



**FEANTSA**

**BELGIUM NATIONAL REPORT 2004 FOR THE  
EUROPEAN OBSERVATORY ON HOMELESSNESS:  
STATISTICAL UPDATE**

By Pascal De Decker

**November 2004**

With the collaboration of Nicolas Bernard Facultés universitaires Saint Louis

## **Table of Contents**

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. The Dutch speaking part of Belgium**
  - 1.1 Profile of the homeless in 2002 in the Dutch speaking community**
  - 1.2 Out of the CAW-Witboek**
  - 1.3 Data on the capacity of the services organised by CAW3**
- 2. French-speaking part of Belgium**
  - 2.1 Walloon Region**
  - 2.2 Brussels-Capital Region**
  - 2.3 Information common to both regions**

## **1. Introduction**

In this report, I present information on the statistical update on homelessness in Belgium. In order to deal with the 2004 Research programme for FEANTSA I contacted Nicolas Bernard of the Facultés universitaires Saint Louis de Bruxelles in order to obtain a better covering of the French speaking part of the country. As a consequence this report is bilingual.

In order to reach our goal and to give the most recent information, we have contacted, besides the umbrella organisations '*Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk (SAW)*' for the Dutch speaking community of Belgium and '*Association des Maisons d'accueil (AMA)*' for the French speaking part of Belgium, a wide range of institutions, universities, housing and welfare institutions and administrations. We thank them for their contributions.

## **2. The Dutch speaking part of Belgium**

Since no new data are available, we repeat last year's data, followed by some comments on the welfare sector as a whole published early this year and a review of the reception capacity.

For the Dutch speaking part of Belgium, in 1998 some 12,680 persons got support in residential care for homeless persons. Of these, 10,754 were new dossiers<sup>1</sup>.

### **2.1 Profile of the homeless in 2002 in the Dutch speaking community**

In a step to re-create data, the SAW did a survey among homeless reception houses (s.l.) in April 2002. A stratified at random survey was organised. Three questionnaires were sent to 144 sub-workings of the 27 '*Centra voor Algemeen Welzijnswerk*' (Centres for General Welfare Work) which work with the homeless.

---

<sup>1</sup> New data will become available one of these weeks. If available they will be inserted in a new version of this report.

The first questionnaire was on the homeless, the second on the relief worker and a third on the perception of the relief workers on homelessness.

The obtained information is on 273 homeless persons, 134 relief workers and 94 services. The available information is preliminary. It was presented at a conference in Brussels (14 May 2002).

In the report is stated that the care for the homeless in 2002 can be seen as a working method, suffering from an increasing societal pressure. Some elements are:

- rising violence between partners, but through an increased social sensitivity, women are more keen to look for support,
- congestion of the reception centres through:
  1. a lack of streaming through possibilities to social housing,
  2. the saturation of the cheap housing market in the cities (Asylum seekers, concentration of poverty),
  3. some features of the working of the local social services on rents, frightening landlords in the private rental sector,
  4. lack of supported housing,
- the risen prison population influences a higher input of former prisoners,
- changes in psychiatric care have as a consequence that patients are taken into care for shorter periods leading to a rising input in homeless reception houses,
- shortage of care places for disabled persons with a low mental problem through which they cannot live independently,
- the rising complexity of living together, together with the phenomenon of living in smaller families, leads to the fact that people who cannot live alone are knocking at the door of the welfare sector,
- the rising complexity of the requests (e.g. on addiction) for care and the rising cultural diversity of the population put pressure on the system. Globalisation not only implies a more international character of economy but also of societal phenomenon: migration, clandestine immigration, people without papers are pictures of 'the globalisation of vagrancy',

- in Flanders, during the 1990s much more energy was put in the reorganisation of welfare work than in the creation of new methods like supported housing or care for women,
- the absence of a policy in Flanders to avoid homelessness and the decrease of residential care,
- the decrease of the age to become an adult.

Striking are also and compared with a survey of 1982:

- a rising share of women (from 18% to 33%)
- the observation of only small changes concerning the age of the population: slightly less young people in 2002 and more people in the age group 41-50. In general the homeless population is not ageing,
- a small rise of non-Belgian clients (from 9% in 1982 to 14.5% in 2002). Of importance here is that among the foreign population, women take a larger share,
- the share of unmarried men did not change over time, while the number of unmarried women dropped dramatically (from 66% to 43%).

On the social biography the survey reveals that:

- homelessness hits lowly educated persons. In 2002 50.8% only finished either primary education or vocational training. Especially lowly educated women end up in shelters;
- 74% of the homeless men have an institutional 'career'. This is far less for women (48%);
- an increase of 'career homelessness': in 1982 40% was in a reception house before; this rose to 56% in 2002. This is more dramatically for men than for women;
- for the client, the major problems are, one, a lack of housing (51%), two, a financial problem (46%) and, three, rooflessness (35%). Seen from the perspective of the welfare worker the major problems are, one, financial

problems (56%), two, psychic or personal problems (52%) and three, a lack of a house (51%),

- an increase of debts (from 25% in 1982 to 60% in 2002);
- a lack of work: 76% of the men do not work; this counts for 84% of the women. Especially the out of labour income dropped dramatically (from 25% in 1982 to 12% in 2002), while contrary, the share of clients on an unemployment benefit rose from 18% to 27%.

## **2.2 Out of the CAW-Witboek**

Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk (2004, p. 43-44) writes that the services organised by CAW are feeling rising pressures. Reasons are:

- ‘rising’ domestic violence (women search more likely than before for help),
- congestion within the services following (among others):
  1. a lack of moving up to social housing,
  2. a saturation of the cheap housing market in the cities (concentration of poverty; asylum seekers),
  3. a lack of alternatives to stream through,
- the rising prison population generates a larger intake of former prisoners;
- a rising take in of former psychiatric patients as a consequence of the changed methodology;
- a shortage of places in services for disabled persons creates a rising intake of light mentally disabled persons;
- some societal developments making life more complex in combination with the changing family structures generates more demand for supported housing;
- a rising complexity of questions (addiction) and the cultural differentiation of the homeless (houseless) population sets pressures on the system;
- the reorganisation of the sector by the Flemish government did not take into account the sectors with an under capacity (supported housing; services for women;

- the absence of a policy to prevent homelessness;
- difficulties concerning adjustment of youth services and general welfare work have as a consequence that a lot of young adults coming from youth care end up in homeless reception houses after a period of living alone.

### 2.3 Data on the capacity of the services organised by CAW

*Table. Dutch speaking community in Flanders and the Brussels Capital Region, the reception capacity, 2000-2004*

	2000	2004	Evolution
Residential care	1.541	1.437	-6.6%
Ambulatory care	985	1.150	+16.8%
Total	2.526	2.587	+2.5%

Source: SAW

*Table. Dutch speaking community in Flanders and the Brussels Capital Region, the reception capacity per type, 2004*

#### Residential services

	Capacity in beds	% of the subtotal	% of the total
Crisis reception	142	10	5
General reception for men	586	41	23
General reception – mixed	191	13	7
Reception for women and children	222	15	9
Refugee houses	91	6	4

Reception centres for youngsters	134	9	5
Night shelters	38	3	1
Reception of asylum seekers	33	2	1
total	1.437	100	-

### **Supported housing**

Accompanied housing	813	71	31
Accompanied housing for youngster	201	17	8
Care housing and pension housing	136	12	5
Total	1.150	100	-
General total	2.587	-	100

Source: SAW

## References

De Decker, P. (2001): *Access to housing. Working together to prevent homelessness among disadvantaged and vulnerable groups*, FEANTSA, Brussels.

Lescrauwaet, D., Van Menxel, G. & L. Serriën (2002): *Thuisloosheid in Vlaanderen. Profiel, visie en krijtlijnen voor een globale strategie*, Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk, Berchem.

Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk (2004): *Voor een sterke eerste lijn in de Vlaamse Welzijnssector*, CAW-Witboek, 2004, Berchem.

Van Menxel, G., Lescrauwaet, D. & I. Parys (2003): *Verbinding verbroken. Thuisloosheid en Algemeen Welzijnswerk in Vlaanderen*, Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk in Vlaanderen, Berchem.

### 3. French-speaking part of Belgium

#### 3.1 Walloon Region

- *homeless*: 5,000 (Ministry of Social Affairs, coordination of the Belgian National Action Plan on Social Inclusion, telephone interview, May 2004)
- *living in permanent accommodation on campsites or mobile home/chalet sites*:
  - 8,514 (Ministry of the Walloon Region and King Baudouin Foundation, *Inventaire descriptif - Synthèse. L'habitat prolongé en campings et parcs résidentiels en Région wallonne*, Brussels, June 1999 - summary descriptive list).
  - 10,000 (Belgian National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2003-2005)
  - "more than 10,000" (Walloon Government, 13 November 2002)
  - "from 10,000 to 12,000" (David Praile, "L'habitat en campings et parcs résidentiels en Wallonie. Questions sociales, enjeux sociaux, rapport à l'habitat", *Le logement dans sa multidimensionalité : une grande cause régionale*, Nicolas Bernard & Charles Mertens (eds), Namur, Ministry of the Walloon Region, in the *Études et Documents* series, 2004, forthcoming).

#### 3.2 Brussels-Capital Region

- *homeless*:

1,200 (A. Réa, P. Schmitz, D. Giannoni & N. Mondelaers, *La problématique des personnes sans-abri en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale*, Brussels, GERME (Institute of Sociology, ULB), 2001 (research commissioned by the Joint Community Commission of the Brussels-Capital Region).

This figure dates from 2001 and does not include the subsequent recorded increase in illegal and undocumented immigrants in Brussels.
- *evictions*:

of 12,000 eviction proceedings started in metropolitan Brussels, only 400 have resulted in an actual eviction (Michel Colson, Chair of the CPAS (public welfare agency) Section of the “Association des villes et communes de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale” (local authority association for the Brussels-Capital Region), "Le point de vue du C.P.A.S.", *Expulsions du logement et dignité humaine*, proceedings of the symposium held in Brussels on 18 May 2001 by the Facultés universitaires Saint Louis and the Syndicat des locataires, *Droit en Quart Monde*, No. 34, 2003).

### 3.3 Information common to both regions

- "more than 10% of the Belgian population at some time experience serious housing problems. Almost 6% even become technically homeless at least once in their life" (P. Philippot & B. Galand, *Les personnes sans-abri en Belgique. Regards croisés des habitants de la rue, de l'opinion publique et des travailleurs sociaux*, Ghent, Federal Science Policy Office and Academia Press, 2003).
- The French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Research (INSEE, Paris) is currently developing for Eurostat a uniform and consistent methodology for counting the homeless in order to achieve validly comparable figures between different European countries.