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**Working Group 1: Homelessness and the Changing Role of the
State in Belgium**

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Working Group 1. The changing role of the state

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1. Introduction

This paper is the third in a row of three, dealing with the changing role of the state and its consequences for welfare policies in general and housing and homelessness policies in particular. In two earlier papers we dealt with the developments of welfare state policies (De Decker, 2003; 2004a) and housing policies (De Decker, 2004b). Contrary to the broadly dispersed argument of a withdrawal of state as a quasi mechanical consequence of globalisation and liberalisation, our appreciation was far more nuanced. Without denying, first, the undisputable fact that not all persons in need are helped, and second, that changes have occurred¹, we have illustrated that in the case of Belgium one should speak about a restyling or restructuring rather than a hollowing out or dismantling of the welfare state. The Belgium welfare state has so far been adapted quite efficiently to the changed environment. Also concerning housing, there can be no other conclusion than that Belgium and its regions today have more "housing policy" than before. In all regions, which are constitutionally responsible for their own housing policies, the 1990s show the approval of new legislations, the recognition of new institutions² and a rise of budgets. Even more, the federal state left its passive attitude and took some initiatives (De Decker; 2005). But it is nevertheless undeniable correct that these all-in-all modest budgetary increases are adding to historically low levels of government

¹ It is e.g. today less easy for starters on the labour market to get an unemployment benefit, but once in the system, it still is for as long as you are unemployed. And one has a right to a subsistence income. It is e.g. true that concerning health care, the forfeit has risen, but at the same time health care is still very accessible and one cannot refuse people on income basis.

² E.g. social rental agencies. See: De Decker (2002).

interference³, but at the same token, it is undeniable that concerning housing one can speak about an enrolment of the state, an attempt of the state(s) to get more grip on the housing market.

This third contribution is on the (changing role of) the state and homelessness. Contrary to the previous two themes, which were/are widely debated - what generated a lot of information -, homelessness can hardly been seen as a hot societal and/or policy issue. Illustrative is the fact that in none of the different regional policy agreements reached after the 2004 regional elections the word "homeless" is present⁴. And this despite a broad acceptance that entering secure housing for vulnerable persons became more difficult and the risks on becoming homeless rose during the 1990s and early 2000s. Homelessness is not an issue, except for those - like researchers and welfare worker - working on and with homeless persons and their problems. Characteristic is that in even in a generally recognised standard work, the yearbook on poverty and social exclusion for the first time was published in 1992, only one single chapter was dedicated to homelessness (Vlaeminck, 1995). Homelessness seems to be a matter for a small group of insiders and interested persons. So looking for the reasons why the state is largely absent, is as important as describing what is.

In what follows we successively deal with the trends in homelessness, the history of homelessness policies, and the current offer of services. We end with an appreciation.

³ Although one can argue that what is described or interpreted as a non-policy is also a policy (Bemelmans-Videc et al., 2003).

⁴ In the policy notes 2004-2009 of the concerned ministers, reference to homelessness is limited, vague and without concrete perspectives. The policy note of the housing minister (Keulen, 2004) has one paragraph on homelessness: "More additional attention will be given in order to avoid home and rooflessness. It is important that eventual problems which can lead to home or rooflessness should be recognized in a early stage by the landlord, and especially the social housing organisations. Based on good and clear agreements with local welfare organisations, preventive support and accompaniment can be organised so that the problems do not accelerate. This is good for as well the concerned tenant, the living together in the neighbourhood as the housing society" (p. 35). Also the policy note on welfare work has some small paragraphs wherein the term "homelessness" is present (Vervotte, 2004): "A significant part of the general welfare work deals with homelessness. It is necessary for the homeless sector to further develop methods, reception types and co-operation forms in order to limit the in stream and increase the out stream. The supply should be flexible and more tailor made: short crisis reception, reception of homeless persons with particular problems, victimised women, young homeless, roofless,... I shall explore how we can enlarge the offer of the homeless reception houses. The existing initiatives concerning supported housing and support - being the least intervening form of care - remain subsidized. I will them - starting from an inclusive approach - integrate in the Flemish housing policy. (...) Following the fact that housing and welfare coincide I will contact the housing minister in order to stimulate co-operation" (p. 58).

Basically, what follows is that concerning homelessness we see a kind of hand-off policy. The state foresees a regulatory and financial framework, but leaves choices on approach and methods and the installation of services to other partners, being welfare work (ngo's) and local authorities. Seen from the perspective of the state, recent initiatives are no more that cosmetic. Another feature is that within welfare work, the homeless sector is not more than the tail (VDVO, 1987).

Note that what follows is largely based on the development in Flanders, since developments in Wallonia and the Brussels Capital region are hardly documented.

2. Trends in homelessness⁵

In 2004 the 27 Centres for General Welfare Work (CAW - see further), received 111,252 applications. For 41,389 support initiatives (either ambulatory or residential) were taken.

This corresponds with a budget of 80.5 million€, of which 53.8 million€ is paid by the Flemish community. The rest is coming from day prices and client contributions (9.6%) and own "money" collected via gifts, fund raising and other subsidy channels (23.6%). This corresponds with 1,500 full-time jobs, of which 1,063 are subsidized.

If we narrow the picture to care for the homeless, we see that in 2004 7,980 persons were received in a residential environment. Next to that there are 2,335 ambulatory clients, adding up to a total number of 10,315 accompaniments.

Table 1. Dutch community, number of clients in general welfare work, 2004

	Reception		Support	
	number	%	number	%
Homeless reception	23,500	21	10,315	25
Justice welfare work	8,058	7	3,957	10
Crime victims	8,916	8	5,347	13
Ambulatory services s.l.	73,197	66	23,469	57
CAW	111,252	100	41,389	100

Source: Tellus - SAW⁶

⁵ SAW (2005).

⁶ SAW= Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk, the umbrella organisation of ngo welfare work in Flanders.

If we look at the evolution between 1982 and 2004 as summarized in table 2, we see a rise in the share of women and non-Belgians. The share of people at work is also decreasing. Of the 2004 clients 54% had an income equal or less to the subsistence income. 90% is unemployed.

The decrease in the share of men does not include that the absolute number is decreasing. On the contrary, going together with a general rise of homelessness in 2004 5,360 of the homeless persons were men, while this number was 4,745 in 2003.

Table 2. Dutch speaking community, summary of the profile of homeless persons, 1982-2004, %

Feature	1982	2002	2004
Men	82	67	65
Women	18	33	35
Non-Belgians	9	15	27
At work	25	12	10
No income at the take in	--	-	30
No income during the stay	5	2	--

Source: Tellus – SAW & Van Menxel et al. (2003)

Further on, it still are single persons that go on to dominate the picture (table 3) and also noticeable is the high number of re-appraisals (table 4). Concerning the place of origin, Lescrauwaet states in a recent newspaper article that 11% of the people, that are received now have wandered before finding a place. Even 6% of the women has lived on the streets for a while, an unknown phenomenon so far, according to Lescrauwaet (in: Ghijs, 2005).

The same article deals more in-depth with the reasons why the share of women and/or migrants is rising. According to Blow, like Lescrauwaet a staff member of SAW, the rising share of women reflects an increase in violence against women and heavy conflicts within families. Blow warns that at least a part of the explanation is that the reporting of violence has risen because it is less tolerated and as a consequence the threshold for reporting has decreased. The number of single mothers is not increasing. Nevertheless, they still compose 7% of the homeless population.

What is striking the last few years is the increased share of allochtonous persons. In two years time, their number doubled. It does not concern Asylum seekers, but

people who are legally in the country and are of a non-European origin. According to Blow (in: Ghijs, 2005), allochtonous persons cumulate a number of risks. They are excluded from the labour market, what influences their (lack of) income. Often housing is refused by landlords not wishing to rent to foreign persons. An important additional feature has to do with the culture of some of the foreign groups. In most of these cultures people take care of each other... "as long as one follows the rules". Most of the homeless allochtonous persons are women, what illustrates the clash of cultures including problems related to forced marriages, casting off, non acceptance of adultery etc. As a consequence, the share of allochtonous persons adds up to 53% in the refugee shelters.

Table 3. Dutch speaking community, homeless according to household situation before take in, 2004, %

	Men	Women
Single	56	17
Partner with children	8	41
Partner without children	6	16
Single parent	1	7
Living at home	6	6
Living with other people	11	8
Collective living form	11	4
Other	1	2
Total	100	100

Source: Tellus – CAW

Table 4. Dutch speaking community, % in other reception centre before take in, 2004

	% that came from another reception house
Crisis reception	7
Men's reception centre	31
Women's reception centre	24
Refugee centre	10
Reception centre for youngsters	20

Source: Tellus – SAW

3. Care for the homeless in perspective

3.1. From vagrant to homeless person

According to Meert & Stuyck (2005) the Belgian policy towards the homeless until 1993 was characterised by two simple key-features: anti-urbanism⁷ and repression. Indeed, until then, a law which was voted in 1891 prescribed that all vagrants - the term homeless was not yet used - who were encountered while sleeping or begging

⁷ See idem De Decker et al. (2005) on the roots of housing policies.

in public spaces and who did not possess a basic sum of money, were to be removed to so-called colonies in the rural periphery of the country (e.g. in the Northern Campines of Flanders or in the Walloon Ardennes). These particular penitentiaries should not only release them from pernicious cities, they should also discipline them and impart social norms, values and regularity (in their daily life) to them. These colonies were conceived as prisons: people were not allowed to leave them until their sanction expired. They took the form of self-provisioning institutions, with cattle breeding and horticulture for the community of vagrants who were compelled to live there for a specific period by way of punishment for having lived as a vagrant (Depreeuw, 1986).

However, the severe economic and related housings crisis of the mid-1980s (De Decker, 2002) produced an increasing number of homeless people who were evicted from their dwelling or who were excluded from other safety-nets or socially integrating mechanisms (such as the labour market). As a consequence, mainly city centres were confronted with an increasing number of so-called vagrants/homeless. Hence, the "demand versus the supply" offered by the colonies became structurally imbalanced, resulting in a new federal law in 1993. This law mentioned for the first time 'homelessness': the vagrant did no longer exist and became a homeless. In contrast to vagrancy, homelessness should according no longer be punishable to the legislator. People who were at the time confined in colonies, were now to be treated in special reception centres which should prepare them for reintegration in society. While colonies were situated in the rural periphery of Belgium, third sector organisations (see further) were established (or continued their work) in the neighbourhoods where the majority of the homeless actually lived.

3.2. On the rise of services

The abolition of the colonies for vagrants went hand in hand with the rise in importance and creation of various types of services for the homeless through third sector organisations. Step by step they were recognised and subsidized. But before that, they had an history of self-financing.

Around 1900 the Salvation Army started with the foundation of (refugee) hostels. Later, under the unstable economic circumstances of the 1930s, in some cities

initiatives were taken, aiming at bettering the material circumstances of destitute people. Even when the recession drew back, the larger cities remained keeping a range of beggars, vagrants and workless persons. The initiatives were taken dominantly by persons belonging to the Catholic bourgeoisie, although also some non-confessional initiatives took off. And again, cloisters and the Salvation Army, which already ran poor houses before, started projects. Taken together, the first halve of the 20th century saw the foundation of a number of homeless reception services, which are still functioning today.

During the 1960s and 1970s modern welfare work discovered “the homeless”. A new “residential movement” took off. Numerous reception services to receive and accompany homeless persons were found. Big adagios were: small scale, professionalisation and the (re)integration in society. In these services for youngsters and adult men and women, homeless persons find besides temporary accommodation, aid: a team of social workers helps with administration, acquiring an income, and looking for work and housing. Help can be individual as well as collective.

Within the sector gradually a labour division has developed: some are focussing on crisis reception, other offer longer term accompaniment. And despite subsidisation – what is not enough to cover the costs (see earlier) – clients have to pay for their stay.

3.3. Services and the State

It took a long time before the government took initiative to recognise the homeless services. Initially, they were taken by the national Ministry of Justice. After the restructuring of the state and the devolution of a number of policy domains, the regions became responsible. So after 1980, the (regional) minister (generally) responsible for the Family and Welfare Work became responsible.

Before 1980, the government only recognised the function of reception for some minor and specific categories. The earliest regulation dates from 1952 and concerns houses for “the moral re-adaptation of young women”, basically being the reception

of young prostitutes. Only loosely connected to homeless care but nevertheless relevant is - based on a law of 1919 - the foundation of homes for unmarried mothers. More important for the current care for the homeless services sector is the 1970 law fostering the so-called "post-penitentiary social care" for former prisoners. Influenced by emerging welfare work, already between the world wars, some attention was targeted on the reception and reclassification of former prisoners in reception houses. In the first phases the Ministry of Justice opposed to this, but gradually these reception houses were seen as useful and some small subsidising was started. It ends when these responsibilities are transferred to the regions.

In 1975, the federal Minister of Health takes some initiatives to subsidise reception centres for "adult social handicapped persons". But in the end the money never came. What was realised within the Ministry of Culture (Directory Administration and Youth formation), was a regulation for the recognition and subsidisation for the reception of juveniles.

The great breakthrough for homeless services finally occurred after the restructuring of the state (8 Aug. 1980), when the so-called "personal matters" like e.g. welfare, housing, education and spatial planning were transferred to the regions. As a consequence the puzzle could be finished in bringing together relevant items within the regional Flemish Ministry of the Family and Welfare Work: the penitentiary and post-penitentiary social care was transferred from the Ministry of Justice; the responsibilities for the homes/services for mothers and the moral re-adaptation of young women came from the pre-federal Ministry of Health and the family, and the responsibilities for the reception centres for youngsters were transferred from the pre-federal Ministry of Culture.

In the beginning, the various "small" regulations remained the same and stood, within one ministry, next to each other. Moreover, a new regulation for the subsidisation of some particular reception centres for adult homeless persons was added to the labyrinth. Basically, this was targeted at half-way houses and general reception houses. Despite it added to the forest of regulations, the sector welcomed this new regulation because for the first time it recognised the assistance to homeless persons. Nevertheless – at that time – the "sector" asked for further adaptation since the decision does not deal with the factual organisation and working.

3.4. Towards Centres of Welfare Work

Homeless care moulded, as seen, during the 1970 and especially the 1980s with the foundation and the growth of targeted (categorical) initiatives. Next steps were set during the 1990s, by integrating homeless care in the sector of the autonomous welfare work after a profound restructuring. As a consequence a lot of attention went to the organisation of different fusions within the sector. Step by step a number of “improper” services and institutions were regrouped under the umbrella of Centre for General Welfare Work (CAW), which are umbrella organisations at sub-regional scale. The merge of a series of categorical services to general welfare work had its impact on homeless care since it disappeared as a regular, independent sector.

General welfare work is a relatively new concept. During the 1990s, based on one new legislation/regulation, a wide variety of small-scaled welfare services were regrouped under its umbrella. Each of these initiatives had their own history, which roughly developed in three phases.

During the 1960 and 1970s, based on the civil pride of some civilians and people with a degree in social work and social sciences a number of small-scale reception initiatives developed. They were imbedded in the broad range of social and emancipatory movements. Critical youth workers started advice centres for youngsters (JAC) and the women’s movement gave birth to the flight houses for maltreated women and centre for birth control and sexual education. Other centres, like reception centres for youngsters, were found as a reaction on the failure of large institution youth care centres. Even within the long-existing care formulas renewal took place. Classical probation and after-care services professionalized step by step and competed with small-scaled reception centres for (dominantly) homeless men and types of accompanied housing.

When, as seen, in the 1980s the regions became responsible, the disparate collection of first line welfare service remained a rest category. The Flemish government took some ad hoc and very different recognition and subsidisation initiatives. This went together with (legal) insecurity and (legal) inequality between the services. As a consequence, the first cries for creating “general welfare work” in order to coordinate bubbled up. The idea was to harmonize the regulation and to restructure

the services. In a first phase this plea came from the ambulatory services and led to different merges. In the meantime under the impulse of the umbrella organisation of homeless reception houses (Vereniging der Vlaamse Onthaalhuizen) a general regulation for homeless care was written concerning general reception centres, reception centres for women and children, crisis reception centres and accompanied housing.

A first Decree on general welfare work was approved on 24 July 1991. The policy note of 1993 promised the foundation of "polyvalent centres". Note that it only referred to ambulatory services, which were seen as a gate to residential care. After an amendment of the Council of General Welfare Work (Hoge Raad voor Algemeen Welzijnswerk), this break was dropped. One argument was that care for the homeless could not be limited to the provision of a roof. Care for the homeless has residential as well as ambulatory features.

During the 1990s, mergers resulted in the foundation of 29 autonomous centres for general welfare work. A further reduction implies that today 27 CAWs are working.

The CAWs have, according to Van Menxel e.a. (2003), a quasi-monopoly in exploiting services for homeless persons. This has, as seen, historically grown. While other work forms of general welfare work are comparable with public services (e.g. hospitals or care for the elderly), nor local authorities nor local public social services founded services for the homeless. And since the abolition of the vagrancy in 1993, also the federal government withdrew.

The restructuring of general welfare work went hand in hand with a substantial deregulation and the introduction of new policy instruments like strategic planning, environment analysis and quality care. The decree abolished the old working types and replaced them by a series of instructions, which should be reached within the frame of envelope financing. The old working types can still be used but only to realise the instructions. A CAW has now the full responsibility, and also the possibility, to change its approach. All stipulations on length of stay, permanence, infrastructure and the way of reception are deleted from the regulation. As a consequence CAWs have the opportunity to organise tailor-made care.

One should notice that the policy process is according to Van Menxel e.a. (2003) not yet finished since the old work forms are still recognisable.

4. The supply

4.1. Working forms and types of supply

One can divide the working methods or forms dealing with homeless people in two types: residential reception centres and ambulatory accompaniment in supported housing. The residential reception centres represent the more traditional work forms: crisis reception, general reception of men or for mixed reception, women reception centres, refugee houses, reception centres for youngsters and night reception centres.

Table 5 gives the division of homeless care initiatives by work form. The largest part consist of general reception centres for men (23%) and supported housing (23%). Reception centres for women and refugee houses stand for approximately 20% of the supply.

If one looks at the type of provision, 70% is a reception centre for homeless. Approximately 20% is supported housing and the rest concerns services which receive e.g. person without papers and outreach work (table 6).

Table 5. Flanders, homeless care by work form, 2000

Work form	number	%
Crisis reception	12	8.8
General reception: men	32	23.4
Women: general reception and refugee houses	24	17.5
General reception: mixed	13	9.5
Reception Centre for youngsters	14	10.2
Supported housing	31	22.6
Night shelters; bed, bath & breakfast	2	1.5
Starting centres	6	4.4
Outreach work	3	2.2
Total	137	100

Source: SAW

Table 6. Flanders, homeless care by type of provision, 2002

Type of provision	number	%
Reception & care	97	69.8
Supported housing	32	23.0
Other	10	7.2
Total	139	100

Source: SAW

4.2. Evolution of supply and capacity

The division of reception capacity is a better indicator of the number of services. Concerning reception centres it refers to the number of beds; concerning supported housing it refers to the number of persons that can be housed in the houses.

Table 7 deals with the changes between 1990 and 2000. In 2000 the capacity of residential care was 1,538 beds. Concerning supported housing⁸ in 2000 there were 970 housing entities,

Besides the extension of support housing, attention is given to the development of day centres and centres for re-entrance. Homeless and other poor people can go there for practical advice, aid, training and recreation activities. These centres are embedded in the local community in order to enlarge the changes to develop social networks. These are less fierce interventions, less expensive and more efficient if compared to residential care.

The supply shows between 1990 and 2000 two important evolutions. One is the rise of the total number of reception possibilities with 60%. Second is the rise of the share of ambulatory support (from 15% to 40%). Until recently supported housing was financed by local funds and/or through the reconversion of residential places. The latest trend is nevertheless that also the Flemish government is recognising the importance of supported housing and foresees some additional funds in some pilot regions.

⁸ Being ambulatory supported housing, supported independent living for young adults, care housing and pension housing.

Table 7. Flanders, evolution of the capacity by work form, 1990-2000

Work form	number			%		
	1990	1995	2000	1990	1995	2000
Crisis reception	32	96	130	2.2	4.6	5.2
General reception for men	1,042	910	710	70.0	43.4	28.1
Mixed reception	-	123	124	0.0	5.39	4.9
Reception for women	101	415	405	6.8	19.8	16.1
Reception of youngsters	96	165	136	6.5	7.9	5.4
Night reception	-	-	33	0.0	0.0	1.3
Day care*	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supported housing	217	346	766	14.6	16.5	30.4
Supported independent living	-	40	126	0.0	1.9	5.0
Pension housing	-	-	78	0.0	0.0	3.1
Mobile work*	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others	-	-	15	0.0	0.0	0.6
Total	1,488	2,095	2,523	100.0	100.0	100.0

*not measurable

Source: SAW

4.3. Trends in care for the homeless

In search for better solutions one can detect some trends (SAW, 2004)

The realisation of basic rights

Homeless persons are – by different reasons - threatened or hurt in a series of fundamental rights: the right to a family, a “human” income, health, work, and so on. As a consequence homeless persons suffer from extreme forms of exclusion. General welfare work has as a goal to prevent, to support and to cure. As a consequence homeless care aims at particular actions in order to foster the realisation of right (housing, income, work, social aid). In the past, reception centres were oriented at a vast offer of support. Often, it was done routinely and the client had to take it or leave it. This is changing in a sense that more and more the work is demand-oriented, implying that the needs of the client becomes central.

From meddling care to tailor-made care

In the search for better methods “tailor-made” became the approach. It stands for a specific method for the accompaniment of persons living in poor conditions. The basis principles are: positive support, integral support, participation, structured support and co-ordinated support.

Contrary to that was “meddling care” a form of buttonhole working. It is a very intensive ambulatory approach which can lose the eye for the own responsibility of the client. It lost its supporters within welfare work.

New risk groups

Homeless reception is recently confronted with new problems and risk groups: homeless couples, youngsters hanging around, homeless young drug addicts, asylum seekers and people without papers are some examples. The conviction is rising that homeless care cannot avoid its responsibility. But this will ask for new work methods.

Self-organisation of the target group

Homeless persons were in the past seen as defenceless individuals who cannot formulate their feelings. This is changing. In larger cities we see a grouping of homeless persons. They squat empty dwellings and organise pressure groups. They evolve from “action against” to a “recognised and sound partner”.

5. Other relevant initiatives

5.1. Local authorities

Earlier we indicated that local authorities and local social services showed little initiative to organise homeless reception care. This seems to be changing. Step by step, local social services (OCMW/CPAS) also found services, thereto enforced by housing problems and the lack of adequate social rental and private rental dwellings. Also the ever difficult access of homeless reception centres though over-occupation and long take-in procedures are at stake.

Today especially urban social services (OCMW's) organise transit houses, emergency dwellings etc. The umbrella organisation of municipalities (VVSG, 2005) organised for the first time a survey in order to picture ‘the residential reception of roof- and homeless persons’ organised by the OCMW's.

Mapped is the residential care targeted at:

- ‘pure’ roofless persons (people urgently in need for a dwelling – e.g. after a fire),
- ‘temporary’ homeless persons (people losing their home temporarily – e.g. battered women, evicted persons),

- 'chronic' homeless persons.

Not mapped are:

- supported housing for psychiatric patients, homes for the elderly, social rental dwelling in the circuit of supported housing
- LOI, being the services dealing with the reception of Asylum seekers.

Asked was for the number of dwellings and capacity as "item in client system", with as a consequence that "one" (client system) does not necessarily stands for "one" person, since a household can be one client and does not concern all individual persons.

The VVSG registered 592 services having 1,110 client systems. In 2002 the OCMWs receipted 1,431 client systems.

5.2. Federal government: enlarging the installation grant for homeless persons⁹

Already for some years, an installation grant exists for homeless persons. The federal government recently (2004) enlarged this installation grant. In order to get an installation grant, the following requirements should be fulfilled:

1. the person should be entitled to a subsistence income,
2. the person should stop being home(roof)less through moving into a dwelling which becomes its domicile. It should be a dwelling with a permanent character. E.g. a move to home reception centre will not be an acceptable entitlement. People who live on a camp site or will leave a recreation park are entitled.
3. the person should not have used the installation before. The law clearly states that a person can only enjoy the grant once in a lifetime.

The sum of the grant is 1/12th of the yearly sum of subsistence income for the category 'single parents'. It is paid in one shot.

⁹ Source : www.vvsg.be (umbrella organisations of municipalities).

6. Assessment

6.1. As formulated by SAW

According to SAW (2004), the Flemish government clearly lacks a policy strategy with respect to homelessness. Avoiding the appearance of homelessness is not guaranteed. Prevention, relief and support can not longer be the role of welfare work alone. OCMWs, social housing, social employment, justice, mental health and psychiatry are also responsible.

The need to create a more global and integrated strategy is illustrated by a text proposed to the Flemish parliament by 6 umbrella organisations, covering local authorities, mental health, welfare work, social rental agencies and minority integration work¹⁰ (SAW,...). A global strategy is needed since:

1. the demand is rising,
2. there is too little attention for prevention,
3. there is no or inadequate co-ordination and fine-tuning.

On the organisational level one can refer to the absence of a programming of the supply, the need for a horizontal co-ordination between the sectors and the absence of a local steering in order to link demand with supply.

As a consequence a wide range of considerations based on policy intentions and developments in the field there is a plea for a policy targeted at persons at risk of homelessness. Fundamental features are:

1. the development of a preventive housing policy, implying the creation of an adequate number of affordable and decent dwellings for people with low income. This asks for structural measures concerning social and private renting;
2. the stimulation of co-operation between the housing and welfare sector via the broadening of diverse forms of housing support and supported housing. This should avoid that people loose their house. At the same time, better agreements can guarantee a better streaming through of homeless person for service to housing, what reliefs the homeless reception services;

¹⁰ Federatie van Diensten Geestelijke Gezondheidszorg, Steunpunt Algemeen Welzijnswerk, Vereniging van Belgische Steden en Gemeenten, Vlaams Minderhedencentrum and Vlaams Overlegbewonersbelangen.

3. the increase of attention for other needs of homeless persons via co-operation with the OCMWs, youth care, mental health care, disability care and the care at home.

6.2. A more general comment

The proceeding paragraphs learn:

1. that within the framework of the federal state the combat of homelessness evolved from a repressive approach towards a hand-off approach. The recent return of the federal state with the installation grant can only be seen as a weak bid and will not resolve the appearance of homelessness;
2. the role of the state was step by step taken over by homeless services which were founded by different fractions of civil society. Some of these initiatives got recognised and subsidized after often long periods of working without subsidies. The recognised services still get only 2/3 of their financial needs subsidized;
3. after devolution of the unitary Belgium state, the regions had to take over. In a first phase the different services remained standing next to each other without any governmental stimulation to co-operate or merge,
4. following the request of the welfare sector, finally the Flemish government drew the logistic framework for the reorganisation of the sector. Fundamental is that concerning choices on content (what should be done? Where? ...) and organisation, the Flemish state does not say anything. These responsibilities are transferred to the welfare sector itself. Within an envelope and framing criteria the sector is fairly autonomous;
5. congestion learns (1) that the supply of services does not meet the need and (2) that streaming through is not evident. As a consequence local authorities are installing new services next to those founded by the welfare sector and welfare service have founded - with social rental agencies (SRAs) - own entrance to the housing market. These SRAs are now confronted with long waiting lists (Baeck, 2005; VOB, 2005).

The above conclusion is one of a state that does not "like" to be involved with care for the homeless and delegates what should be done to civil society, restricting its own role to legislation and subsidisation. Since there is no reason to believe that the public opinion opposes a more active homeless policy (Philipot & Galand, 2003), it

raises the question: why? Different features are in play. They concern (1) the position of the poor in society, (2) occupation of the state and (3) the separation of housing and homeless policies.

Take the first point. Policies to combat homelessness stand - like special policies to combat poverty and urban policies (De Decker, 2004) - besides the general social security policies, which remain by far the most important social policies. And homeless policies are - when looking at state money going in, the extent of the staff and the number of paragraphs in policy notes - not more than fraying in the fringes. How has this grown? Because power lacks. In order to understand this we pass by Vranken (1974, 1979) who compares the power formation of the poor in the 19th century with today. Although this may sound a little odd, in the 19th century the poor had - as the proletariat - power (e.g. as a consequence of high mortality figures). Because they were a production factor, a labour reserve. This (passive, functional) power could evolve to an active power as soon as trade unions became important and their struggle - often helped by external circumstances like wars and economic growth - could step by step develop to the welfare state we know today. Today, the poor don't have that power anymore since the labour reserve power is imported (since the 1960s an ongoing process) or production is exported. As a consequence, the poor have no power base (anymore).

To be added is the factor of numbers. In the 19th century a large majority of the population was poor and their numbers remained high until the 1960s, implying a serious potential for physical power (which was used by rioting and striking). Today, the poor are a small and splintered group with nearly no possibility to use power. Above that they are easily controllable. As a consequence they cannot pressure politics. They are irrelevant for the functioning of the economy and nearly not dangerous for the functioning of society.

Besides the factor "power" there is the factor "occupation of the state". They have to do with a double path-dependency. One is institutional; the other has to do with the content. With respect to the institutional path-dependency we refer - following Huyse (2003) and Jacquier (div.) - to the "occupation" of the state. We can observe, first, that policies to combat poverty are weak, and second, fairly never followed top down initiatives. Above that, homeless policies are recent. The feature

“recent” is important. What one can call homeless policies (what is basically not more than subsidizing services), emerged in a continuum of time after the development and settlement of the institutions of the welfare state (social consult, health, pensions,...), which themselves came long after the development and settlement of the classical institutions of the state (justice, police, public works, education...). As a consequence new policies (always) enter an already occupied field. This occupation is as well financial, political (old and welfare institutions have their people in parliament) and institutional (via the participation to a numerous consultation arrangements). The sheer existence of this organisational constellation creates a Matthew effect: who already has, gets more. And “the others” – new policy themes – have to be satisfied with the crumbs. On the playground there is hardly any place and the already existing players make no place or demand, thereto enforced by own developments (e.g. own growing needs¹¹ or technological development¹²), more place for themselves. As a consequence new policies get hardly any chance¹³.

But, the “occupation” of the state is not only institutional; it – certainly if we see homelessness partly as a housing problem – also concerns the content. Especially with respect to housing old options hardly change. Since the first housing law, Belgian politics still promote homeownership, quasi ignoring private rental policies and keeping social rental housing residual. Above that renewal policies are lacking. All this together creates a frame for homelessness (De Decker, 2004c).

So, in our search to understand the restricted political efforts to deal with homelessness, we have linked it to (1) the limited power of the poor and (2) the occupation of the state. To be added is the fact that historically and lasting until today housing policies and welfare policies were (and are) complete separated policies. It is only recently that the Flemish government set up a working group bringing together welfare and housing partners. As a consequence, housing policies hardly took attention for homeless persons. Above that social rental housing tries to keep homeless persons out. The current regulation does not foresee any priority

¹¹ For e.g. pensions, but also combat in the global economy.

¹² E.g. rising expenses in health care as a consequence of the introduction of expensive new technologies.

¹³ New themes that seem to break through only when they are located in the slipstream of old policies. Take e.g. a lot of environmental measures. They can because they are in the slipstream of Public Works and belong to the influence field of technical and civil engineers.

entrance for homeless persons and new proposals aim at excluding homelessness completely¹⁴, since homeless persons are equalised to problem tenants (see e.g. De Decker, 2005). As a consequence homeless persons hardly end up in social rental housing (Lescrauwaet, 2005).

In order to resolve that "old problem", welfare organisations in general and homeless services in particular took the initiative and founded social rental agencies (De Decker, 2002). Today these are recognised and subsidized, but they remain small and their impact hardly exceeds a drop on a hot plate (De Decker, 2004c).

7. To conclude

In this contribution we have elaborated on the relation between the Belgian and regional state (Flanders) and homelessness. It shows an evolution from a repressive approach to an approach based on care. On the field this evolution was paralleled with a withdrawal from direct state intervention, compensated by the installation of numerous third sector initiatives. Basically, this initiated a hand-off policy, implying that the (regional) state sticks to the legal framework and the provision of a budget. Choices on the content are left to the ngo's and their umbrella organisation. This approach is clearly illustrated by the 1990s reforms of general welfare work by the Flemish government. On the one hand the government forces the welfare sector to restructure, while at the same time she passes on the responsibilities to welfare work.

Although one can conclude that homelessness is virtually not a social nor a political issues, nevertheless the last few years the number of care places rose, although this number is far too low to cover the needs.

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¹⁴ Today there is no guaranteed priority for homeless person. Nevertheless: a homeless person can enter social housing, but the procedure is 'heavy'.

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