

Quality standards in social services from the perspective of services working with homeless people

Špela Razpotnik,
Kings of the street (Association for help and self-help of homeless)
Slovenia

1. Organization and funding of homeless services

1.1. Legislation

Is there any legislation or policy which focuses specifically on homeless services provision?

Homelessness and legislation: Homeless are mentioned in strategic documents such as Resolution on national programme of social protection from 2006–2010 (ReNPSV06-10), p. 4192 where homeless individuals are listed as one of the vulnerable groups who need the special treatment/care (strategy G, 1st Aim).

Under “**Public social protection services**” of the Resolution on national programme of social protection from 2006–2010 (ReNPSV06-10) the network of shelters for homeless people with common national capacity of at least 250 beds is provided; besides it 80 beds in shelters for homeless drug users is provided.

Homeless people were mentioned in national programme of combating poverty and social exclusions (since 2000).

Ministry for family, labour and social affairs (MFLSA, <http://www.mddsz.gov.si/>) is in charge for implementing “**The Social Security Act**” (slo. *zakon o socialnem varstvu*). Tasks under this law are carried out by public institutions, listed below:

62 centers for social work (CSW)

55 homes for retired,

7 special institutions for adults,

5 social care institutions for the training of children and adolescents with severe, severe or serious mental disorder

40 protection-work centers,

8 emergency (crisis) centres for minors

[\(More here\)](#)

The Social Security Act sets also many forms of “social protection services”, which have to be available to individuals, families or specific social groups for helping them overcome personal difficulties, to offer them provision, protection and education. Social services are provided with aim of:

- Preventing social distress and difficulties
- Solving social distress and difficulties

Social Security Act predicts also social prevention of social difficulties for individuals, families or specific groups of population.

For solving social difficulties and distress the law (11 to 18 article) predicts several types of services that include:

- individual counselling, to which everyone in need of help on the territory of Slovenia is entitled
- family assistance
- institutional care, which includes all forms of aid in the institution, in another family or according other organized format. The purpose of such protection is that an adult or children who needs protection, replacement or supplement the function of own home and family, and especially the provision of food, protection and health care. Institutional care is organized in the public social welfare institutions and other social welfare institutions
- organized care management and care and employment under special conditions of adults physically and mentally disabled are being carried out in occupational activity centers, which have the status of public social welfare institution
- support for workers in enterprises, institutions and other employers in solving personal problems related to work

Social Security Act defines service provision as a right, which means that the individual who needs a certain service can claim the right to service after the provided procedure. Right to benefits (e.g. services) follow principles of equal access, freedom of choice and the principles of social justice.

Social Security Act (in article 41.b) states that social services can be performed (carried out) by legal entities or individuals if they meet and follow the conditions and regulations set by this Act. Services defined by the law (Social Security Act) as public services, provide their services via the **network of public services**. Under the same conditions there operate public social welfare institutions and other legal or individual entities who have obtained a **concession to public tender**.

Social protection services which are outside the network of public services (legal or individual entities) can obtain permission to work by the ministry responsible for social welfare, MLFSA. The same law in the 65th paragraph states that the social security services are provided by a private provider if they meet the following conditions:

- have relevant professional qualifications in accordance with the 69th or 70 article of the Act
- the head of the program has passed the **qualifying examination** (slo. *strokovni izpit*) and so obtained **the opinion of the Social Chamber**, this process is called **verification**.
- the head of the program has at least three years working experience in a field in which they are to perform private practice
- is not employed elsewhere
- has facilities, equipment and personnel, required by the nature of work. etc.

Social protection services are listed in the 11th article of the Social Security Act and are described in articles from 12 to 18 of the same law, details standards and normative for each of the social protection services are defined in the Rules of the standards and normative of social services ([Pravilnik o standardih in normativih socialnovarstvenih storitev](#)).

Among priority directions for financing the network of public social protection services are amongst others also:

In the group of "**Public social services**":

- the network of centers and shelters for the homeless in all statistical regions

And within network of experimental programs undertaken and financed by MLFSA homeless are not explicitly mentioned, but we can find them under:

- the network of other programs that are dedicated to addressing social pressures that are not part of the other announced programs (Roma, asylum seekers, refugees, former prisoners, ...)

As **housing** is the domain of Ministry of Environment and of Spatial Planning (MESP) and not that of social affairs (MFLSA), I want to mention as well this domain although MESP do not recognise or consider homelessness as their responsibility - not even partly. Anyhow, in national housing programme (NHP)¹, social instruments in housing stock are intended to make the acquisition and use of housing easier for those individuals or families who are not able by their material situation of resolving their housing problem on their own, or who cannot cover costs of use – rent and other costs, including the costs of maintenance of flats and residential houses. These are primarily families with several children, young families, people with disabilities and families with a disabled member, and other families and individual persons with low or no income. The two basic instruments of social policy in the housing area are mentioned: opportunity to rent social housing and to receive aid for use of the housing unit.

Homeless services provision and legislation: There is no legislation or policy which would focus on homeless services provision exclusively. Services, dealing with homeless are usually part of broader field of social welfare / protection (described above) and are not considered or treated as separate, specific field legally.

At the moment there is not yet national strategy on homelessness in Slovenia, although there have been some attempts done in past years. Up to the June 2010 Conference on homelessness and social exclusion (which was dedicated to the development of national strategy by engaging all the relevant stake-holders) there was no serious discussion on national homelessness strategy in Slovenia. The strongest engagements in this field are still of curative nature, which means that government is trying to deal with homelessness (supporting shelters and soup kitchens) and not strategically reduce or solve the problem or search for systematic solutions and/or pathways out of homelessness. In Slovenia there is still nothing like national systematic research on this field (first national expertise on extend of homelessness and housing exclusion, following ETHOS, was carried out in 2010, by Dekleva, Filipović, Nagode, Razpotnik and Smolej²). There were some discussions in the past encouraged by FEANTSA or/and in cooperation with others Slovene institutions (research institutes, ministries, NGOs etc.)

1.2. Typology and organization of services

Does a typology of homeless or social services exist in your country? In your organization? If yes, please describe in detail.

Does a register of homeless services exist? If yes, please, give us relevant links to websites and directories.

Describe briefly how the provision of homeless services is organized in your country.

In Slovenia typology of homeless services does not exist officially. Organisations that deal exclusively with homelessness are relatively rare in Slovenia but their number is growing in past let's say 10 years.

Official register of homeless services does not exist. There is an info-register, prepared by organization [Kings of the street](#) that covers only Ljubljana; there are 13 organizations listed and described (their offer, location, schedule, contacts). Majority (7) of them are church charity organization, 5 of them are NGOs (nongovernmental and not-for-profit organizations) and one of them is part of governmental Center for social work. There are mainly emergency shelters and food and clothes providers among them but also

¹ Pursuant to Article 77 of the Housing Act (Ur. l. RS, 18/91, 18/91-I, 19/91-I-amendments, 9/94 - CC Resolution, 21/94, 23/96, 24/96 - CC Resolution, 44/96 - CC Resolution, 1/2000 and 1/2000 - CC Resolution) and Article 168 of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly, the National Assembly adopted, at its session on 10 May 2000

² Dekleva, Filipović, Nagode, Razpotnik in Smolej (2010). *Ocena obsega skritega in prikritega brezdomstva v Sloveniji* [The study on the extend of visible and hidden homelessness in Slovenia], MFLSA.

drop in centers, one health care organization for individuals without health insurance and only one housing first project (resettlement program). There is also only one pilot experimental project of social entrepreneurship, where homeless are employed (Old stuff new use, Kings of the street) and one educational-cultural program for homeless (University under the stars, Kings of the street). The main purpose of this info – sheet is informing users and potential users of the offer of different organizations and also networking. It's been updated several times and at the moment the new version of flyers is printed.

Although majority of organizations facing homelessness are in the capital (Ljubljana), across the country there are some more, mostly shelters. New shelters are emerging in past few years as an answer to the more and more visible problem of street homelessness in Slovenia. There are at least seven shelters or drop in centres in other Slovenian cities at the moment. The list of them can be found also on <http://www.kraljiulice.org/kam-po-moc>. On the same page there are “shelters, day care centers and drop in centers for homeless people” listed in the first category and there are 13 of them; “organization dealing with drug (and or alcohol) addiction treatment” (16 of them), there are also 8 organization listed under category “other” (mainly health care organizations, organizations delivering food and other goods to people – [Karitas](#), [Red cross](#); and one organization offering legal advice [Pro bono](#)).

There is another register or list of homelessness related services, limited only on state financed programs, which are evaluated by [Social protection institute of Republic of Slovenia](#). There are 12 organizations listed, running one or several programs on the field of homelessness. Typology of social services same institute presents is:

- social rehabilitation of addiction,
- mental health,
- programs for homeless,
- programs for elderly,
- programs for child and youth care,
- programs for preventing violence,
- programs for handicapped,
- programs for Roma,
- therapeutic programs,
- other.

Each Municipality is supposed to have a housing stock for vulnerable groups. Ljubljana is the only city though with an official Housing fund (so called emergency housing units) for different vulnerable groups - big families, people with disabilities, single parents, victims of domestic violence and homeless are only one of the groups that can compete for the very limited amount of those “emergency housing units”.

So there are **church (charity) organizations** offering mainly food and other goods to homeless people; **organizations (mainly shelters), which are part of canters for social work; municipal housing funds** and finally **non for profit nongovernmental organizations**, which are generally spiking the most professionally progressive group of actors in the field of homelessness, trying to set higher professional standards, search and develop new answers on existing circumstances people fare facing and also in the regard of participation of users. There are no “for profit private organizations” on the field of homelessness so far in Slovenia.

There is not clear division between organizations that are dealing with homelessness exclusively and those that are “in between” in a sense that homeless are only one of several target groups and that homelessness in not the main issue they are dealing with but health care, mental health care, addiction treatment ...

1.3. Funding

What are the main mechanisms in place for funding homeless services provided for the not-for profit organizations in your country? (public procurement, grants, agreements with NGOs, donations etc.)

Since 1993 the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (MLFSA) supports on the basis or within **the annual public tenders** the NGO's, which offer projects dealing with homelessness. MLFSA is the most important financer for the homeless services. It also provides above mentioned Public network on the field of social protection.

The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (MLFSA) is supporting programmes that are designed to offer services to homeless people, like shelters, space for personal hygiene, food, drop in centres and similar. Currently there are 21 programmes (in sum of 639.000 euro): 4 of them are long term programmes on homelessness supported by MLFSA (in sum of 276.000 euro) and rest of them (17) one year programmes (in sum of 363.000 euro). MLFSA does not have sufficient influence on housing policy and cannot provide homeless people with permanent accommodation. Ministry for Environment and spatial planning (MESP) is responsible for housing. There is so far no sufficient cooperation between two ministries, what some experts (e.g. Leskošek, 2010) understand as governmental attitude to homelessness as a social problem that is solved with turning homeless into the clients of different services and not someone who is entitled to an independent housing outside social control system.

Programmes that MLFSA is financing are divided in one-year and five years programmes, which means that one year (so called experimental) programmes providers have to answer annual public tenders and those 5 years have granted finances for 5 years period. 5-years programmes are part of so called network of social welfare service providers. Social Chamber sets criteria and verifies programmes if they are ready to pass from 1-year to 5-years financing scheme (when becoming 5-years programme means entering the public network of national social protection services). Above I describe the role of Social Chamber, which sets standards for programs and which verifies them before they can enter in public network:

Professional workers and professional assistants in public social welfare institutions are obliged to follow the educational and training courses. The Social Chamber (according to Social Security Act, Articles from 76-78) determine the education and training and also verifies the programs:

The Social Chamber takes care of connectedness, development and professional improvement of social welfare activity. It performs as public authorities the following tasks:

- it determines the programmes of training determined by the Act,
- it plans and organises permanent professional education and training referred to in Article 73 of the Act for professional workers and professional assistants;
- it determines the types and degrees of educational programmes for professional assistants in social welfare according to Article 70 of the Act and determines for which case it shall be necessary to check their ability before the start of performing individual services and tasks in the field of social welfare,
- it determines the conditions and manner of completing internship and monitors the internship, and it controls the performing of internship according to the general act referred to in Article 71 of the Act,
- it determines the conditions and manner of doing the professional examination and it organizes and performs the examination of knowledge for acquiring the professional examination in the field of social welfare.

- it prepares and adopts the catalogues of necessary skills and checks the ability for
- performing individual services and tasks in the field of social welfare,
- it plans and organizes the supervision of professional work of professional workers,
- it organizes and performs instructive counselling
-

The Social Chamber also performs other tasks, in particular:

- it adopts the Code of Ethics of workers in the field of social welfare, promotes and
- controls its implementation and takes measures at its breaching,
- it gives opinions in the procedures for granting concessions and authorizations to work;
- it monitors and performs the projects of supervision of work of professional workers,
- it performs the training of professional workers and professional assistants,
- takes part in the preparation of regulations and in the preparation of professional bases for the social welfare programme;

Besides MLFSA also Municipalities are financial supporters of the services addressing homelessness. They also have annually public tenders for NGO's and they select programs on the basis of external professional evaluation of proposals. Municipality of Ljubljana is the greater of all the financers because of already mentioned biggest extend of the homelessness in the urban area of capital.

There are also other other financers like [FIHO](#) (*Fundacija za financiranje invalidskih in humanitarnih organizacij v Republiki Sloveniji*; Foundation of financial support for services for invalidity and humanitarian organisation in Republic Slovenia). Also few governmental agencies (Agency for equal opportunities ...), Ministry for Health, Ministry for culture and some others support agencies. Program of social entrepreneurship is funded also with European grants (European social fund).

For some organisations (e.g. church organisations) donations might be also a large part of funds but not for NGOs.

2. Implementation of quality provisions in homeless services

2.1. Governance

Who is responsible for implementing minimum standards in homeless services in your country? (homeless service providers, funding bodies of the homeless services, local authorities ...).

Homeless service providers are responsible for implementing minimum standards although they are always dependable on funding bodies that sets criteria to assign funds. There are external evaluators of the potential providers, applying on the tender. On the basis of the scoring procedure (based on all the important aspects of the program – past references of applicant, content and quality of the program, demanded profession and demanded level of education of staff, professional exam and years of experiences of the project leader, realiability of project, financial plan, predicted evaluation and regular supervision, users participation ...) certain programs are funded. Similar (but not exactly the same) procedure of applying for grants is known for Governmental tenders as well as for Municipal.

Is the correct implementation of the quality provisions monitored? If yes, who is in charge of monitoring? Through which channels is it performed (i.e. activity reports, outcomes measurement, quality of system etc.)?

All the services that receive grants by Ministries or Municipalities have to report annually or even more often about their outcomes and realisation of the goals they have set. Reports are precondition for the grants (which are usually received after reports are handed).

2.2. Methods

Do homeless service providers in your country create and implement their own quality provisions without involving any external bodies?

It differs from organisation to organisation; some of them do, according to their own professional, evidence based or ideological standards. I do not have an entire insight in other organisations so I can only guess on this question.

Are quality standards regularly reviewed in your country to adapt to changes in service provision?

At the moment Ministry (MLFSA) is working on new evaluation scheme together with Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia and with service providers themselves. Service providers (in 5-years financing scheme) are obliged to evaluate their programs permanently, Social Protection Institute is obliged to follow, analyze and interpret those evaluations. But there is no discussion on quality standards – in exactly these terms.

[The Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia](#), which main role is to ensure effective informational support in the field of social protection. The Institute was founded in 1996 by the Republic of Slovenia. On its behalf the executive rights and obligations are carried out by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs (MLFSA). The Institute monitors the implementation of a number of government programmes by establishing specialised systems of indicators and provides informational support for them by collecting and analysing data.

One of the roles of the Institute is evaluation of social protection programmes. Because so far evaluations in the social protection field have been carried out according to different models, and have considered diverse criteria, and past self-evaluations do not even allow comparisons between similar programmes, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs has entrusted the Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia as well as the Faculty of Social Work with the project task of establishing an evaluation system to evaluate the implementation of social protection programmes.

The project established a system for evaluating social protection programmes which enables a comparison of effects between similar programmes (as requested by MLFSA) and provides the providers of programmes with feedback information to enable them to plan and direct their future work.

2.3. Staff training

Are the budgets available to regularly train homeless services staff to adapt to emerging trends and needs?

No, organisations have to select grants from their existing budgets.

Are there any training schemes to help homeless service staff to implement quality standards in their homeless services?

No regular training schemes exclusively on homelessness.

3. Policy and legal framework regarding quality in homeless services

3.1. Quality provisions

Is there any legislation or policy framework in place defining quality standards or principles?

Is there a quality framework for social services in general relevant to the homeless sector? Are you in your work affected by quality provisions regarding healthcare services or employment services?

No as far as I am informed.

Evaluation scheme MLFSA is preparing is affected more by healthcare services, questions are proper to follow institutionalised (e.g. Shelter) forms of services but not at all proper for evaluating drop in canters or field work services. (also because of their lower thresholds).

3.2. Dimensions of quality

What definition of quality is used in your country?

There is no external definition of quality in homeless services in use in our country. Quality standards acquirement is up to each organization – service provider to include it into their programme, in line with the goals and demands of the financer of course.

What are the criteria of quality in a homeless service in your country? (i.e. user participation, training, funding).

Regarding the questions in applications for grants for programs, all above mentioned topics are important criteria but also past references of applicant, profession and level of education of staff, inclusion of volunteers, professional exam and years of experiences of the project leader, regular supervision for workers, collaboration with local community, ...

4. Quality in the context of the specificities of homeless services

4.1. Transitional character of homeless services

In your country, is there a different way of measuring quality in homeless services because of their short term emergency nature?

Consultation of service users is an element of quality of the service - do emergency / transitional services in your country have specific methods for this?

4.2. Diversity

People who are homeless have multiple needs so services need to have room for creativity and flexibility in finding solutions – do the quality provision in your work address this diversity?

4.3. Users' Participation

Has your organization developed specific methods to ensure effective participation of the users in spite of the unfavorable context of the often emergency character of homeless services?

Our organisation (Kings of the street) tends to include users in all the important committees and bodies of governing the Association as well as in daily life of organisation (meetings, evaluations, plans). There is also a tendency to employ within organisation as much users as possible if there is a chance for it. Participants of our organisation are member of Editorial board of Street paper and also on other levels we develop democratic system of decision making – representator of the street paper vendors, etc. We encourage activities that arise from everyday lives of our participants and try to form such services that would meet their needs as prompt as possible (because of thee emergency nature of our services it is not always easy).

5. Evaluation of the existing quality provisions

5.1. Organization of homeless services

In your opinion, is the legislation regarding the organization of homeless services in your country appropriate?

If not, would you recommend new or amended legislation on homeless services? Please, describe how.

Homelessness is not yet separate sphere whit its own legislation, strategy, goals and plans which we can explain:

In Slovenia in the last few years awareness of the growing problem of homelessness raised and, consequently, a series of organizations, services and projects dealing with this phenomenon has developed. Homelessness in Slovenia had until 2000 been perceived as a marginal problem, which can mainly be solved by charity (and curative) measures. In line with this, homelessness-related initiatives in Slovenia had until the middle of the previous decade focused only on providing basic material goods (food, clothes and – to a limited extent and only temporary – accommodation in shelters) for people experiencing homelessness. Many of these initiatives have been traditionally linked with charity organizations and run by the church. The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and some municipalities have been funding homelessness-related services of a reactive nature but without a comprehensive strategy. Until 2005 no research on homelessness had been carried out in Slovenia.

In Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana, the issue of homelessness is the most visible and challenging and it comes as no surprise that we can find the majority of homelessness-related initiatives in this municipality. The first research and professional projects rising up the question of homelessness were carried out in 2005/2006, when homelessness became more visible in the capital. Both the public and the policy makers faced new challenges of how to understand and face the phenomenon of homelessness. In line with previously described process of raising the issue of homelessness in 2000's after 2005 new services started to develop, we could call it slow pluralisation and professionalization of the field. Some of those new developed services differed from the previous ones especially in regard to the participation of homeless people and in the professionalization of the programs.

I think it would be useful and necessary to recognise homeless sector as specific one, first of all legally. It would for sure give more strength to the service providers and with time more space to build more efficient network to address this field in more comprehensive and tuned way.