a person of no abode and it often requires forms of supervision and targeted support. Here it is important to distinguish from among the large range of the homeless identified by the ETHOS classification between those who are experiencing a profound crisis in their biographies (the "no abode") and those who, once they have overcome administrative and legal barriers (immigrants in particular) are able to progress with their concrete plans in life with only "light" supervision and support.

What is determining above all in a profound crisis of existence and making life plans is to redefine the role of work within an overall vision of sewing back together the "gash" that

has opened up between the person and work. What is required is professional educational and social work skills which operate within a network of service providers and agencies that are able to address the health, administrative and training dimensions. Spaces for meaning and resources can then be gradually (re)opened which find concrete answers in the availability of “work scholarships” in “protected” places where the personal relationship dimension is attended to in addition to the necessary occupational skills.

Unfortunately we must underline that the outcome of these programmes do not always consist of real employment in “for-profit” firms where the progressive decrease in the number of simple, not stressful jobs, perhaps marginal to main production processes limits the chances of adults with wounds in their biographies and affected by poor mental and physical health after a period of extreme hardship living on the streets.

On the other hand, the path for those classified in ETHOS categories 8 - 13 (with particular reference to immigrants) is different. It is a question above all of mobilising social resources during a period of administrative and contractual difficulties, before emerging and putting a life plan into action which these persons have often already defined but which has been delayed by external obstacles (legislative, availability of housing, etc.).

It is fundamental in all that has been described for the role of service providers and social workers operating in the field of extreme marginalisation to be that of mediators between a demand that has not been easy to intercept and the capacity to ferry it to employment resources by means of the guarantees given by the recognition of adequate rights.

To do this the capacity to interpret the phenomenon of homelessness must be increased. Simplifications which attribute a priority role to work in the path away from extreme social exclusion must be avoided, with employment placed in the context of the local situation with the activation of a network of assistance which includes organisations which operate in the “normal” labour market in order to avoid damaging “ghettoisations”, using resources which make up for legislative and administrative failings.

Therefore even when speaking of work and persons of no abode, the operational dimension is required to integrate strategies on two levels: cultural to understand the condition of the no abode and political to induce the legislator to govern economic and social processes which are increasingly facilitating the drift into social exclusion.

ETHOS

European typology on the no abode and housing exclusion

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORY		OPERATIONAL CATEGORY	SUB CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
NO ABODE (roofless)	1	People living rough	1.1	People sleeping rough
			1.2	People contacted by outreach street units
	2	People staying in a night shelter and who pass many hours of the day in public places (outdoor)	2.1	Low threshold/direct access night shelter
			2.2	Provisional accommodation (e.g. bed and breakfast/low cost hotels)
			2.3	Short stay hostels/shelters

HOUSELESS	3	Hostels for the homeless/ temporary accommodation	3.1	Short stay homeless hostels
			3.2	Temporary accommodation (without any precise length of stay)
			3.3	Temporary accommodation (transitory)
			3.4	Temporary accommodation (long stay)
	4	People in women's shelters/ refuges	4.1	Night shelter
			4.2	Accommodation with social work supervision
	5	People in accommodation for asylum seekers and immigrants	5.1	Reception centres (for asylum seekers)
			5.2	Accommodation for people waiting to be repatriated
			5.3	Immigrant worker's accommodation
	6	Institutions	6.1	Penal institutions (for a period of time defined for each country)
		6.2	Institutions (nursing, hospital)	
7	Accommodation for people receiving social work support (for the "no abode")	7.1	Supported accommodation/ Residential care (for groups)	
		7.2	Supported accommodation (for individuals)	
		7.3	Supported accommodation (for individuals)	
		7.4	Training day centres (Foyers) Adolescents with foster families	
INSECURE HOUSING	8	With no legal tenancy	8.1	Temporarily with family or friends (not by choice)
			8.2	Living in apartments with no legal (sub) tenancy (excluding illegal occupation)
	9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1	Court order for eviction (for rented accommodation)
			9.2	Mortgage repossession orders (for owned property)
	10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Living under the threat of violence from partner of family (police recorded incidents)
INADEQUATE	11	Temporary structures	11.1	Mobile home / caravan
			11.2	Illegal occupation of public areas (e.g. Roma / <i>Punk a'bestia</i> - young nomad travellers/Gypsies)
			11.3	Illegal occupation of a building (squatting)
	12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Apartments unfit for habitation under national legislation
	13	Overcrowded accommodation	13.1	Overcrowding higher than the level set by national legislation