



Burdens on the gateway to the state

The Construction of Administrative Burdens in the Registration of Homeless People in Belgium and the Netherlands

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INTRODUCTION

Having no address /
Not being registered

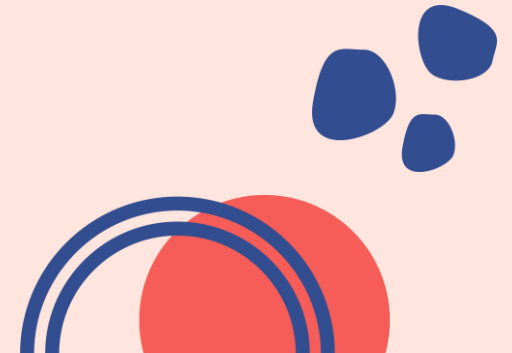
Banking account
Health insurance fund
Unemployment benefits
Child allowance
Library card
Employment
Electoral register
Driving license
Social housing
...

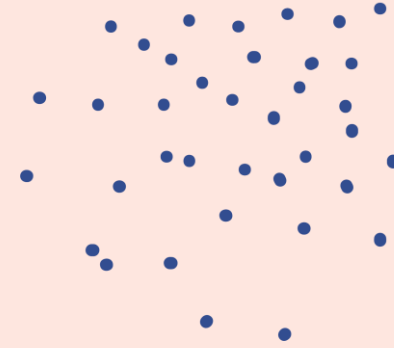
Access to social rights
and services



Postal Paradox

Experiencing Homelessness





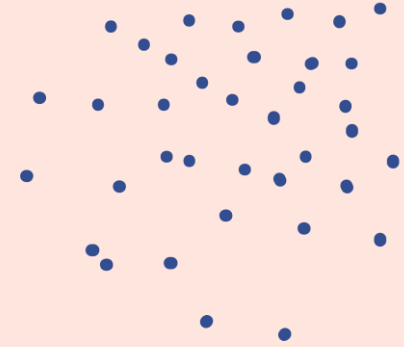
Registration systems

Reference address
in Belgium

Postal address
in the Netherlands

However > Signals on the field raised concerns on its accessibility





Conditions

BE (at a local welfare office)

1. To experience homelessness (i.e. to have insufficient means to provide for one's own accommodation)
2. Not being registered in the civil registry
3. Request social assistance at the local welfare office

NL (private person, municipality, or local organisation)

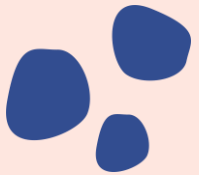
- Formally, every person that does not have a residential address or that stays in an institution is entitled to a reference address.
- A formal agreement of the private person that agrees to 'host'
 - Municipalities and local organisations determine their own specific application criteria





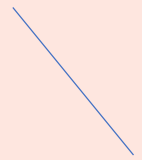
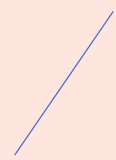
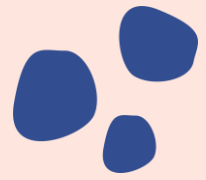
Administrative burdens

- Bureaucracy, confusing paperwork, complex regulations and procedures, ...
- Compliance, learning and psychological costs
- Administrative burdens affect whether people are able to exercise fundamental rights, and they can alter the effectiveness of public programs (Herd & Moynihan, 2018; Moynihan et al, 2015)



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A political problem
'Policymaking by other means' -
Administrative burdens as political
tactics, strategically applied to restrict
access to rights and benefits
(Herd & Moynihan, 2018)

An institutional problem?

METHODS & DATA

Data:

Semi-structured interviews with
35 professionals in Belgium and
26 professionals in the Netherlands

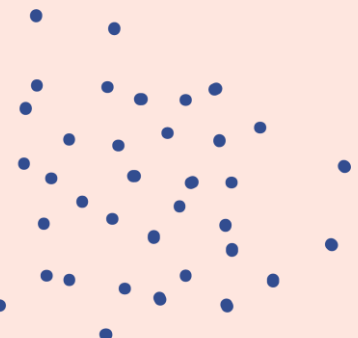
Theoretical framework:

Elinor Ostrom's (2005) Institutional Analysis
and Development Framework (IAD)

Research questions:

RQ1: Which administrative burdens do homeless people
experience when applying for the reference address?

RQ2: Why do these administrative burdens occur?

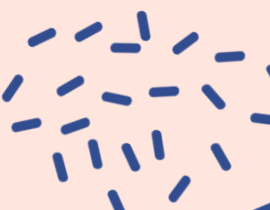




Results



RQ1: Which administrative burdens do homeless people experience when applying for the reference address?

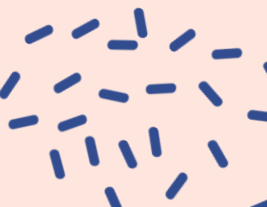


The experience of administrative burdens

1. Compliance costs: restricted application channels, complex application forms, multiple sleeping locations, information obligation, proven local connection, waiting times (BE), ...

« *You must experience homelessness, and this must be demonstrable. If you say 'I don't have a home, I want a reference address', that is not enough. You have to show where you sleep, where you live, you have to share everything related to the address.*

-Policy advisor civil service in municipality (NL)



The experience of administrative burdens

2. Learning costs: uncertainty regarding cohabitation norms, lack of knowledge, application help from intermediary organizations

« *It is not advertised; the option of a reference address is not mentioned anywhere. You almost have to be an expert in civil affairs to even know the phenomenon of a postal address.*
-Policy advisor civil service in municipality (NL)



The experience of administrative burdens

3. Psychological costs: shame, hostile intake location, social stigma, stress and other worries, distrust of government

« *If someone is registered in Rotterdam at a well-known organization or homeless shelter, then everyone knows: “Oh, that is a homeless address”. [...] well...that raises the stigma. In itself, yes, that has an exclusive effect.*

Policy advisor in homelessness advocacy organization (NL)

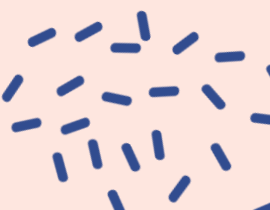




Results



RQ2: Why do these administrative burdens occur?



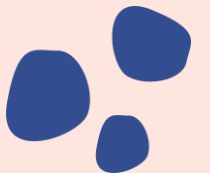
Causes of administrative burdens

Governance level

Double function: keep the registries up to date (monitor and control) + anti-fraud policies

Reference address has immediate and significant financial consequences

« *There's a well-known tension: perceiving the reference address as a tool for social assistance or as a tool to combat fraud.*
-Staff member at the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (BE) »



Causes of administrative burdens

Governance level

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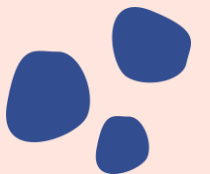
Reference address has immediate and significant financial consequences

Policy level

Specific disincentivizing conditionalities (e.g. local connection, temporary nature)

« *More requirements than remaining reachable, are not allowed by law. In practice, more conditions are being imposed. For example, I saw a form in which they need to note the addresses where claimants were sleeping for the past three months. This is actually a breach of law, but some municipalities will ask it anyway.*

Policy advisor at homelessness advocacy organization (NL)



Causes of administrative burdens

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Double function: keep the registries up to date (monitor and control) + anti-fraud policies

Reference address has immediate and significant financial consequences

Policy level

Burdensome application procedures

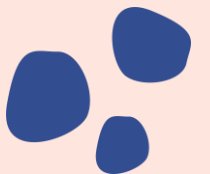
Specific disincentivizing conditionalities (e.g. local connection, temporary nature)

Operational level

Street-level bureaucrats deal with the ambiguities by developing notions of 'deservingness' (Jilke & Tummers, 2018) and 'responsabilization' (Rose, 1996).

« *As a social assistant in a local welfare office (OCMW), we are sitting in a double seat. On the one hand, we are there to help people out, to get them back on track. On the other hand, there is this supervising function. We need to check whether these people genuinely need help, and whether they are not committing fraud in secret. We even ask for their banking statements. It's this supervising function that scares claimants off.*

Social worker in local welfare office (BE)



Results



External factors
Scarcity in (social) housing

Governance level

Double function: keep the registries up to date (monitor and control) + anti-fraud policies

Reference address has immediate and significant financial consequences

Policy level

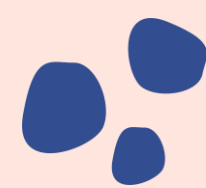
Burdensome application procedures

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Feedback mechanisms



Conclusion

- Homeless (or 'address-less') people face a series of burdens – including an intrusive and stressful screening process, complex application forms, and strict conditionalities
- These burdens are constructed at the municipal level to disincentivize the use of the reference address – even though it constitutes a formal rights for citizens that lack a residential address
- The role of street-level bureaucrats in the construction or mitigation of administrative burdens has largely been overlooked in the literature
- The construction of administrative burdens can be a consequence of political, but also institutional factors.



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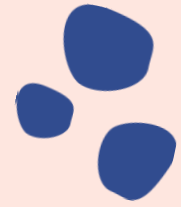
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