

September 2003

**Report of the Barka Foundation for Mutual Help
on selected problems of homelessness in Poland
Prepared for FEANTSA**

1. Introduction

Reasons, definition, extent of the phenomenon, correlation with unemployment and housing shortage.

Homelessness became clearly seen in Poland after 1989. The development of the phenomenon of homelessness was not only a result of the socio-economic transformation, as the liquidation of workers' hotels maintained together with large companies active in the previous socialist system, but also a consequence of completely new processes linked with the development of the free market economy.

However, the scale of poverty problems in Poland (and in its deepest form – the homelessness) is not a result of the independently functioning free market, but very frequently the outcome of politicians' decisions. At the beginning of the transformation times the then governments fearing a massive unemployment selected the way of offering passive social protections, by sending some millions of citizens to earlier retiring pensions, relieves and prior-to-retirement benefits. Therefore, instead of making efforts to activate the work market, they consciously condemned large groups of people in professionally active age to inactivity and a life dependent on social benefits. It should be added that a decisive majority of the population surviving today thanks to social benefits and pensions for the unemployed, when asked about the way to improve their situation and what they expect from the State, indicate that they expect support to get a job and to have possibilities of professional re-qualification or to get a new profession, instead of social benefits. It is also clear that among the some-millions' mass of people surviving presently with non-work related sources there is a part for which life on benefits is a conscious choice. However, a generalization of this opinion would be unjust because we have to take into consideration that they did not make the choice of living at the socio-economic margin, but were push aside.¹ Unfortunately, the myth that the homeless and poverty-stricken persons are responsible for their own fate is widely generalised in the Polish public opinion. Attitudes of social solidarity were becoming less popular in the Polish society during the last period. The attitudes that are being promoted by the society are of fight, keenness, entrepreneurship and market competitiveness.

Under the statistical point of view, according to the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Social Policy, the most frequent reasons of homelessness are: family disintegration, evictions, return from prison without possibility of residence in the previous place, lack of permanent income, violence in family, lack of social tolerance, addictions, lack of shelter due to the liquidation of hotels maintained by liquidated companies, leaves from orphanages and psychiatric hospitals. A separate group is constituted by foreigners: refugees and foreigners with temporary stay in our country.²

We will try to define the phenomenon of homelessness. A satisfactory definition of a homeless person was not elaborated up to now yet. The Law on Social Welfare dated November 29th, 1990 (with further changes) defines the homeless person as "a person who does not live in housing premises within the meaning of directives regarding rent of housing premises and additional housing benefits, and nowhere registered for permanent stay according to the meaning of directives regarding population and personal identities' registry" (Art. 2a /5a)³. This is a very narrow definition that

¹ Prof. Ewa Les – article „Four myths of the Polish poverty” / „Cztery mity o polskim ubóstwie”

² Ministry of Economy, Labor and Social Policy. Question of homelessness in the ministerial programme for the years 1994-2001

³ Law dated November 29th, 1990 regarding Social Welfare (homogeneous text)

excludes from statistics large masses of homeless people who have registration of a permanent stay but even so do not have a roof on their heads. The above definition is based on the administrative aspect and does not take into consideration the remaining aspects linked with homelessness.

Generally homeless people are assimilated with persons who live on railroad stations and other public places (street homeless) and people who live in centres of support to the homeless (sheltered homeless). The social services and public institutions have problems in adding to the group of homeless people persons who inhabit summer recreation allotments or stay for a limited period of time with farther family and friends. The definition of homelessness according to the Council of Europe (1993) ⁴ i.e., that homelessness frequently means not only lack of housing but also inadequate housing, overcrowded, with low standard, is not yet taken into consideration in Poland.

The scale of the phenomenon of homelessness in Poland is also difficult to estimate because of lack of a concrete definition, absence of a monitoring system of the problem and insufficiency of elaborated indexes of the phenomenon. The number of homeless persons is estimated from 40 000 to 500 000. The lowest limit is determined by the governmental administration in relation to the number of persons who benefited from social support. The upper limit is acknowledged by non-governmental organizations (in this case MONAR Association) and is determined by the scale of support offered by NGOs and through good recognition of the homeless' environments of people, who do not benefit from shelters. From reports sent by non-governmental organizations to the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Social Policy with regard to donations received for support to the homeless results that they give assistance to about 80 000 – 130 000 persons.⁵ However, it was estimated that there are about 20 thousand places of stationary social support in Poland. More information regarding discrepancies in numbers of persons benefiting from social support in the public and non-governmental sectors will be given in next parts of this report.

The Ministry of Economy, Labour and Social Policy estimates that all the institutions providing stationary assistance have altogether 12 572 accommodation places for homeless people. Even if we accept that in Poland the number of homeless persons is about 30 000, the divergence in relation to the available number of places is drastic!

It is worth to remember that two worrisome tendencies were observed: 1) since three years all the places in institutions offering stationary assistance (shelter) in Poland are occupied, even in the summer time. Before, in summer time the number of homeless persons in shelters was not reaching the level of 100%. Some homeless persons preferred to chose a nomadic type of life, worrying about a permanent place to stay only in autumn. Since three years shelters started to report 100% of residents, and even more. From this results that the number of homeless persons increased so much that places in shelters became invaluable. 2) The structure of the population of homeless people changed. According to statistics of the Barka Foundation's Social Emergency Office during the last years the number of homeless women and families drastically increased.

The characteristic situation in Poland is that the assistance to the homeless given by governmental and self-governmental administrations, and also up to a great extent by non-governmental organizations is mainly characterized by stationary assistance ("bed and meals"). Up to the present moment homelessness was not associated with such important facts as housing and unemployment. The approach to these questions is indispensable if we want to talk about a permanent prevention of homelessness.

Presently, the unemployment in Poland reached the level of about 18% and became a problem of all the society. Up to now, successive governments were creating programmes of employment or restructure, concentrating mainly on places and environments where potentially big social tensions could emerge (coal-field in Silesia region or more recently the health services, for example). The most

⁴ Prof. Danuta Zalewska, „Homelessness. Working together for change” / „Bezdomność. Wspólnie pracując dla zmiany”

⁵ Ministry of Economy, Labor and Social Policy. Question of homelessness in the ministerial programme for the years 1994-2001

socially neglected groups were not perceived up to now. The change happened in 2002, when the works on the “law on social employment” were initiated. This law gives a chance of social and professional re-integration for long term unemployed persons, including the homeless.

Despite indication in the Polish Constitution that public authorities should conduct a politics favourable to meet citizens’ housing needs, mainly to prevent homelessness and support the development of social housing, and also to support citizens’ activities undertaken with the objective of achieving own housing⁶, this politics is not carried out in practice. The tasks of meeting housing needs the Polish Constitution transfers mainly to the local self-governments. It is important to mention that the problem of housing refers to all the society. After the fall of socialist housing programmes commercial undertakings and programmes of the TBS (Association of Social Housing) started to appear on the market. These programmes however, are addressed to the upper average class. The group of pauperised society (not necessarily unemployed), which also do not have access to such housing is increasing.

With such an enormous problem associated with unemployment (from one side it refers to the question of continuously pauperising social groups and from the other side to the migration decrease of unemployed persons to areas with small rate of unemployment because of housing problems), a systematic solution of this question was not taken into consideration. Recently, the Polish government prepared the document: “Conditions and introductory principles to a multiyear social housing programme”.

2. Solving the problem of homelessness in the context of the Polish legislation

The problem of homelessness in Poland showed clear differences in the ways of activities undertaken in the public sector and by non-governmental organizations. These differences refer to: the philosophy of activities, legal basis of activities, scope and access to services.

2.1 The public sector

2.1.1 Legal basis and types of services

The legal basis for services of social support was created in 1990 on basis of the law on social welfare dated November 29th, 1990. The social services included in its composition were up to then concentrated mainly in the area of health services. The legislator indicated the territorial self-government as the main sector responsible for the implementation of the tasks related to social support. There was no indication regarding the principle of assistance–subsidiarity, mentioning only that “the social support is organised by the governmental and self-governmental (territorial) administrations, in cooperation with social organizations, the catholic church, other churches, faith unions, foundations, associations, employers, as well as physical and legal persons”⁷. The main accent was therefore placed on the administration, treating citizens’ activities as an eventual supplement. Besides the main law on the social welfare, the public sector has also to deal with a series of other laws, what causes serious difficulties in the work of social workers.

2.1.2 Quantity of services, statistics

The services for the homeless are described mainly in the law on social welfare. Besides all other services (mainly passive forms of support – financial benefits and material help) the law also mentions that “the municipality or province should give shelter, meals and indispensable clothing to persons who are deprived of these services or goods, including the homeless”. This however is not being accomplished for many reasons. The Ministry of Economy, Labour and Social Policy informs that about 30 thousand persons annually receive support from the public social services. Unfortunately, the

⁶ Art. 75 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland

⁷ Art. 1.1.2 of the Law on Social Welfare dated November 29th, 1990 (homogeneous text)

statistics do not mention how many persons did not receive social support. The question is: what happens with the persons who did not receive or benefit from the offer of the public social services?

2.1.3 Accessibility of services

The access to services provided by the public sector is restricted and this restriction results from many factors. First, the general scale of poverty is so large that social workers are not in position to undertake social work. For example, in Poznan, a 600 thousand inhabitants' city, there are 110 environments for one social worker (families and lonely persons), where the social work should be carried out. The result of such situation is that social workers reduce their tasks to concession of benefits, without carrying out any previous social work. Another negative element is the work tool available, i.e. a questionnaire of environmental interview, which the social worker should make with every new "client". This questionnaire contains 20 pages to fulfil in the place of residence of the homeless person! At this stage a problem appeared. In some parts of Poland for many years social workers did not make interviews (what in consequence impeded to offer support) because of lack of homeless persons' place of residence. Some workers tried to place the person in a centre for homeless people (what is very difficult because of the limited number of shelters available) and only then (in a concrete place) interviews were carried out. Other workers acting according to the law were making the interviews in the actual place of residence, even so strange as a railway station, heating channels, etc.

The public administration's system was and is characterised by a genuinely static approach, a passive form of support. For years homeless persons should apply for support to the public offices of social support. The first contact should always be a result of "client's" initiative. However, this type of initiative was difficult to happen because, as it is known, homeless people hide many crises and human tragedies: psychological diseases, alcoholic and drugs' addictions, the syndrome of learned helplessness, or even due to previous negative experiences observed with the services of social support. I did not meet street workers in the public administration in Poland working on behalf of the homeless. The examples mentioned figure out only a certain philosophy of activities, which unfortunately, is still very frequently practiced.

An extremely high influence on solving the problems of homelessness comes from the whole social welfare financing system. As examples we can mention: 1) a homeless person who has no social insurance (frequently without any identification documents) may receive health services in a hospital or other health services' unit. The lack of social insurance may be compensated by an invoice for the treatment of the homeless person issued by the hospital to the unit of social support. However, very frequently hospitals do not receive the reimbursement of treatment expenses. Because of such experiences homeless persons are not being received easily in hospitals or are not being accepted at all. What is the reason of this procedure? The invoices for treatment of homeless people, with extremely neglected health, are very high. The social service providers reimburse them unwillingly because of their limited budget. They even succeed in finding a formal possibility to not pay. Normally the hospital gives the notice regarding health services when the homeless person already left the hospital. Then, the reason to deny the reimbursement of expenses is the lack of the mentioned environmental interview with the homeless person. The public social services do not inform health services' providers regarding the adequate procedures, since this, as a consequence, would touch their budget in a serious way.

Another example of "budgetary savings" is the practice of non-formal prohibition to social workers to issue written guidance to the homeless for support to be given by centres that offer stationary help, since such practice could constitute a formal basis to apply for reimbursement of the costs of stay of the homeless person. The mentioned examples show that within an inadequate financing system the homeless persons are quickly excluded from the system of social support as "an expensive category of clients".

2.2 The non-governmental sector

Because of the particular aspects of the Polish history, the non-governmental sector is incredibly young and does not have a developed tradition. Together with the evolution of democracy, since the year of 1990, we can talk about an explosion of citizens' organizations. Presently, according to researches of the Klon/Jawor Association "there are 36500 associations and over 5000 foundations registered in Poland. At least 58% of registered organizations are active. The research succeeded in determining that 10% of registered organizations are not running any activities at all in practice. (...)"⁸ The numbers mentioned refer to citizens' organizations in diverse fields of activities. What types of activities Polish citizens select more frequently? "The greatest number of associations and foundations indicate one activity only as the most important field of their work, being: (1) 59% sport, (2) 48.2% culture and education, (3) 32.6% health protection, rehabilitation and support to the handicapped, (4) 27.4% culture and art." Organizations involved in social support, self-help and charitable activities are mentioned only on the 5th place, with 17.2%.

Looking once again at the whole non-governmental sector it should be mentioned that 30% of organizations belong to (in a formal or informal way) national, regional or specialized agreements of non-governmental organizations (unions of associations, federations). Unfortunately, because of economic difficulties during the last years many unions of organizations stopped their activities in practice, and the organizations stressed their activities mainly on own actions. Since this year it is possible to observe an increased activity of NGOs at a higher organizational level, due to their preparation for the perspective of work in the European Union and its financial policy for citizens' organizations.

Analysing the NGOs engaged in the problematic of homelessness, it should be mentioned that up to now there were no national structure embracing organizations specialized in the field of homelessness. There were trials in the past to create such coalition, but they resulted in failures.

In the current year the largest organizations involved in giving support to the homeless (among other persons) and interested in carrying out the policy of social reintegration of the excluded groups through social employment created the National Confederation of Social Employers.

The largest non-governmental organizations⁹ working in the field of social support to the homeless are:

- St. Brat Alberta Association - <http://www.bratalbert.org.pl>
- Monar/Markot Association - <http://www.monar-markot.poznan.pl>
- Caritas - <http://www.caritas.pl>
- Community "Bread of Life" - <http://www.chlebzycia.win.pl>
- Barka Foundation for Mutual Help - <http://www.barka.org.pl>

It is also important to mention that many organizations active on behalf of the homeless manage small local initiatives. Almost all organizations' activities in support to homeless people are based on the self-help system, i.e., homeless persons, or former homeless, non-drinking alcoholics are working without receiving salaries or are employed by the NGOs.

2.2.1 Legal basis and types of services

Comparing the non-governmental sector with the public one it is possible to get the impression that these sectors represent two different worlds, rarely correlated. The non-governmental organizations in Poland act on basis of two legal acts: the law regarding foundations dated April 6th, 1984¹⁰ and the

⁸ J. Dąbrowska, M. Gumkowska, J. Wygnański – „Basic facts on non-governmental organizations – report from researches made in 2002”.

⁹ the criteria is not only the number of persons who receive social support, but also the trans-regionality of an organization, the extent of services and programmes on behalf of the homeless people (from relief help through shelter to education, employment and social housing building), and advocacy services.

¹⁰ Dz. U. 91.46.203 – Law journal

law on associations dated April 7th, 1989¹¹. These were the basic legal acts up to the year of 2003. The first initiatives of reply to social problems, including homelessness were started by non-governmental organizations. Almost all the stationary centres of support for the homeless are maintained by non-governmental organisations.

The scale of services is very wide. Relief help still dominates, i.e., management of units giving meals and clothing, sanitary services and medical ambulatories, and also stationary help: shelters, night shelters and hostels. These activities are mostly characterized by the philosophy of humanitarian help, life saving, biological survival of homeless people. Already in shelters work is carried out on motivation to undertake treatment in case of an alcoholic disease or other addictions. A serious problem in this type of activities is the belief that after this first stage of assistance the homeless person will look for work, rent a room or flat. However, normally this does not happens because of big deficits in education of homeless people, as well as the generally bad situation on the work market and in the housing sector in Poland. The phenomenon of “storage of people” starts to emerge in stationary centres of social support and the lack of perspectives of change in the situation very frequently is the reason of a return of the homeless person to the streets.

A second group is composed by more and more numerous organizations, which undertake social reintegration programmes of the homeless people through education, for example, centres established on the model of the philosophy of workshops and courses adopted by the Kofoed School from Copenhagen are becoming popular). Because of the wide spread unemployment, organizations engaged in work with homeless people, taking as model organizations from Western Europe, mainly Italy, started to create work places for the “socially handicapped” and are perceiving the homeless person as a subject on the work market. These activities however, were carried out in a very small scale because of very unfriendly legislation with regard to non-profit enterprises. The year of 2003 is a decisive year as to the dissemination of a new type of services, because of at least four reasons:

- The centres of support managing relief help are recognizing that the situation on the work market is bad and that, without programmes of social reintegration the homeless persons will not be able to manage the situation by themselves;
- The positive reply of the Polish society to the treaty ratification as to the accession to the European Union and the real admission of Poland in the EU in May 2004 will bring many consequences for the Polish NGOs, as for example a common work in the structures of unions of organizations and adaptation of their services in such a way that they can be included in programmes of the European Social Fund (so, to perceive the homeless persons in the context of reintegration with the work market);
- Change of the legal status of non-governmental organizations by means of the law on public benefit activities and volunteerism (the creation of this law was possible thanks to strong lobby of non-governmental organizations);
- Creation of legal possibilities to establish Centres of Social Integration – schools and non-profit enterprises for the socially excluded people by means of the law on social employment (this law was elaborated on basis of Barka Foundation’s and other organizations’ programmes).

2.2.2 Quantity of services, statistics

The reports of the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Social Policy on financial support to homeless people indicate that 80 – 130 thousand persons receive financial support¹². These data do not include the non-governmental organizations which did not receive financial support from the Ministry.

Up to the present moment there is no monitoring system elaborated to keep track of the services of social support offered by non-governmental organizations and their effectiveness. As to the effectiveness of services, similar problem also exists in the public sector. The important question is not

¹¹ Dz. U. 01.79.855 – Law journal

¹² MGPIPS. Question of homelessness in the programme of the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Social Policy in the years 1994-2001

only how many persons received social support but also how many persons did not receive any support at all and the reasons of lack of assistance.

Reports made by NGOs on statistics of services provided is very helpful in understandings regarding the local social policy with the self-government. The data of the Barka Foundation indicate a change in the structure of the beneficiaries of programmes of support.

In Poznan, a 600 thousand inhabitants city, there are 5 big organizations and institutions offering stationary help to the homeless. It is estimated that in Poznan there are about 3000 homeless persons, of which only 660 in shelters.

A unit of the first contact of the Barka Foundation – the Social Emergency Office issues statistics. We are mentioning below some of them regarding the year of 2002:

- 1466 persons applied for help for the first time to Barka's Social Emergency Office in the year of 2002, including 944 homeless persons;
- in average in Barka's hostels in Poznan 263 persons got accommodation;
- 76 persons became independent in 2002 (found work and flat or room);
- 33 persons/day benefited from occasional help and counselling;
- every day about 148 persons took part in educational programmes;
- 2033 persons/year benefited from showers/bath;
- 4992 persons received clothing;
- 3427 persons benefited from the medical and dental ambulatories;
- 138 persons participated in social employment programmes (employed on diverse forms on agreements);
- 30 persons participated in the training of the School of Social Animation (which started its activities in the middle of the year);
- 25 children received special care in kindergartens.

2.2.3 Accessibility of services

As a rule non-governmental organizations do not have formal requirements as to the access to services by homeless people, contrary to self-governmental centres of social support where frequently exists the requirement of belonging to the region. It is important to mention that the majority of NGOs centres gives support both to women and men, giving possibilities to maintain the families, marriages and also non-formalized relations. By the other side, centres of support of the public administration frequently create separate shelters for women and men and very seldom for families, what frequently is the reason of tragedies of disintegrated families and also of guiding their children to orphanages.

Among the difficulties in access to services provided by citizens' organizations to the homeless people are:

- insufficient number of places in NGOs' shelters;
- uneven geographic distribution of centres (frequently the centres are concentrated in big cities and many provinces do not have any centre).

3. New legislative initiatives regarding integration of excluded groups in the context of accession of Poland to the European Union and new philosophy of activities.

In the presence of growing social problems and also preparations linked with the accession of Poland to the European Union, during the two last years the Polish government undertook activities aimed at searching for new legislative solutions and building the social dialogue.

Non-governmental organizations started to be included in consultations regarding preparation of governmental legislative proposals. A public debate was initiated on internet websites, as well as in

the media and press. The debate concerned mainly the Polish system of social welfare and the presently revised law on social welfare. In the letter¹³ addressed to the Minister of Economy, Labour and Social Policy by the representative of the National Confederation of Social Employers we can read that the idea of the law on social welfare will consolidate the “old approach” and it still concentrates on safeguarding the reforms undertaken and not on prevention of the social exclusion. Presently, it does not answer to the spirit of the laws created in Poland, as the law on public benefit activities and volunteerism and the law on social employment. It was underlined in the letter that this project is not taking into consideration the principle of subsidiarity and maintains the myth of State tutelage and the privileged position of state institutions over citizens’ institutions. The confederation also calls attention of the Minister to the necessity of urgent changes in the system of training of social assistance staff. The educational system does not keep pace with the dynamically changing reality and tasks resulting from the necessity of creating active forms of support – we read in the letter. A series of publications also appeared underlining the necessity of changes, among them the book published by Prof. Ewa Les entitled “From clientism to participation”¹⁴ describing the model of social welfare functioning up to now as a client-oriented model, founded on single act of distribution of sources, clothing, food, place in shelter, etc. with lack of any activity from the side of the person in need of help. There is a need of a wide education of social assistance staff regarding creation of a participative model, in which the basis is the long term work process with full participation of the interested person, with the purpose of achieving social integration and integration with the work market.

At the same time Poland was obliged by the European Union to prepare the National Strategy for Social Inclusion. Efforts were therefore undertaken to build a systematic and complex national programme in cooperation with a 32-person team composed, among others, by representatives of diplomatic units from the European Union, governmental administration, self-governments and NGOs. The main principle of this strategy is to build a legislative-legal system giving possibilities of independence and integration for persons from socially excluded groups. This strategy is being accompanied by a commonly elaborated awareness regarding the necessity of taking into consideration in the social welfare, from one side the social benefits and, from the other side such tools as the activities necessary to promote the integration of excluded groups with efficient groups, social education, rehabilitation, help in getting employment, development of social housing programmes. It is necessary to underline also that, the National Strategy for Social Inclusion building process takes into consideration the experiences and innovative programmes implemented by non-governmental organizations. The team for recognition of the best practical solutions got acquainted with systematic solutions proposed by non-governmental organizations, among other with programmes of “creating roots” in communities, socio-educational programmes, creation of work places and accessible housing programmes carried out with the participation of the needy persons.

3.1 New legal acts as tools to build cooperation among sectors and socio-professional integration of excluded groups

In the development of the dialogue between the public administration sector and NGOs two very important legal acts were created in Poland: the **Law on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism** and the **Law on Social Employment**. These laws have a structural meaning and influence change on the philosophy of the social welfare in Poland. The laws were accepted by the Polish parliament and their introduction into force will begin on January 1st, 2004.

The Law on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteerism determines 5 basic questions in a fundamental way:

- It introduces the status of organizations of public benefit and determines the possibilities of benefiting from diverse forms of deductions, exemptions and donations, and also determines the obligations of this type of organizations;

¹³ Letter of T. Sadowski, representative of the Confederation of Social Employers; www.barka.org.pl

¹⁴ E. Leś „Social support: from clientism to participation” / „Pomoc społeczna: od klientyzmu do partycypacji”, Warsaw 2002-2003

- The Minister competent in social insurance matters supervises the activity-related and financial matters of activities of public benefit;
- The law regulates the questions of volunteers' legal status (enables to provide for their insurance, reimbursement of travel expenses, cover training costs, etc.);
- Established the possibility of reduction of 1% of the income tax of physical persons on behalf of organizations of public benefit;
- Introduces the Council of Activities of Public Benefit as a opinion-making - advisory organ to the minister competent for social insurance questions; the Council will be composed by 20 members, including 10 representatives of non-governmental organizations and 10 representatives of the public administration.

This law has an important meaning for organizations active in the field of support to the homeless people. It stabilizes their activities and encourages volunteers to achieve professional experiences in the structures of these organizations, enables to undertake economic activities aimed at creation of work places and at the same time benefit from the possibility of income tax reductions, exemption from rents of buildings, etc. The law expects transparency of organizations' activities, publishing of annual financial and activity-related reports.

Another important legal act is the Law on Social Employment. It was inspired by Barka Foundation's and other organizations' programmes, description of which was enclosed to the justification of introduction of this law. This is an example of cooperation of policy makers with the non-governmental organizations which are carrying out innovative programmes.

The Law on Social Employment creates conditions of institutional support for the homeless, long term unemployed persons, addicted, former prisoners and refugees in the so called **Centres of Social Integration** (CIS – Centrum Integracji Społecznej) designated by non-governmental organizations and self-government centres of social support. The Centres of Social Integration will carry out educational and entrepreneurial programmes, i.e., tasks of professional re-qualification and general education. Production, manufacture and services will also be run. These activities are not treated as commercial activities but are designated to achieve experience, which will enable persons from the socially excluded group to enter the work market. Every participant of the programme will receive integration benefit in the amount of approx. Euro 100/monthly, which will be reimbursed by the work office. Participants of the programme will also receive training in CISs on **how to establish own small enterprises and cooperatives**.

After the period of permanence in the Centre of Social Integration (from 1 to 1.1/2 year) the graduate will have the possibility to enter into the so called social employment. The entrepreneurs who will employ CISs' graduates will get reimbursement of part of the costs with social insurance during a period of one year. This is a further step in getting experience, this time already in enterprises and companies.

The Law on Social Employment requires a “new education” of the staff of social support and orientation of the needy people, as well as an authentic closeness among the helping persons, needy people and the business sector.

3.2. Homelessness and social housing

In Poland there is a need for about 1 – 1.5 million dwellings. In the period 1993 – 2002 a drastic increase of homeless people took place caused among others by 153 571 eviction verdicts effected from public housing sources.¹⁵ After taking into consideration the evictions from private housing these data should be increased by about 30 – 40% (altogether over 200 thousand verdicts, what means at least 600 thousand persons, including handicapped, unemployed, children). Private owners do not have any legal restrictions with regard to determination of the amounts of rents. Frequently exorbitant

¹⁵ “Conditions and introductory principles for the multiyear programme of social housing” / „Uwarunkowania i wstępne założenia do wieloletniego programu budownictwa społecznego”-www.mpips.gov.pl

prices sentence for streets consecutive groups of people. Up to 2002 the regulations regarding evictions enabled the eviction of persons and families without indication of a substitute housing. Presently, changes were effected in the regulations, which enable evictions only in the case of an assurance of a substitute place.

The responsibility for providing social housing relies on the municipalities which, in consideration to the big deficit of substitute places in the period 1996 – 2002 had possibilities of offering only 19 393 temporary places. The existing housing sources are far from enough. Non-governmental organizations in Poland did not undertake yet housing programmes for the needy persons. With regard to this the National Housing Office (Krajowy Urząd Mieszkalnictwa) in cooperation with the Ministry of Economy Labour and Social Policy, after social consultations, elaborated a project of **law regarding support for construction of social housing**¹⁶. The objective of the planned law is to limit the phenomenon of homelessness and its negative effects.

The project determines the principles of support to be given by the State for construction or adaptation of housing assets determined for temporary stay of persons in difficult material situation, such as the homeless people, refugees, persons leaving rehabilitation centres, persons and families with children, mainly taking into consideration those who received an eviction verdict.

The main principles of the law on construction of social housing are: to give support to families and persons who are in difficult situation due to lack of housing and prophylactics and prevention of situations of homelessness, and also to encourage municipalities and non-governmental organizations to undertake social housing by offering financial support to their activities in the framework of the social housing building programme.

The project principles include engagement of unemployed persons in construction in the so called public works reimbursed from the work offices, as well as possibilities of getting preferential credits for construction. In 2003-2004 it is being planned to build about 3250 social dwellings and 170 social buildings.

Thanks to the proposals of non-governmental organizations the project takes into consideration the possibility of enabling NGOs to carry out social housing programmes, as well as to act as employers giving jobs in the framework of public works to persons from the socially excluded groups, under adequate construction supervision.

This law together with the law on social employment mentioned before, creates a system that gives a real chance to get out of homelessness. The processes of social integration will be effected according to the following stages: through shelters and night-accommodation to education in centres of social integration, and through social employment to obtain a dwelling.

4. FEANTSA's work programme (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) on behalf of strengthening the problematic of homelessness in the European strategy of fight against poverty and social exclusion

4.1 The role of FEANTSA

FEANTSA's programme for the year of 2003 represents an important contribution to the problematic of homelessness at European level, provides knowledge in such areas of homelessness which are not well enough recognised or tackled, indicates the necessity of building on experts' opinions from the practical and scientific points of view. Because of its large cooperation network FEANTSA has the possibility of integrating its efforts in the accession countries. This gives possibilities of exchange of information and knowledge, indication of innovative programmes and effective legal solutions, build an effective strategy of prevention of homelessness in Europe.

¹⁶ Project of law regarding support for building in the years 2003-2004 of some housing assets / projekt ustawy o wspieraniu budowy w latach 2003 i 2004 niektórych pomieszczeń mieszkalnych; www.mpips.gov.pl

A good tool for this work is the **idea of national reports on homelessness** initiated by FEANTSA, prepared both by non-governmental organizations and scientists. This gives the possibility to call the attention of governing bodies in specific countries to the problems that occur there, and also to indicate the desired directions for problem solving. Extraordinarily valuable will be the itemization of the best legislative solutions, as well as the best practical solutions already functioning in Europe in the area of homeless people's integration, made by FEANTSA in the European report regarding homelessness.

4.2 International exchange

One of the most important questions approached by FEANTSA in its work programme is the emphasis given to the necessity of pursuing relations and cooperation between the policy makers and the non-governmental organizations which are carrying out the best practical solutions to solve the problems of homelessness. Frequently policy makers work independently, their imagination regarding the necessary changes up to a big extent may be theoretic, while the laws introduced by them (as the last decade shows in Poland) have a character that is not keeping pace with the fast changing reality. Because of this, in Poland as well as in Europe, there are so many laws with a passive character, differentiating the givers and takers of support, without possibilities of personal relations, exchange, cooperation, etc. From the other side there are already innovatory proposals of solutions functioning in the world carried out by leaders of NGOs, whose biggest preoccupation is that the methods of their work be successfully disseminated and serve to ever more numerous groups of needy people. Frequently, a relationship between the two groups does not have any chance to be worked out and without a chance of being strengthened by the legislation, some good solutions get lost together with the death of the leaders that created them.

In Poland, in the last two years relations started to be build between the policy makers and non-governmental organizations, but organization' networks included for example in the National Confederation of Social Employers have been elaborating for many years a model of activities, which was reflected in the laws created in Poland on behalf of social and professional integration. The National Confederation of Social Employers is interested in the cooperation with other European partners in the framework of the theme proposed by FENATSA for the year of 2003 entitled "cooperation and networking".

The **conferences** organized by FEANTSA strengthen the cooperation among organizations at European level. Especially important role FEANTSA will have in creating partnerships among organizations from diverse European countries with the objective of building common projects, as well as in providing training to organizations from candidate countries with regard to transference of knowledge to prepare applications for grants in the framework of European Union programmes. This still represents a big problem for organizations from Central and Eastern European countries. Polish non-governmental organizations are engaged in direct work with the homeless people and not having enough financial resources to employ specialists to write projects, still need exchange of experiences to meet the expectations of European grant donors.

FANTSA has many experiences in this field. An example is the successful cooperation in the framework of the PHARE programme with Czech non-governmental organizations. FEANTSA was the partner in this project, helped to build the programme and the budget, and also to approach other European partners. The programme obtained European Commission's support and was a great success. One of its stages took place in Poland where, beside getting acknowledged with direct programmes for the homeless a conference was held on how to build programmes, which could enable homeless people to get out of temporary shelters and obtain independent housing. A problematic undertaken in this way indicates a development process, thanks to which homeless people, through education and employment achieve the possibilities of maintaining own dwelling. In FEANTSA's programme we read that such awareness becomes the basis of a new approach to the problematic of homelessness and creation of a new type of legislation in Europe. This tendency is starting to be seen also in Poland. Some Polish non-governmental organizations showed in practice the functioning of this type of work

system with the homeless, what was reflected in the new laws. None the less many years of experiences and cooperation are necessary so that this philosophy be generalised in Poland. **There exists therefore, the necessity of strengthening this direction of activities through participation in conferences, training, common projects and exchange of experiences among European organizations.**

There are four groups working in the framework of FEANTSA's activities: in the areas of housing, social support, data collection and employment. **The representatives of the National Confederation of Social Employers propose an enlargement of the area of activities of the group working on housing issues by the themes of education, professional training and employment in social enterprises.** From Polish experiences results that one of the reasons of homelessness is the low educational level of the homeless (elementary by rule) and lack of professional preparation. The integration of this group is being done through education and training. This was reflected in the Polish law on social employment, in the framework of which the social employment is being carried out by means of professional training and therapy on addictions in the so called Centres of Social Integration. **A second important notice is the emphasis given to the fact that the group working on social support should also analyse the theme of integration of the homeless in diverse types of communities.** One of the more painful experiences of homeless persons is the feeling of loneliness and lack of roots in a place. The basic task of the social work in the first stage is to provide social support and next to organize environments, meetings, discussion groups, tasks, anonymous alcoholics' groups and local groups in which both the homeless people and representatives of diverse environments can participate. Taking the above into consideration, this group should have the name of **"for questions of social support and integration in communities"**.

4.3 Lobbying

Lobbying on behalf of the development of concrete legislative forms at European Union level is an important FEANTSA's task. This task FEANTSA plans to undertake in cooperation with other European networks such as the Social Platform, EAPN, European Housing Forum, European Network of Social Housing Companies and the Union of European Cities. This lobbying will be based on the knowledge achieved thanks to the international exchange of experiences and information, as well as the research programmes carried out by FEANTSA in the area of homelessness. Very important is also to undertake cooperation with international bodies such as the UN Programme for Human Settlements, among others. FEANTSA has also the objective of monitoring the extent of implementation of the EU obligations signed by member countries in the framework of the above mentioned ONZ programme and the European strategy against poverty and social exclusion.

Taking into consideration the experiences of Polish non-governmental organizations, which during the last two years undertook an effective lobbying on behalf of 4 laws: the law on public benefit activities and volunteerism, law on social employment, law on social welfare and law on social housing, it is necessary to underline that citizens should show an extraordinary watchfulness in relation to legislators, build representation groups and federations, build cooperation with representatives of the world of education and have certificates of concrete practical solutions. FEANTSA has a very important task of informing to non-governmental organizations about the necessity of influencing in their countries the legislation's shape in the field of the problematic of homelessness.

4.4 Communication and information

The publications edited by FEANTSA, its internet website and other communication tools represent a chance for NGOs from Central and Eastern European countries to get relevant information regarding the European Union's social policy on poverty and homelessness problems, EU programmes of support to NGOs' projects, and also regarding all the other important events and programmes. By means of these information FEANTSA is becoming more and more recognizable in European bodies. This is a form of promotion of activities and to obtain new members, as well as exchange of information and experiences. FEANTSA's member organizations should be awakened to present

FEANTSA's programme among national non-governmental organizations and to obtain a more intense sharing of experiences and proposals in the framework of FEANTSA's publications.

4.5 Scientific researches

From the perspectives of Polish experiences the creation of research committees for the problem of homelessness is an important undertaking, mainly because of the possibility of effecting an independent monitoring, both for the legislative activities, as well as the extent and level of services provided for the homeless. A monitoring of non-governmental organizations is also important with regard to the effectiveness of activities connected with the implementation of new legal acts. Because of this the activities of the European Observatory on Homelessness created by FEANTSA represent an important tool that enables a diagnosis of the situation in specific member countries. There is also the necessity of including in the work of the Observatory researchers from the candidate countries.

4.6 European Union enlargement

Polish non-governmental organizations have big expectations as to the cooperation with European Union countries' organizations and up to a great extent are already prepared for this cooperation. Probably, in views of some decades of experiences in citizens' activities in the European Union, a series of questions regarding work standards is already established and Polish organizations will have the possibility of learning a lot. However, it should be emphasised that Polish organizations active for years in very difficult conditions (with Governmental and self-governmental support not exceeding 15 – 20% of their budgets), elaborated many self-help activities engaging the needy persons in diverse work activities and responsibilities. This may also be very inspiring to organizations from European Union countries.

Many Polish organizations, despite of the lack of support, run cooperation programmes with partners from European Union countries, be it at the level of direct activities or at the level of conferences, exchange of information and experiences. It seems very important that European organizations, including FEANTSA, despite of not getting EU support for cooperation programmes, invite Polish NGOs to participate in their work as observers. Thanks to this attitude many information and tendencies were already obtained by the Polish NGOs' sector.

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Annex: Data of the main non-governmental organizations active in the field of social support.

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