



FEANTSA

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

National Report The Netherlands – Annual Theme 2007

1. Introduction

Unemployment in the Netherlands

In the first half of 2007 the unemployment rate in the Netherlands has decreased to below 5% of the labour force. On an average day 347.000 people are looking for work. Most of them will find a paid job within 12 months.

A steady group of around 200.000 people in the general population is dealing with long term unemployment. They have been unemployed for more than a year. Around 50.000 have been unemployed for more than 5 years. Recent research by the social security authorities shows that they expect 123.000 people in total to remain unemployed¹.

General risk factors for long term unemployment are²:

- low education level (elementary school)
- no job skills
- no work experience
- disabilities
- age (over 45)
- being single
- belonging to an ethnic minority.

Homeless population

Characteristics of the homeless population in the Netherlands are the following³:

- around 80% of the homeless are male, around 20% female
- around 90% are single
- around 30% have only elementary school education or less
- around 25% belong to an ethnic minority
- around 50% have a social security allowance
- around 20% have no income
- around 10% have a paid job
- around 10-20% have unknown income
- most of them are between 40 and 65 years old.

Most researchers in the past 10 years estimate the total number of homeless people (including people living in shelters) between 30.000 and 50.000 people on an annual basis.

Income strategies of homeless people

Homeless people have different strategies to earn an income. Research⁴ noted the following: begging, selling streetpapers, prostitution, burglary, theft, dealing drugs, not pay bills for items ordered, and mutual loans.

Dealing drugs can consist of an array of activities: act as dealer, courier, watchman, customer acquisition, and reselling.

In many cases people try to supplement their social security income by using the above mentioned strategies. Their social security income is often not enough to pay for their drug-use.

¹ Divosa Monitor 2007, Utrecht juli 2007

² CBS 2005 Artikel Robert de Vries *Langdurige werkloosheid in Nederland*

³ IBO rapport 2002-2003, *De Opvang Verstoort, Bijlage 3*

⁴ Lia van Doorn, dissertation *‘Een tijd op straat’*, Utrecht, 2002

2. Barriers to employment for people who are homeless: What barriers to employment do people who are homeless in your country face?

In the first paragraph a number of general risk factors for long term unemployment is mentioned. For homeless people there are a few specific risk factors which can be added to that list and which form a barrier to gain paid employment.

a) health and disabilities

Homeless people generally are not in good health. Around 50% of the homeless people have a mental illness and/or addiction problems. Around 25% of the homeless people have a learning disability. Their physical health is often in a bad state, most common diseases being:

* Infectious diseases: HIV, TB, STD's, respiratory infections, infestations (scabies, lice, etc.), skin infectior chronic viral hepatitis.

* Muscle skeletal problems: foot diseases, post-traumatic arthritis, chronic pain syndromes

* Psychiatric disease: Underlying severe mental illness, undiagnosed mental illness, post traumatic stress disorder and other resultant mental illness from homelessness

* Substance abuse related illness: Permanent sequelae of substance abuse, brain dysfunction liver disease, lung and heart disease.

* Chronic diseases: diabetes, hypertension, COPD.

* Diseases of neglect: nutritional problems, dental diseases.⁵

The physical appearance in many cases is influenced negatively by their unhealthy diet, lack of vitamins and lack of dental care. The general state of health and the appearance lengthen the distance to the regular labour market.

Another factor is that people who have lived on the streets for long periods of time have difficulty adjusting to indoor occupation. They often prefer outdoors activities.

b) Education

Most homeless people have a low level of education. Around 30% has elementary school level education or less. Reading and writing skills are often weakly developed or non-existent among this group. Only a small percentage has completed secondary education. Most jobs in the Netherlands require a secondary education diploma, also for entry level jobs.

c) Job skills

Homeless people more often than not lack specific job and life skills necessary to gain and keep employment. The ability to show up at the appointed time and place, to follow and carry out orders, to stick to procedures and to cooperate and work in a team are crucial skills for getting an keeping a job, but many homeless people do not possess these skills.

⁵ Health Care and Multiple Diagnosis Issues of Homeless People, Barry Zevin, MD, Tom Waddell Health Center, San Francisco, USA, 1998

d) Age

Most of the homeless people are older than 40 years. On the labour market, especially the labour market for unskilled work, age counts heavily for the chances of finding employment. Since most of them are over 40 years old, this factor poses a further barrier to finding employment.

3. Policy and legal context: What is being done in your country to overcome the barriers to employment for people experiencing homelessness?

General context

Since the mid 1990s, various policy measures targeted at the low-skilled have been intensified. These policies can be divided into policies that stimulate participation and job creation on the one hand (carrots), and policies that discourage non participation on the other hand (sticks). The first type of policies lead to a trade-off between stimulating employment of lowskilled and discouraging employment (in hours) of high-skilled workers. For example, targeted subsidies for workers (earned income tax credits) or firms (wage subsidies) lower the unemployment and non participation of low-skilled, but at the same time have an adverse effect on the labour supply in hours of high-skilled. By contrast, intensifying sanctions and cutting benefit levels increase the employment of low-skilled workers without reducing the employment of high-skilled workers. However, there is a price to pay as lowering benefit levels generates more inequality and less insurance for the low-skilled⁶.

At this point local authorities have different instruments to lead people to employment. The Work and Social Assistance Act provides a minimum income for all persons residing legally in the Netherlands with insufficient financial resources to meet their essential living costs. However, these persons are required to do everything they possibly can to support themselves again. The person entitled to this benefit is obliged to accept generally accepted work. If the person is not successful in getting back to work, the social services, the Employment Office and/or a reintegration organisation may offer support in finding work or schooling. With regard to school-leavers the social services can reduce the benefit during the first half year after the schooling or training course has ended. People aged 21 or 22 may also receive less benefit if the social services find that full benefit will make employment financially unattractive.

Most local authorities offer unemployed people who apply for Social Assistance a “Work First” job.

According to this method benefit claimants are obliged to take part in work activities for a large part of the week. Work First has been developed to limit the intake of benefit claimants. In the course of time the Work First-approach will also more and more aim at outflow to regular work. Benefit claimants can gain work experience by means of a Work First-project and acquire work rhythm for the promotion of the reintegration on the regular labour market. In the meantime also a further diagnosis can be made for an alternative reintegration route. Participation is obliged for everyone who gets an offer for a Work First placement.

For people with mental, physical or social handicaps and a long distance to the labour market, the local authority can offer the possibility to do volunteer work or participate in training to improve social skills, life skills and job skills. Sometimes the aim is to provide

⁶ Low wage employment in the Netherlands, N Voskuilen-Bosch, Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Review, January 2007

people with a meaningful day occupation, other times the aim is to prevent them from hanging around public spaces.

Employment policies for homeless people⁷

There are no special legal measures to promote employment among homeless people. Local authorities can use all the above mentioned instruments to increase social participation and work experience.

In the Netherlands 43 local authorities are designated to develop and execute policies on services for the homeless in their respective regions. At this time they are required to develop an Action Plan for Social Relief following the example of the four major cities in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague). In this Action Plan policies for social activation and participation have to be included. The expectation is that the local authorities will develop a mix of measures ranging from education and training to volunteer work, meaningful occupation, day jobs, supported employment and if possible, paid jobs.

4. Employment schemes/tools for people who are homeless: Which employment/activation tools or services are available to people experiencing homelessness in your country?⁸

Many projects have been set up in recent years for motivating homeless people and addicts. The nature of the projects is between volunteer work (day activities) and subsidized labour (reintegration). The Verwey-Jonker Research Institute in Utrecht examined over sixty different projects in 2005. These projects were concerned with homeless people and addicts who would be unable to cope in regular or subsidized work. The research questioned the effects of the projects: do participants develop a perspective for putting their lives back on the rails and is there a positive effect on the liveability in the neighbourhoods and districts?

Types of occupation

Three types of occupational rehabilitation were found by the researchers.

1. daily wage projects
2. new style occupation projects
3. processes oriented to labour integration in subsidized or regular labour.

1. Daily wage projects

These projects were developed to suit the unpredictable nature of life on the streets. The underlying assumption was that the participants would be willing to work on days they felt they were able to. In return, the participants received direct payments “cash on the nail”. The tasks involved are clear and self contained.

Examples:

We find three types of daily wage projects. The first type are projects run by special temp agencies; the second type are cleaning & sweeping projects and the third type is working for and selling streetpapers.

In Amsterdam, Rotterdam (100 people per day) and Utrecht (30 people per day) special temp agencies provide work on a daily wage basis. Jobs can be the cleaning of railway stations, production work in factories (wrapping Christmas gifts, working on mailings), doing odd jobs for citizens around house and yard, garden work and other jobs which require a low level of job skills.

⁷ Enforcement of the infrastructure for activation and labour reintegration of homeless persons and drug addicts, M. Davelaar, Verwey-Jonker Instituut, Utrecht, 2006

⁸ Most of this information has been taken from the research report: “Setting to work in the frayed fringes of society. Work and motivation for homeless people and addicts”, M. Davelaar e.a., Verwey-Jonker Instituut, Utrecht, 2005

In Rotterdam we also find the furniture workshop Sandford & Zo (funded by a formerly addicted furniture maker) where homeless people can work on assignments with a different level of required skills. Furniture and other wood products are sold in shops and art galleries.

Cleaning & sweeping projects are found in a number of cities: Heerlen, The Hague, Leiden, and Rotterdam for instance. In Heerlen a group of ex-homeless people is in charge of cleaning along the railway track of a tourist train. A number of sweeping projects are connected to a fixed neighbourhood. Their job is to clean up street rubbish and to improve the quality of life in neighbourhoods. At the same time the sweeping project aims to improve the image of homeless people by showing their value for society.

In some cities homeless people are actively involved in producing and distributing street papers. In other cities they only act as salesman of the papers.

The people using these three types of daily wage projects belong to the more problematic groups among the homeless. They are usually active drug users and often not very healthy. They like this type of projects because it earns them cash, because they are free to come and work when they feel like working and because most of the work is outside. Living on the streets for quite some time makes it difficult for people to adjust to jobs which are indoors. The average wage is between 15-20 euros per day. If they receive a social security income they may still keep their earnings. Selling streetpapers yields 0.55 to 0.70 eurocent per newspaper. Salesmen often get tipped by their customers.

2. New Style Occupation Projects

The important part of these projects is the option for participants to perform work that they enjoy and is within their abilities. The working atmosphere must be pleasant, because the perception of safety, and the contacts with and support from each other are extremely important. The projects are often integrated within multiple support processes in the field of housing and care.

Examples:

In Amsterdam the project Church and Neighbourhood is a small scale project where participants can work in a furniture recycling project, a breakfast and meal service, a clothing project and a music project. The activities range from picking up used furniture, selling furniture in a thriftshop, catering breakfast in a neighbourhood centre or cleaning and selling second hand clothes. Participants like to feel useful and to have something to do during the day. Earning extra money is not a very important thing in their motivation. They enjoy the mutual support and the company that they have while they work.

In the city of Helmond clients can work in a biological garden and greenery, growing vegetables and producing jam. People can also work in a social restaurant, preparing food, cook or serve meals and clean the restaurant. Other activities in Helmond include a bicycle repair workshop, a arts and crafts workshop, and a workshop where people can sign up for cleaning or production activities.

In most cities the projects are organised in such a way that participants are offered a choice of activities. For the participants it is not the goal to move on to regular employment or even sheltered employment. The projects are meant to create a safe environment, a mutual support system and in some cases to encourage contact between formerly homeless people and the neighbourhood.

3. Labour oriented processes

These projects are set out to provide participants with the prospect of gaining 'real' employment. Learning work related skills is paramount. A pleasant atmosphere at work is

an important stimulus for the participants. The personality of the leader/trainer or on the job supervisor is crucial in the learning process: he is teacher, motivator and supervisor.

Examples:

In Amsterdam four organizations cooperate in the Housing & Work project. Two shelter organizations, the Amsterdam streetpaper and an employment reintegration organisation work together to reintegrate homeless people into housing and a paid job. Only motivated homeless people with legal status and older than 18 years can qualify for this project. The first phase of the project consists of finding suitable housing, dealing with paperwork and debts and finding a trainee job. This phase usually takes four months. The four partners are together with the homeless person responsible for delivering housing, debt regulation, and a temporary reintegration job (for six months). This job is to gain work experience. After six months they are posted in a city sponsored job in Amsterdam. It usually takes two years of counselling and training on the job to find a regular paid job.

In Helmond people who move on from the daily occupation projects can participate in an employment training scheme. They can work in an industrial workshop, for instance where they make seats and backs of wheelchairs. Participants work eight hours per day and have to arrive on time. They earn three euros per day, on top of their social security allowance. When they succeed in finding a paid job they can qualify for a bonus of 1200 euros. The shelter organisation who runs this programme cooperates with the mental health care, housing association, supported employment organisation, city social welfare and the debt regulation organisations. Evaluation of this project show that 40 to 60% of the participants do not succeed in successfully completing the programme and finding a paid job.

5. Training for employers or public administration?

The national and local authorities try to inform employers as much as possible (mailings, newspapers, television, internet) about tax benefits and other monetary advantages to use when employing people with a handicap or otherwise disadvantaged target groups. There are no specific training schemes for employers. It is doubtful whether training for employers would improve the possibilities for homeless people to find employment.

6. Cooperation between different stakeholders: Do you work together with stakeholders in the field of employment, skills or training?

Almost all projects in the Netherlands are joint ventures. Local authorities, vocational training schools, service providers, employment office, social welfare authorities and health care organisations work together to organise and provide the different types of occupation and employment.

The participation of private companies and commercial businesses is till very low. However the growing economy is improving the chances for vulnerable people on the labour market. The disadvantage is that economic growth comes and goes and so do the chances of these people on the labour market.

7. Funding of employment services for people who are homeless: How are employment services for people experiencing homelessness funded in your country?

Employment services for homeless people are usually funded within the frame work of the homeless services⁹. Service providers are funded to realise a complete programme ranging from emergency shelter to reintegration programmes. Most of the time the local authority requires the service providers to organise the reintegration activities in cooperation with other organisations.

There is one service provider in Rotterdam who has been successful in securing EU funding for a three year period in which to develop a reintegration to work programme.

As with all project funding, the temporary nature can be a disadvantage for the structural implementation of employment programmes. It requires a lot of creativity of service providers and different cooperative partners to ensure continuity of programmes. However, due to the fact that the social security authorities require clients on welfare to actively participate in a useful occupation and job reintegration project, the funding of most projects is not in serious danger. There is still room for improvement though especially where the cooperation of the different branches of a local authority is concerned.

8. Indicators and success factors: Have employment services for people who are homeless been successful in bringing people experiencing homelessness back into employment?

Employment projects have been successful in activating homeless people and in providing former homeless people with (life) skills, a meaningful occupation and a social network.

Depending on the type of project, a number of people has managed to find paid employment. Labour oriented work programmes have a success rate of around 50%. For most people participating in employment projects, a paid job and economic independence will not be feasible. However, the social and personal gain as well as the improvement of the quality of life, is significant.

9. Data collection and research?

Specific data on the employment situation of homeless people is not being collected in the Netherlands. The homeless service providers are maintaining a registration on certain aspects of their clients among which are the details of their income sources.

10. The right to work of people who are homeless?

In the Netherlands the question is not so much whether homeless people have a right to work. When they have a social security income, or when they are housed by a homeless service provider there is an obligation to do meaningful work and to gain more life skills. Clients themselves report to feel better if they can do something useful during the day. They are even more satisfied when they can earn cash payments for their work. But for a large group of these people job satisfaction is also found in the company of co-workers, the attention of a work supervisor and in the recognition which they receive from the general public.

The work issue is not a really political issue except for the sense that for social and economic reasons it is better to stimulate people to participate than to stay excluded.

⁹ See page three, last paragraph

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Policy measures that could be taken to increase the opportunities for homeless people would be the review the assumptions of national policy to create more structural scope for municipalities and to devise new types of labour contracts that allow for flexibility and are attractive for commercial employers¹⁰.

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¹⁰ Recommendation taken from: : *“Setting to work in the frayed fringes of society. Work and motivation for homeless people and addicts”*, M. Davelaar e.a., Verwey-Jonker Instituut, Utrecht, 2005