



**CO-OPERATION
BETWEEN ALL RELEVANT BODIES
TO IMPROVE THE FIGHT AGAINST
HOMELESSNESS¹**

Review of the situation in the member states of the European Union

¹ This report is based on 15 national reports produced by FEANTSA's member organisations in the framework of FEANTSA's work programme 2002-2003. The national reports are available on FEANTSA's website <http://www.feantsa.org> This report was approved by FEANTSA's Administrative Council in May 2004.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Co-operation, between and within the public sector and the voluntary sector, (and the private sector), in the different relevant policy areas, is an effective means of strengthening the fight against homelessness**

In countries, where co-operation between the different bodies is underdeveloped, the fight against homelessness tends to be restricted to emergency support. More advanced forms of co-operation result in more comprehensive and integrated approaches and thus potentially more permanent solutions to homelessness. Of course if a more integrated approach is already in place, it will facilitate more advanced forms of co-operation.

- **Political recognition of homelessness as a distinct problem and homeless people as a specific target group of social policy is the starting point for effective co-operation.**

All member states of the EU admit that homelessness is a problem in their country. Several member states, however, do not recognise the value of targeted policies to combat homelessness. In these member states the co-operation between the different actors involved in the fight against homelessness is often less developed. Of course, for an effective approach to homelessness both a universal and targeted approach are required.

- **Co-operation involving the voluntary sector will lead to effective homeless policies.**

To access knowledge and expertise on homelessness, public authorities should co-operate with voluntary organisations. A great deal of knowledge, expertise, and innovative approaches are to be found in the voluntary sector.

- **It is unrealistic to expect effective co-operation to develop without extra financial resources**

Effective co-operation requires additional resources. But permanent answers to homelessness are best developed through effective co-operation. The choice is really between ineffective homeless policies at a lower initial cost and effective homeless policies at a higher cost in short term but cost effective in the longer term.

- **Inter-departmental co-operation in the government facilitates and promotes trans-sectoral co-operation in the voluntary sector.**

In countries where the different departments of the government work together to develop and implement homeless policies, voluntary organisations are more likely to engage in trans-sectoral co-operation. In some countries, however, strong co-operation among voluntary organisations might influence or encourage inter-departmental co-operation in the government.

- ✓ **A strong political commitment to addressing and reducing homelessness promotes and strengthens co-operation.**

In countries where governments have set clear and measurable objectives in the fight against homelessness, co-operation is usually much stronger.

II. THE ACTORS

1. CO-OPERATION

BETWEEN

PUBLIC AUTHORITIES AND THE VOLUNTARY HOMELESS SECTOR

In all EU member states there exists co-operation between the public authorities and the voluntary homeless sector. The scope and the nature of this co-operation, however, vary a lot.

THE PUBLIC AUTHORITIES AS FUNDERS

Public funding for services to the homeless is the most basic form of co-operation between public authorities and the voluntary homeless sector.

In some member states – such as Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy – this would generally be the only form of co-operation between public authorities and voluntary organisations.

In Italy the public authorities generally award contracts for the provision of services through public calls for tender. Financial criteria often prevail in the selection of the service provider. This worrying practice – which obviously affects the quality of the services and the success of the fight against homelessness – is also becoming more common in other member states.

In some member states – such as Greece – the funding provided by the State is so insufficient that most homeless services are funded by private donations and managed by volunteers. It is clear that this also affects the quality of the service provision.

In member states, where the role of the public authorities is restricted to the provision of funding, lower levels of public funds are made available compared to member states, where the co-operation between the public and voluntary sector is more developed. This is probably because stronger co-operation leads to a better understanding of the problem of homelessness and a more realistic idea of the costs of effective solutions.

In many countries the State Lotteries provide some additional funding to fight homelessness – often for specific projects of limited duration. In Finland, however, the Slot Machine Association (RAY), which has an exclusive right to operate slot machines and runs a casino, is an important source of structural financial support for the voluntary homeless sector. The objective of RAY is to promote the health and social welfare of the people in Finland – with a particular focus on the most excluded – through funding voluntary organisation and relevant projects. On a yearly basis RAY invests about 20 million € in combating and preventing homelessness. Although RAY was originally created by the NGOs, the allocation of funding is now controlled by the state. (<http://www.ray.fi> -- English version available)

In several countries – such as the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, and Denmark – most of the voluntary homeless organisations would be entirely funded by the public authorities. In countries, where local authorities are often the main or only source of funding (e.g. The Netherlands), there is a danger that local authorities may prioritise the immediate needs of the local community (e.g. the fear of disruption of public order by homeless people) and therefore not invest in lasting solutions. Some local authorities might even be reluctant to offer good quality services, because it could attract homeless people to the local area.

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AS POLICY MAKERS

In most EU member states, the voluntary sector is involved in public policy making. Often this involvement does not go beyond a mere consultative role for the voluntary sector. Substantial knowledge and expertise concerning homelessness is found in the voluntary sector and therefore the public authorities need and benefit from this kind of co-operation.

In most member states, voluntary homeless organisations are represented in relevant consultative bodies created by the government (in the areas of housing, social welfare, health, etc.) at the different levels of public policy making.

In Finland and Scotland the government created a specific working group with the sole aim of developing an integrated strategy to combat homelessness. In these working groups the voluntary homeless sector is represented as well as public authorities, researchers, and other relevant actors. The different members of the working group co-operate as equal partners. In both Scotland and Finland the creation of such working groups has contributed to the development of homeless policies – which are considered to be amongst the best policies in Europe.

In particular the working group that was set up in Scotland – the Task Force on Homelessness – could serve as an example. The Task Force developed the Homeless Strategy, and the cross-sectoral homeless monitoring group monitors, evaluates and adjusts the strategy. (For more information on the Scottish working group visit <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/homelessness/>)

In countries, where homelessness is not recognised as a distinct public policy issue, it is much more difficult for homeless organisations to become members of official consultative bodies. In Italy, for instance, only very few homeless organisations managed to get a place in the consultative bodies that prepare the important regional action plans for social welfare – even though the fight against homelessness should be part of these plans.

VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS AS ACTORS IMPLEMENTING HOMELESS POLICY

In all EU member states which have a defined homeless policy, voluntary organisations are players, implementing this policy through the provision of shelter, employment opportunities, etc.

The role of the public authorities in the provision of services to homeless people is limited. In some countries – such as Greece - public authorities run hostels and shelters themselves, but this is rather unusual.

In Sweden, the local authorities are obliged by law to work with voluntary organisations for the implementation of homeless policies.

In Denmark, the law on social services (§110) also includes an obligation to co-operate with the voluntary sector. This same law also regulates the funding for the voluntary homeless sector. In Denmark the network of voluntary homeless service providers is even named after the paragraph related to homelessness in the social welfare law (SBS § 94). The very close co-operation with the public authorities in Denmark makes the voluntary homeless sector almost semi-public.

Because of its size Luxembourg is a particular case. The relevant Ministry is directly involved with service provision at local level. Until recently representatives of the Ministry were on the management board of voluntary service providers.

In a few member states, voluntary organisations are in fact in a very good negotiating position, because they are able to *sell* their services to local authorities and to retain control over the quality and the nature of the services in order to meet specified targets. For example, the Finnish government made a firm commitment to substantially reducing the numbers of homeless people and worked with organisations in this manner to ensure that targets were met. This type of strong commitment means that these voluntary organisations are in a unique and rather powerful position vis-à-vis the public authorities.

This paper does not cover the accession states, but we want to stress that in general, the role of the public authorities as providers of care (often emergency care) in the former *Eastern Bloc* countries is still relatively important.

2. CO-OPERATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT LEVELS AND AREAS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

➤ CO-OPERATION ACROSS DIFFERENT LEVELS OF POLICY-MAKING

In most EU member states, there is co-operation between the different levels of public policy-making. The framework for homeless policies is normally designed at national level and the implementation of the policies is organised at local level. In some federal countries – such as Belgium, the UK and Austria – the regional governments develop the policy framework for fighting homelessness.

In only a few countries, is there a legal framework defining the roles and responsibilities of the different public policy levels for combating homelessness.

In Scotland, the Housing Act of 2001 obliges all local authorities to assess homelessness and develop a homeless strategy. The Act furthermore states that local authorities are obliged to provide (temporary) housing for a reasonable period for homeless people. Such a strong legal obligation is unique in the European Union. Scotland also has a

statutory basis for its integrated homeless strategy – the Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Act 2003. For more information please visit the Scottish Executive's website on <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/?pageID=149#>

In all countries (with the exception of Luxembourg (see above) and France) local authorities are in practice the most important public actors in the fight against homelessness. In some policy areas, the role of local authorities goes beyond the role of promoter and regulator of service provision for the homeless. In Finland, for instance, the local authorities own most of the social housing stock and are therefore key partners of the voluntary homeless sector to secure access to housing for homeless people.

CO-OPERATION ACROSS DIFFERENT AREAS OF PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING

An effective strategy to combat homelessness covers a number of public policy areas – such as housing, employment, education, health, and justice. Responsibility for these policy areas is often divided between different levels (national, regional, local) and different segments of public policy-making (e.g. ministries, departments). In an effective homelessness strategy, the relevant levels and segments of public policy-making should work closely together. In most member states, however, this is still a distant prospect.

In many countries there is very little – and certainly no formal co-operation – between the different segments of public policy-making at national level in order to combat homelessness.

In almost all countries, there is one ministry leading the fight against homelessness. Most often, the Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for or leading the fight against homelessness. This is the case in countries such as France, Austria, Denmark, and Germany. In a few countries – such as Finland and Ireland - the Ministry responsible for Housing is co-ordinating the fight against homelessness. This explains why in most countries homelessness is considered to be first and foremost a social welfare problem rather than primarily a housing problem.

In some countries, there is no Ministry taking responsibility for homelessness. This is the case for countries such as Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Greece.

In a few countries – such as the UK (Scotland, Wales, and England) – homelessness falls under the responsibilities of Ministries with a wider brief. In Scotland the Minister of Communities is leading the fight against homelessness, in England it is the Deputy Prime Minister, and in Wales the Minister responsible for the local authorities is co-ordinating homeless policies. There is a risk that Ministers without a specific attachment to homelessness will not devote the necessary attention and resources. However, a Ministry in this co-ordinating capacity can better bring together the relevant government actors.

In most countries the co-operation is very complicated, because the policy areas that relate to homelessness fall under the competence of different levels of public policy-making. In most countries, the national authorities are entirely responsible for policy areas such as justice, public security, asylum, social protection, but have no role or only a partial role in policy areas such as housing, employment, and health. Therefore local authorities, who in most countries are the key actors in the fight against homelessness, often have to overcome the negative implications of decisions taken at higher levels of policy-making, although these have no, or an unclear role, regarding homelessness.

However, in several countries local authorities either fail to implement appropriate and necessary policies decided at regional or national level, or simply fail to take the initiative and develop measures under their own brief.

The co-operation is even more complicated in many countries because for certain policy areas related to homelessness the responsibilities are shared between different levels of public policy-making. In the area of health, for instance, the responsibility is often shared between the national level (public health insurance), the intermediate or regional level (e.g. mental health care, hospitals), and the local level (e.g. outpatient care).

The complex distribution of responsibilities between different levels and segments of public policy-making in virtually all member states proves the need for a strong national (if possible legal) framework for the fight against homelessness. If such a framework does not exist, it is less likely that co-operation will be effective at the level of public policy and it is also probable that co-operation in the voluntary sector will be less well developed.

II. THE POLICY AREAS

Homelessness is a multi-dimensional problem. Therefore effective policies addressing homelessness must include actions in different policy areas. For the purpose of this paper we have limited the policy areas to housing, employment, health, justice and immigration. Other important policy areas – such as education and culture – are not included in this paper.

1. HOUSING

It is generally accepted that an effective homeless strategy must include policy actions in the area of housing. Deficiencies in the housing market are becoming an ever more direct cause of homelessness.

Housing providers are key players in the fight against homelessness. Therefore the voluntary homeless sector needs to co-operate with the housing providers. In many member states, however, this co-operation is far from being self-evident.

The housing options for homeless people are obviously very limited. In most countries the public authorities and/or the social housing associations play an important role in offering lasting housing solutions for homeless people. In some member states the private housing sector is also involved in the fight against homelessness. But the involvement of the latter sector is often marginal, considering the scope of the homelessness problem in these states.

CO-OPERATION WITH THE PRIVATE HOUSING SECTOR

In most countries the co-operation between the voluntary homeless sector and the private sector is negligible.

Because of lack of sufficient social/public housing in most member states, many homeless people have no other option than to find housing *solutions* in the private housing market. Most of the *private* dwellings available for homeless people, however, are of very bad quality and often lack even the minimum level of security of tenure. In some countries, the private housing market is a last resort – but a totally inappropriate resort - for homeless people.

Cooperation between voluntary and private sectors

In some countries, however, there exist examples of proper co-operation between the voluntary homeless sector and private landlords.

In particular in countries with a small social/public housing sector – such as Spain and Belgium – voluntary organisations try to access the private rental housing market for homeless people who might be difficult to house without additional support. These organisations – often called *social rental agencies* – act as the intermediary between the private landlords and the tenants by guaranteeing the payment of the rent and by often also by providing support to the tenants in order to avoid anti-social behaviour.

In several countries, these social rental agencies receive public funding: Agences immobilières à vocation sociale (AIVS) in France; Agences immobilières sociales (AIS) in Belgium and Wunnengshëllef in Luxemburg. The public authorities focus too often, however, on rent subsidies and do not provide enough funding to allow the social rental agencies to provide the much needed social support for the tenants.

In Spain, voluntary organisations accessing the private housing market for difficult to house tenants – such as Provivienda (national) and Prohabitage (Catalonia) – are amongst the most important players in the fight against homelessness.

Co-operation between public authorities and private sector

In most countries there is no direct co-operation between the public authorities and the private sector. There might be an indirect form of co-operation through public funding for social rental agencies (see above).

In many countries, in particular in countries where there exists a legal obligation to house certain categories of homeless people – such as in Ireland and the UK, the local authorities often rely on providers of bed & breakfast (B &B) accommodation and other private low-budget accommodation to provide temporary housing for homeless people. In most countries B&B accommodation is not considered as an adequate long-term solution. In Ireland, however, the local authorities in Dublin are currently considering entering a public-private partnership with owners of B&Bs to house homeless people on a longer-term basis.

➤ CO-OPERATION WITH SOCIAL HOUSING SECTOR

In most countries, the social housing associations play an important role in housing homeless people. There might be co-operation between public authorities and social housing associations, but most often the co-operation is between the voluntary homeless sector and the social housing associations.

Co-operation between voluntary homeless sector and the social housing sector

The scope and nature of the co-operation between the voluntary homeless sector and the social housing sector varies considerably in the different member states.

In Ireland, the co-operation is probably the most structured and advanced. There is not a clear distinction – as in many other countries – between a sector providing services for the homeless and a sector providing social housing. All major NGOs providing services for homeless people – such as Simon Communities of Ireland and St Vincent de Paul – are registered social landlords. Also NGOs, which only provide shelter for homeless people, need to be officially registered as social landlords. It is interesting to note that in Ireland an important part of the present social housing sector originates from the voluntary care sector. The Irish umbrella of social housing associations includes all major NGOs working with homeless people. Because of the thin line between voluntary homeless organisations and social housing providers, co-operation happens as a matter of course.

Ireland is one of the EU member states where the housing dimension of policies addressing homelessness is most developed. The homeless are defined by law as one of the key target groups of the social housing sector next to disabled and older people.

Also in Finland, one of the main actors fighting homelessness is a housing organisation (Y-Foundation). With public funding Y-Foundation purchases dwellings for homeless people and organises or sub-contracts the social support for its homeless tenants throughout Finland.

In several countries, there is some sort of structured co-operation between the voluntary homeless sector and the social housing sector at the national or regional level.

In France, for instance, the respective umbrellas of the voluntary homeless sector (FNARS) and the social housing associations (Union Sociale pour l'Habitat) sign agreements about the number of dwellings to be allocated to homeless people in certain regions of the country.

In some other countries, the co-operation is not structured at national level, but takes place in the framework of specific projects. In the Netherlands, for instance, the national umbrella of social housing associations (Aedes) funds projects on the prevention of eviction and supported housing for the homeless, in which the national umbrella of homeless organisations (Federatie Opvang) is involved. The aim of these projects is to develop more structured co-operation in the future.

In a few countries – such as Germany – co-operation with social housing associations is very difficult. The voluntary homeless sector in Germany (BAWohnungslosenhilfe) is of the opinion that, without a clear legal framework, such co-operation cannot be advantageous for the voluntary homeless sector nor for the homeless.

At local level there often exists co-operation between organisations working with homeless people and local housing associations. In several member states – such as Ireland, the Netherlands, and Belgium – some local social housing associations reserve a certain number of social dwellings (quota) for homeless people (clients of organisations working with homeless people or referrals by local authorities). In many cases the organisations working with homeless people continue to provide support to their former clients.

Co-operation between the public authorities and the social housing sector

In many member states, social housing associations are only an indirect partner of the public authorities in the fight against homelessness. There are only a few countries – such as Ireland and the UK – where social housing associations are directly involved in developing and/or implementing public homeless strategies.

In most countries, the social housing sector would not consider the homeless as a (primary) target group. In some countries the social housing associations would even be reluctant to provide housing for the homeless. One of the main reasons for this is probably the pressure on social housing associations to become more financially independent, which forces them to revise their allocation policies and target more middle-income groups of the population.

There are however a few exceptions.

In Denmark there exists an agreement between the national umbrella of local authorities and the social housing sector, which gives the local authorities the right to allocate at least 25% of the vacant social dwellings.

Scotland is probably one of the only *countries* (i.e. region with fully developed competences to address homelessness in an integrated manner) in the EU where the social housing associations have the legal duty to assist local authorities in implementing their local homeless strategies (see Housing Act 2001). In principle, a housing association is obliged to house every homeless person referred to it by the local authority. Local housing associations were involved in the development of the Scottish homeless strategy and play an important role in tackling homelessness.

✓ CO-OPERATION WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

In several countries – such as Finland, Ireland, Austria, and the UK – the local authorities are the main providers of affordable housing. In these countries the voluntary homeless sector works closely with the local authorities to get access to housing for their clients.

In Ireland, the public authorities are primarily responsible for housing homeless people. Some local authorities reserve up to one third of their housing vacancies for homeless families.

In some of the countries with an important public housing sector – in particular in the UK – the public authorities transferred substantial parts of their housing stock to registered social landlords. This complicates the fight against homelessness, because the local authorities need to rely on a third party to address homelessness effectively.

In Scotland, the transfer of public housing stock and the tightening of the homeless legislation happened at the same time. The new legislation obliges social landlords to house homeless people referred to them (see above). The legislation should ensure that the transfer of public housing stock does not substantially limit the housing options for the homeless.

2. HEALTH

A large section of the homeless population suffers from bad health conditions. In particular mental health problems are prevalent amongst homeless people. In order to fight homelessness effectively, the health problems of homeless people need to be addressed as well. This requires specific professional expertise, which is often not, or only partly, available in the voluntary homeless sector. Co-operation with the health sector is therefore required.

✓ CO-OPERATION IN GENERAL

In several countries – such as Denmark, UK, Sweden and France (Couverture médicale universelle - CMU) – basic health care is free for everybody, including the homeless. In

other countries, basic health care is available at low cost and often special measures exist to ensure access to basic care for people on low incomes. In practice, however, in all countries there are obstacles that prevent homeless people from accessing mainstream health care provision.

Therefore specific initiatives are necessary to address the health problems of the homeless. Most of these initiatives are undertaken by the voluntary homeless sector – sometimes in co-operation with the established health sector. These initiatives on the part of the voluntary sector are in fact the result of the failure of the health care institutions to live up to their obligation to make their services accessible for ALL members of society, including the homeless.

There are only few examples of formal co-operation agreements between the voluntary homeless sector and the health sector. Very often the co-operation is organised between individual organisations at local level.

An interesting example of co-operation at local level has been initiated by the voluntary homeless sector in Mainz in Germany. Homeless services work very closely with general practitioners, hospitals, public health bodies, and local and regional authorities to provide mobile and stationary health care for the homeless. The approach is known as the *Mainzer model* in Germany. (For more information see <http://home.main-rheiner.de/armut.gesundheit/>)

Scotland is the only country that has developed a statutory health and homelessness strategy. As part of the strategy the NHS (National Health Service) Boards have to develop a Health and Homelessness Action Plan as an integral part of the Local Health Plan, in partnership with local authorities, the voluntary sector and homeless people. The Action Plans need to be clearly linked to the Local Authorities' Homelessness Strategies.

In Ireland, the Health Boards (statutory bodies responsible for planning, arranging, overseeing and co-ordinating health and personal social services) often work together with the voluntary homeless sector to organise health care for homeless people at the regional level. Unlike in Scotland, there is no statutory framework for addressing the health problems of the homeless.

In some countries – like Italy for instance – the public health care providers are reluctant to treat homeless people. The main role of the voluntary homeless sector is mediating between homeless people and the care providers. It is clear that genuine co-operation is not possible if the voluntary homeless sector is always pushed in the (weaker) role of mediator.

✓ **GENERAL MEDICAL CARE**

Homeless people encounter several obstacles when trying to access basic health care on their own. For this reason, most shelters and hostels co-operate with general practitioners. Only a few hostels have a permanent medical staff. This co-operation is important to prevent medical emergencies amongst homeless people, who tend to accumulate health problems.

In the Netherlands, for instance, the health department of the local authorities usually organise, in co-operation with the voluntary homeless sector, regular visits of general practitioners in shelters and hostels.

✓ DENTAL CARE

Tooth decay is a common problem amongst homeless people, but in probably all member states, homeless people experience serious difficulties when trying to receive dental care. In most countries dental care is not, or is only minimally, covered by public health insurance.

There exists no formally organised co-operation between homeless organisations and dentists. Most of the existing initiatives are voluntary and get little or no public funding.

In Sweden, for instance, the voluntary homeless sector has created the *national network of dentists and doctors against homelessness*.

In 2001 in The Hague in the Netherlands, a dental care service was set up specifically targeting homeless people. This service works well because of the effective networking between public health insurers, the local authority, dentists, and local homeless organisations.

✓ MENTAL HEALTH

In many countries, the staff of hostels and shelters for homeless includes at least one psychologist. There is often good co-operation with external psychiatrists, who normally visit the shelter or hostel at regular times. In some countries – such as France – it is normal practice that an external psychiatrist attends the staff meeting of the hostels and shelters.

In several countries – such as Germany – the mental health problems of homeless people do not receive sufficient attention. The staff of the voluntary homeless sector is often not adequately trained to identify and/or address the mental health problems of their clients. At the same time it is very difficult to rely on the established mental health actors, because they are often unwilling to help homeless people and their staff does usually not have a thorough understanding of the problem of homelessness. This mutual lack of the expertise complicates co-operation between the mental health sector and the voluntary homeless sector.

In other countries – such as the Netherlands and Luxembourg – there exists effective structural co-operation between homeless organisations and the mental health sector. This co-operation mostly includes screening of clients of homeless hostels and sometimes also the training of the staff of homeless hostels in the area of mental health.

The networking between the voluntary homeless sector and the organised mental health sector is often not sufficient to provide homeless people suffering from mental illnesses with adequate long-term housing solutions. In Luxembourg and France the government funds *appartements thérapeutiques* as a sustainable solution. Co-operation between the homeless organisations, mental health organisations, organisations specialised in

addiction problems, and housing associations is of key importance for the success of the *appartements thérapeutiques*.

In Finland, Y-Foundation provides housing for homeless people with mental health problems. The Y-Foundation works together with other organisations to provide the social support. A formal co-operation agreement exists between Y-Foundation, the Finnish association of mental health and the local authorities of several urban areas, in which the roles of each actor are clearly defined. The local authorities provide the funding, Y-Foundation provides the housing, and the Finnish association provides the social support. Such a formal framework for co-operation between the homeless sector and the mental health sector is relatively unique in the European Union.

A similar agreement exists in the Netherlands between the national network of local authorities and the national network of the health boards of the local authorities, the national mental health care association and the voluntary homeless sector. This national agreement provides the framework for local actions to provide mental health care and housing for very vulnerable groups including the homeless.

In some countries – such as Spain – there exists co-operation between local authorities, homeless organisations and care providers, to address the mental health problems of rough sleepers only. The objective of the co-operation is very limited and consists of removing rough sleepers from the street into recognised and specialised hostels.

✓ ADDICTION

Many homeless people suffer from addiction problems. In most countries the co-operation between different sectors to address these problems is rather difficult.

In the Netherlands, there are some very interesting initiatives regarding drug related problems. There exists effective co-operation between the health departments of cities and homeless organisations for the provision of outreach services. The creation of *user rooms* is of particular interest in this regard. In *user rooms* long term drug addicts find a safe and sanitary space where they can use heroin which is supplied free of charge. The *user rooms* provide good opportunities for social workers and health services to reach out to very *difficult* clients and start a reintegration process.

According to the same approach, homeless service providers together with the health departments of cities or mental health services created shelters in which addicted clients are allowed to continue using drugs.

Evaluation of both projects proved that the health situation of the clients improved considerably.

3. EMPLOYMENT

Employment is often cited as the main tool for a successful reintegration of vulnerable groups in society. A substantial part of the homeless population is indeed unemployed. Most unemployed homeless people are not easily employable. Very often special

initiatives have to be developed to provide access to normal, or supported, employment for homeless people. Developing employability is very important. However, it must be accepted that some individuals will never be able to take up either supported or mainstream employment, and therefore other activities must be available to them. Networking with other sectors makes these initiatives more effective and sustainable.

✓ **GENERAL EMPLOYMENT MEASURES**

In all member states there exists specific public policies to facilitate access to employment for vulnerable groups. There are often several actors involved in developing and implementing these policies – such as national employment agencies, social welfare organisations, trade unions, employers and public authorities. The German *employment alliances* are worth mentioning here. The voluntary homeless sector is very much present in these alliances, which play a key role in Germany's employment policies.

It goes beyond the scope of this paper to describe the more general public employment measures targeted at vulnerable people. It is, however, rather common in the different countries that these general employment measures do not reach most of homeless people. It seems to be necessary to develop initiatives, which specifically target the homeless. Such initiatives exist, but are certainly not very widespread.

✓ **ROLE OF PRIVATE EMPLOYERS**

In most countries, employers in the private sector would not be considered as relevant partners to provide jobs for homeless people. In the UK, however, major employers in the private sector seek to employ homeless people and offer them additional support during their training. Several initiatives have been developed to facilitate access to jobs offered by private employers for homeless people.

Business Action on Homelessness (BAOH) is a probably unique partnership, in the European Union, between leading businesses, homelessness agencies and the Government. The campaign was launched in 1998 to change the perceptions which companies have of homelessness and to assist homeless people, through business support, in gaining employment and independent living.

The Ready for Jobs online job bank (<http://www.readyforjobs.co.uk>) is a successful initiative of BAOH. Ready for Jobs is the only online job bank for people affected by homelessness. It gives 'job-ready' homeless individuals the opportunity to secure quality employment and employers the chance to address the homelessness issue by adding their job vacancies to the site.

For many homeless people, undeclared work is the only immediate option in order to access the labour market. It is clear that the voluntary homeless sector does not consider private employers offering undeclared work for homeless people as valuable partners (even if some homeless people might be worse off without the insecure and underpaid jobs offered).

✓ **THE ROLE OF PUBLIC AUTHORITIES**

Public authorities as funders

In several countries the voluntary homeless sector cannot find genuinely interested partners to facilitate access to employment for their clients. In most countries, the government tries to stimulate employers to recruit vulnerable people through all kinds of financial incentives (mostly tax reductions). But often these measures do not reach the homeless.

In a few countries, the government does not even take on this minimal role. In Italy, for instance, the government does not offer financial incentives – not even to social co-operatives – to employ very vulnerable groups.

In a number of countries, the voluntary homeless sector therefore developed initiatives of their own. Many shelters and hostels developed internally possibilities for their clients to acquire some work experiences (gardening, wood work, recycling, etc.). In some countries – such as France and the UK – there exists organisations (the so-called *Foyers*), which offer accommodation and employment support as one single *integration package* – in particular for young homeless people.

In only a few countries, the government has made substantial financial resources available for specific employment projects targeting very vulnerable groups – including the homeless.

The Dutch government earmarked some 20 million € for experimental projects for the reactivation of very excluded groups of the population (during 2000 –2003). Only local authorities could apply for funding. The government's initiative was a huge success – more than 400 local authorities participated. The projects facilitated and promoted co-operation between the local authorities, local employment offices and social welfare organisations – including many voluntary homeless organisations. Many projects offered homeless people new and more sustainable employment options (including meaningful occupation). In spite of the success of the experimental projects, the new social assistance law (2004) has not taken account of the often limited potential and support needs of the most vulnerable persons in terms of employment.

A similar initiative exists in Scotland called the New Futures Fund. The NFF supports projects, which aim to integrate very excluded groups of society into the employment market. The homeless are one of the groups targeted by the NFF. Although many project are undertaken by NGOs, co-operation with different partners is less a feature of projects funded by NFF. For more info see http://www.scottish-enterprise.com/sedotcom_home/stp/extra-support/newfuturesfund1.htm. A short description of the projects funded can be found on this website.

It is common throughout Europe that employment measures for homeless people be funded through projects, which are limited in time. Structural financial support for the employment of homeless people and other vulnerable groups is very rare.

In France, the local plans for social integration and employment (Plans locaux pluriannuels pour l'insertion et l'emploi – better known under the acronym PLIE) are an attempt to provide this structural support. The local authorities are the initiators of the plans, which target people who suffer from serious social and employment problems. The local authorities work very closely together with private and social employers, social welfare organisations, public employment agencies and other relevant actors. The transsectoral and the multi-annual approach of the PLIE's has strengthened employment

policies for very excluded groups. For more info see website of the Ministry of Employment <http://www.travail.gouv.fr>

Statutory role of public authorities

As we highlighted above, financial co-operation in the area of employment between the voluntary homeless sector and public authorities is relatively well developed in the majority of the member states. The public authorities are rather keen to invest in this kind of co-operation with the voluntary homeless sector – probably also because of the *likely* savings on the public budget in the longer run.

In most countries, local authorities are the driving forces behind employment programmes for vulnerable groups and for the homeless more specifically.

In some countries – such as Denmark and Finland – the local authorities have a legal duty to develop (*social*) *activation* measures for all unemployment people. The local authorities in Denmark are obliged to co-operate with the voluntary homeless sector (registered under §94 of the Social Welfare Legislation) for the development of individual *activation* plans for homeless people. Because the very limited suitable employment places that the local authorities can offer, most *activation* initiatives are created in the voluntary homeless sector.

✓ **THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL EMPLOYERS**

In all European countries there are *social employers*, who offer jobs to the excluded groups of society. In several countries the social economy sector is strictly regulated by the State. Co-operation between the voluntary homeless sector and social employers exists in most countries. In some countries, this co-operation is strongly developed.

In France, for instance, a national organisation (Ménage-Service -- <http://www.ménage-service.com>) was created, which offers very excluded people job opportunities in the different areas such as cleaning, childcare, older people's care, and maintenance. The success of Ménage-Service is based on strong networking between the voluntary homeless sector (FNARS), networks of social employers, and public authorities. It is interesting to note that the initiator and the driving force behind Ménage-Service is the voluntary homeless sector.

It is impossible within the limited scope of this paper to discuss the social economy in great detail. It is important to stress, however, that in most countries *social employers* target disabled people first and foremost. Co-operation with the voluntary homeless sector is rather limited and happens often at local level on a voluntary basis without a clear legal and political framework.

✓ **THE ROLE OF THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR**

In a few countries the voluntary sector has developed networks to provide employment opportunities for their homeless clients.

In the UK the voluntary homeless sector set up *Off the Streets into Work* (OSW) – a partnership of agencies that provide employment training, advice, and guidance to homeless people in London. OSW brings together different actors such as the voluntary

homeless sector, public authorities, public and private employment services, and organisations of homeless people. Mainly because of the strong partnership and the targeted approach, OSW is rather successful. For more information see <http://www.osw.org.uk/>

4. IMMIGRATION

The voluntary homeless sector is confronted with the effects of inadequate public immigration policies. A growing part of the clients of services for the homeless are immigrants.² Often, homeless services are not equipped and lack the expertise to take care of this growing number of immigrants. Asylum seekers turn to homeless services due to the lack of adequate asylum accommodation. Provision of services to undocumented immigrants is illegal in a number of countries. Improved coordination between the voluntary homeless sector and the *immigration sector* is necessary.

✓ ASYLUM SEEKERS

In many countries, the public authorities do not provide enough adequate reception facilities and as a consequence more and more asylum seekers have no other option than to seek help in the voluntary homeless sector. Effective co-operation between the *asylum sector* and the voluntary homeless sector is necessary to offer asylum seekers adequate and sustainable solutions to their problems.

In most countries, there is no co-operation – not even informal co-operation – between organisations working with asylum seekers and the voluntary homeless sector. The reception of asylum seekers is normally organised completely by the public authorities. In most countries the public authorities are not interested in close co-operation with the homeless sector. This would imply the admittance that their asylum policies are deficient. Most voluntary homeless organisations, on the contrary, are very interested in closer co-operation.

✓ REFUGEES

Co-operation between the voluntary homeless sector and the *asylum sector* would also be valuable in order to prevent homelessness amongst refugees. It is generally accepted that refugees run a great risk of becoming homeless.

In Finland, the Y-Foundation, a major organisation providing housing for homeless people, works closely together with local authorities to house refugees. We believe this co-operation is rather unique in the European Union. In Denmark, the local authorities are obliged to offer housing to refugees for three years, but they do not co-operate with the homeless sector for this purpose.

✓ UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

² See for more information FEANTSA's background document and policy statement on the relation between immigration and homelessness (2003) on FEANTSA's website <http://www.feantsa.org>.

Undocumented immigrants are the fastest growing group of immigrants amongst the clients of homeless services. In most countries undocumented immigrants are denied access to the most fundamental human rights. In some countries – such as Greece – helping undocumented immigrants is even a punishable act. As a consequence, in most member states there exists no structured sector of organisations working with undocumented immigrants and therefore co-operation with this sector is very difficult. Most voluntary homeless organisations would be supportive of closer co-operation with public authorities to address the problems caused by the growing number of undocumented immigrants amongst their clients. But it is difficult for public policy-makers to co-operate on a problem that officially does not exist.

France is one of the very few countries where the government tries to ensure respect for the most fundamental human rights of undocumented immigrants. Undocumented immigrants can find temporary housing solutions in the CHU's (Centre d'Hébergement d'Urgence), which are hostels where homeless people can stay for a short time. The CHU's receive public funding according to the number of clients – including undocumented clients. It is exceptional that the homeless sector receives adequate funding for the accommodation of people without a legal status – especially on such a scale.

5. JUSTICE

In most member states there exist informal – and sometimes even formal co-operation – between the voluntary homeless sector and the *justice sector*. Co-operation happens mostly in areas such as domestic violence, criminality and release from prison.

✓ DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Women especially, are victims of domestic violence. In some countries battered women are considered to be homeless, in other countries they are considered at risk of becoming homeless.

In some countries – such as the Netherlands – the organisations working with homeless people and the organisations working with battered women form one single sector, which makes co-operation between both types of organisations easier and more effective.

In only a few countries does genuine transsectoral co-operation exist to address and prevent homelessness as a result of domestic violence. This co-operation is mostly informal and organised at local level.

In the Netherlands, however, a national taskforce was set up involving all relevant players – such as hostels, police, mental health organisations, organisation providing care for young people – to develop an integrated approach to domestic violence. Such an approach provides battered woman with a place to stay, security, psychological counselling, etc. The taskforce promotes the creation of local partnerships to address domestic violence and thus prevent homelessness amongst women.

✓ **RELEASE FROM PRISON**

It is generally known that people released from prison run a high risk of becoming homeless. In order to reduce this risk, the voluntary homeless sector co-operates closely with prisons. In almost all countries such co-operation exists, although it is mostly informal co-operation without any national or regional guidance.

In France, co-operation between homeless organisations and prisons is particularly well developed. There exist agreements between the Ministry of Justice and the umbrella organisation of the voluntary homeless sector (FNARS). It is common practice in France that directors of hostels for homeless people have a seat on the supervisory boards of prisons (*Commissions de Surveillance*).

In Scotland NGO's provide independent housing advice to prisoners in order to facilitate access to housing for prisoners upon release.

In Finland, there exists a rather unique form of co-operation between the local authorities, housing companies and social welfare organisations to for the integration of people to be released from prison who have addictions problems. The prisoners receive treatment and training to facilitate access to the employment market and are guaranteed accommodation upon release. The project is small but the initial results are very promising.

✓ **CRIMINALITY**

In most countries the police co-operate with homeless organisations to address and reduce criminal or anti-social behaviour amongst homeless people. It needs to be stressed that homeless organisations often do not feel very comfortable about this co-operation, which they often consider as being forced upon them.

✓ **OTHER**

In some countries there exist quite original examples of co-operation with the *justice sector*. It is worth mentioning that in Italy the voluntary sector works informally with lawyers to defend their clients in legal cases.
