

# September 2003    National Report on Homelessness in Hungary Prepared for FEANTSA

- I.     Introduction**
- II.    Description of the situation**
- III.   Answers to the challenges**
- IV.    Policy considerations**

## **I.     Introduction**

In Hungary homelessness appeared as a specific socialpolitical problem of the period directly prior to the transformation (1988-1990).

The following factors played role in the development of homelessness:

- various deprivational phenomena
- conglomeration of social disadvantages
- poverty
- unemployment

Empirical surveys revealed that the facts mentioned above regenerate as society forming factors.

During the indicated period there were few opportunities available for society researchers, thus we have only estimated figures. Accordingly there were more than 360 000 people living out of housing. The number of people living in various places could be estimated up to 30-60.000. Thus we can tell that almost 400.000 people lived in the risk of homelessness.

Up to the transformation homeless people were forced upon a hidden way of life, the cause of which was the then legal and regulation approaches. The authorities dealing the problem mainly with the leverage of criminal law and ruling patrol were unable to make rational intervention, only symptomatic treatment occurred. However intervention was needed by all means, since by the begining of 1990 the extent of this social phenomenon culminated the critical measure forcing intervention.

Mass demonstration backed by various prominent persons facilitated the staggering process of apperception. Following the shocking occurences homelessness appeared en masse in the streets of the capital and in the streets, public places, railway stations of rural cities, anywhere there was chance to survive this extremely disadvantageous situation of life. Shelters established in half-legitimate places consecutively came into existance. In this way it became achievable, that despite of the multitudinous extent of homelessness there happened no major disasters demanding many human lives.

Springing from the contemporary circumstances organizations dealing with the homeless successively were instituted by the support of various civil initiations.

In February 1989 the Social Committee for the Homeless were established. This first established civil organization stood up for the protection of homeless people, and constructed

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an action plan for them. Following the committee's activity the presentation of the problem of homelessness gave significant coverage in the press.

During the fall of 1990 the government established the Office Addressing Social Crisis within the Ministry of Social Welfare. The Office started to establish the present institution system of homeless services.

The Ministry of Social Welfare set up the network of a complex differentiated system of services. The civil sector also gave significant role in the establishment of the system of services. More than half of the homeless services in Budapest are run by NGO's, while in the countryside the same proportion of the services are run by local governments. The proportion and the regional distribution of the accommodation are involved in *appendix I*.

## **II. Description of the situation in Hungary**

### *Concepts-definitions*

Homeless :

- a.** a person without having registered address, except from the one whose registered dwelling is a homeless institution. For making social administration steps in the case of homeless people the competent body is the one which has social authority and the regional competence of which the homeless person declared as his residential area when resorting to the service. Municipalism type of approach
  
- b.** a person is homeless, if he spends his nights in public places, or in other place inadequate for living. Provision type of approach

### *Types of provisions:*

- allowance of the aged
- regular social benefit
- housing subsidy
- temporary benefit
- public funeral
- access to medical attendance
- soup-kitchen: warm food at least once a day for socially indigent

specialized provisions :

- institutions providing medical attendance  
*Home for the aged homeless:* for long-term medical attendance due to the age and physical conditions
- *Rehabilitational institution:* for voluntary participation of people being in active age and able to work
- *Day Centre:* free service of homeless people conducting their lives in the streets, for daily residence, meal, meeting basic hygienic needs
- Institutions providing temporary accommodation: a. *Night Shelter*  
b. *Temporary Shelter*

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*Bodies bound to organize individual care:*

Local governments bound to organize various services depending on capitation.

At present homeless services in Hungary have almost 7000 accommodations, besides there are 489 accommodations available in Temporary Family Homes. Soup-kitchens provide 4000 people, Day Centres provide 3200 people.

Almost half of the mentioned system of services is located in Budapest. Other important feature of the spatial distribution is that the capacity of homeless services can be found chiefly in the major cities of the countryside.

The distribution of the homeless is not equable within the country either, which can be related to the economical depression. According to our lights the bigger needs of services in the eastern part of the country doesn't necessarily have appropriate capacity of provision.

The material conditions of homeless shelters – particularly stress on the buildings – can be said expressly disadvantageous. Apart from some exceptions the buildings were not built for social purpose, there are only a few buildings built as a result of greenfield investments. The material equipments of homeless services are worn out and out of date. Due to this shelters make bad and crowded impression.

According to the relevant rules in Hungary every activity offering social service must be authorized. However the conditions ground for the authorization make possible for the majority of the services to be granted only temporary authority. There are only limited resources available to take the obviously necessary measures.

### **Description of the services**

There is a distinct rule on the vocational duties and operational conditions of the institutions providing individual care. The rules extend to services run by non-governmental as well as ecclesiastical organizations.

#### ***Food provision***

Homeless people can get warm food at least once a week due to this service. The content of the primary commodity and nourishing value of the rations are specified in the rules. If the food is eaten on the spot hand-wash facilities and table-wares are provided.

The service –which primarily means soup-kitchen – must be organized in such township or part of settlement, where chiefly occasional meal is required by the needy.

#### ***Day Centre***

When organizing this service we must adapt to the conduct of homeless people. The aim is to achieve that they avail themselves to social services.

Day Centres provide the possibility of being together in a community, relaxing and lavation for the homeless. It facilitates the cleaning of the clients' clothes, provides facilities to warm

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**Hungary**

up, serve and eat food. A standard record must be kept of the services used, which contains the client's main personal data as well as the services provided.

***Street work***

The aim of this special service is to support those unprovided homeless people, who conduct their lives in the street, either due to the limited capacity or to their own mistrust. The furtherance of this group involves chiefly life-saving, but prevention and achieving social reintegration of the individual also get significant role in the activity. The services particularly belonging to street work are the localization of the homeless and making contact with the appropriate social workers. Further target within the service is to assign the person to the appropriate institution. According to the client's need street workers provide him with necessary information. Street workers keep a standard record of their activities and services, in which the concrete care activity is recorded beyond the the individual's personal data.

***Temporary Shelter***

Temporary shelters provide overnight accommodation, relax, lavation, warming up food as a basic service for the homeless. Besides it provide the facility of separating the ill and being together in community. During this provisional accommodation maximum 15 persons can be accommodated in one room. Fixtures can be cleaned and sterilized easily. At the temporary shelter there is at least one shower stall per 15 clients. For the sake of the appropriate provision there must be minimum 4 m<sup>2</sup> living space per capita. Heating, lighting, warm water must continuously be provided at the temporary shelter.

Temporary shelters are open at least 16 hours a day. During this period of time the clients' social and mental care must be provided for at least 6 hours a day. Case work, social teamwork and community social work are particularly included in the social and mental care at the temporary shelters. The temporary shelters develop their vocational programme in such way so that they can assure the clients the possibility of moving on. There can come to socialtherapy as well if it is needed and can be organized. Supporting the clients to keep in touch with their family and the relatives gets an especially important role at the temporary shelter. Beyond the above to promote arranging official matters also belongs to the services.

Services provided during the temporary accommodation must be recorded on a standard registry form. The social worker's name, the time of registration as well as the name of the person responsible for the case are indicated on this form. Besides recording the personal data, the provided social work and the identification of the problem are also detailed. As part of the service the contract made between the client and the social worker is also described briefly.

***Night Shelter***

Night shelters are open for the homeless for at least 14 hours a day. In this service it is allowed to accommodate maximum 20 persons in a place.

A social worker must be on duty for 4 hours a day at the night shelter. The social worker's scope of activity includes the provision of necessary information and counselling on the client's entitlements. In other regard the rules relating the temporary shelter are valid.

### ***Periodic enlargement of capacity***

From 1 November to 30 April periodic accommodations are established for the winter provision of homeless people conducting their lives in inappropriate housing and public places. The accommodations are set up either in already existing institutions or in a separate place. Periodic accommodations must be authorized. The vocational programme concerning the provision is an accentuated part of the application. The programme contains the motivation, aims and the designation of tasks in view of the services. It also contains the description of the target group, the vocational content of the tasks, the types and regularity of the services. Periodic accommodation must be established in such way, that maximum 20 persons can be accommodated per rooms. Fixtures must be easy to clean and sterilize, there must be minimum 4 m<sup>2</sup> for each person. Heating, lighting, and warm water must be continuously provided amongst the services. There is at least one shower stall and one toilet per gender for each person.

### ***Home for the aged homeless***

Those homeless people are entitled to attend this service, whose provision at the temporary shelter can not be assured because of their general condition. But due to their age and health condition persons accommodated in this institution need great care and attention. The health service of the persons accommodated covers the clients' regular treatment and preventive hygienic care. People living here are treated and nursed by specialists. If it is needed they receive medical rehabilitation as well. They receive such special, mentalhygienic attendance, which takes into account the peculiarities resulting from homelessness.

### ***Rehabilitation Shelter***

Those people receive this service who are in their active age and able to work, but their health, psychic and social conditions are damaged in reversible way. They take the process of rehabilitation voluntarily.

Besides supporting the clients, the basic task is to restore and develop their capability for an independent life. There is great emphasis on restoring their capability of work. In the course of the rehabilitation process the sustainment of housing and the solution of housing conditions are placed as realistic and achievable objectives.

Follow up care of the clients is also provided before the end of the rehabilitation process. To this end they contact the municipality, labour centre, social and other organizations competent in their residence. Supporting the clients to reintegrate into society is included in the follow up care of the rehabilitated person.

### ***Medical attendance for the homeless***

In the interest of the higher standard medical attendance for the homeless –who can be characterized with extremely bad health indicators –health services for homeless people were

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**Hungary**

included into the budget of the National Health Insurance Fund. They are entitled to access the service providing basic medical attendance by their subjective right.

The system of the so-called semi-invalid services gradually develop as a border-line service in the medical attendance of the homeless. In the services chiefly working in the capital the cases are dealt according to social and medical aspects.

*Access to services*

Homeless people attend social services voluntarily. The provision come into existence for the claimant's request, and lasts for determined period of time. If needed services are available out of turn. For access to the institutions a decree of referral is needed, which includes in details the designation of the institution and the period of provision.

If the institution is state run it comes to enter into an agreement. The agreement includes the provision period, the types, ways and scope of the provision, the costs and the rules concerning payment. Ensured by the rules during the services providing individual basic and specialized attendance a legal representative is available for the person partakes in the services.

**III. Answers to challenges**

Homeless services has undergone great advancement for the last 10 years. In view of capacity the number of accommodations has increased up to 20 times more, the services have become entirely complex.

The system itself – since it had no exclusive task – was unable or hardly able to achieve preventive effect. Thus the „recurrence” of new clients was continuous during the last period. The number of the limited accommodation has resulted the development of a kind of specific selection. Especially those persons can be found in the homeless provision system, who could adapt themselves to it in the most adequate way. In the interest of the sustainable operation of the system it is forced to provide services for clients behaving more conformable.

There is a little more than 300 accommodation (in rehabilitation shelters) available to serve the great need of reintegration. This capacity is unable to reintegrate a perceptible number of homeless people into society. The constant lack of resources prevents the professional work taking place in rehabilitation shelters.

Nowadays the majority of the homeless live in the streets, out of institutions. The financial inco-ordination of street work greatly encumbers their provision. Being in this financial catch street work can hardly defend itself from the tension coming from the lack of capacity.

The health condition of the homeless is extremely critical. The available possibilities prove to be limited for their adequate attendance. There is great need of co-financed services that would be able to cope with border-line problems.

It is important for homeless services to undertake only those problems, that can be addressed in a competent way. They should not yield under pressure coming from other sub-systems.

In fact the Hungarian homeless services can only meet the requirements, if the present serious restrictive practice in financing ends.

#### **IV. Policy considerations**

Joining the vocational gathering within the EU, in the frame of FEANTSA membership, is a basic need of the Hungarian homeless services. Our concrete objectives include the exchange of the relevant professional information, experiences as well as various examples of good practices.

Our policy approaches the problem of homelessness from two directions.

1. Strengthening the preventive feature of addressing homelessness in order that we can take professionally founded measures in the fight against homelessness.
2. Moving on from the present situation needs greater extent of reintegration. The reduction of discrepancy between the capacity available at present and the extent of the actual services required needs well-founded and prepared strategy.

The vocational training and improvement of the staff employed by the Hungarian service providers requires professional co-operation based on daily work contact and common actions. Regional decentralization (the network of Regional Centres of Methodology) aims to promote the intention mentioned above.