



# NEWSLETTER 4 2009

double issue

## PEER REVIEWS

### Counting the homeless – setting the scene for improved policymaking

Homelessness is a complex problem but solutions are possible. However, managing – and eventually putting an end to – homelessness requires a much deeper understanding of the extent of the phenomenon and of its root causes.

Currently, far too little accurate information is available and this hinders the development of effective strategies. Some EU countries are still at the very early stages of collecting information, making it virtually impossible to compare homelessness across the EU. The fact that legal definitions of homelessness and housing exclusion do not exist everywhere or are not consistent further complicates the issue.

The Peer Review hosted by the City of Vienna and Austria's Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection on 12-13 November 2009 therefore sought to share information on existing data-collection instruments, with a view to improving the planning of assistance to the homeless.

At the same time, the host country wanted to explore the reasons behind the ongoing rise in homelessness in its country despite its significant efforts to increase the number and quality of places for homeless people in recent years.

Indeed, Vienna, with its stock of 220,000 social dwellings for a population of 1.7 million, has become the European city with the largest social housing sector. The range of alternatives available to the homeless has also become wider, providing them with outpatient facilities, such as day-care centres, and various forms of inpatient accommodation, including 'socially-supported accommodation' in the form of supervised flats for people no longer in a position to live on their own.

#### **Lessons learned**

One of the prime challenges in addressing homelessness is that responsibility for housing policy is often devolved to the regional or municipal level, leading to different policies and approaches and

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On behalf of the



European Commission  
DG Employment, Social Affairs  
and Equal Opportunities



a lack of national coordination. Whereas case management often takes place locally, it is nevertheless essential to have centralised data coordination and analysis systems to support policy-making. This could also be outsourced to university research departments.

The Review further underscored the need to understand which information is required before developing mechanisms to acquire it. For this, more research is needed with regard to specific groups of homeless people, including the young, people with difficult lifestyles, those that become homeless voluntarily or involuntarily, or as the result of failure in other service areas, such as psychiatric care.

Research must also look into how housing markets operate, the extent of empty housing, and how the private rental sector can be harnessed to help counter homelessness. The growing privatisation of housing stock can cause a loosening of price controls and creates a need for better regulation of landlords or social rental agencies.

Some participants in the Review pointed out that

highlighting the cost-benefit of prevention can help garner support for better-crafted housing strategies. For example, a 2008 study in England suggested savings of £21,000 on temporary accommodation and of £54,500 on health, legal, security and other expenditure, over two years. Nevertheless, others warned that such arguments risk stereotyping all homeless people as problem cases.

In any case, all agreed that overcoming difficulties in developing a comprehensive national strategy should not take precedence over concrete action and that launching initiatives at local level is preferable to becoming “overwhelmed” by the problem.

As such, NGO-led initiatives should be supported and assisted in training their staff and developing mechanisms for data collection at local level. Some suggested that data collection and compilation should be a mandatory criterion when governments provide funds to NGOs for implementing homeless assistance programmes, although this emerged as a potentially politically sensitive issue.

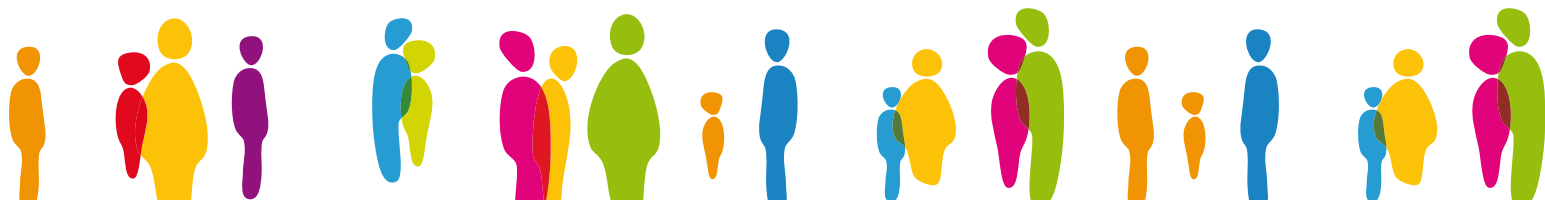
### ***A role for the EU***

Although the EU does not have competency on homelessness or housing policy, and is therefore not in a position to draw up a Europe-wide strategy, the Commission can support Member States, namely when it comes to data availability and the definition of baselines and indicators.

The EC-funded MPHASIS project (2007-2009), which aims to improve monitoring capacity in 20 European countries through transnational exchange and action-oriented research, is one example of how the EU can support Member States.

The EU must also encourage Member States to collect robust information and set up monitoring systems by sending out a clear message on this at the Spring Council 2010.

<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2009/counting-the-homeless>



## Developing the right tools for reintegrating the vulnerable: Norway's 'Qualification Programme'

Although Norway has very high labour market participation rates (approximately 80%), one quarter of the working-age population receives health-related and disability pensions and 3.7% receive social assistance benefits, of which 22% are on long-term benefits.

It is people in this latter group, in particular, that the Qualification Programme targets, as they are often the ones that struggle most to get a job and to return to the labour market.

Established as part of the country's major welfare system reform ('NAV-reform'), the programme offers these long-term unemployed the opportunity to participate in a year-long programme of activities that will gradually prepare them to (re-)enter the labour market or training programmes. Participants receive a regular weekly income, as well as benefits such as child support, in exchange for attending.

The Programme begins with an evaluation of potential participants through a Workability Assessment test that ascertains their poten-

tial for finding work and the type of support and coaching they need to break out of their situation. Based on this, participants are provided with an 'activity programme', which has an initial focus on basic life and working skills to help them to regain the necessary self-confidence and well-being to be able to operate in the working world.

In the later stages of the Programme, participants receive more targeted labour-market training to improve their employability and are assigned a work-experience placement with a local employer, who receives a 50% wage subsidy for each placement offered.

A central aspect of the Programme is the close follow-up of participants by consultants in the local 'NAV' offices. These offices are one of the key outcomes of Norway's welfare system reform, which aimed to merge nationally and locally-run social, welfare and labour services, so as to provide 'one-stop-shops' for all users and stop them being passed around from one adminis-

tration to another to receive benefits or services.

The individual follow-up of participants is highly labour-intensive, making the Programme expensive, but this was also judged to be a crucial factor in the Programme's success. What's more, given the long-term savings that can be generated by helping people off benefits and into the labour market, where they will make social contributions, it was considered cost-effective.

Although the Programme is too fresh to be assessed in full, it boasts high participation and low drop-out rates, and initial figures as regards placement rates appear favourable.

During the Peer Review that was hosted by the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion in Oslo on 29 and 30 October 2009, a wide-ranging discussion took place that touched upon different aspects of the Qualification Programme such as staffing issues, the role of the diagnostic (workability) test (how to reach the target group), working



with employers and how to measure success. Peer reviewers welcomed the fact that specific evaluation studies had been launched

so that in time a systematic assessment of the results of the programme should become available.

<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2009/developing-well-targeted-tools-for-the-active-inclusion-of-vulnerable-people>

### **The Grorud Office – An example of how the Qualification Programme is implemented**

*During the Norwegian Peer Review, government representatives and experts from Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom, as well as experts from the European Anti-Poverty Network and the European Commission set out to the NAV office in Grorud, Oslo, to get a feel of how the programme works in practice.*

*The Grorud office was opened in October 2008 and services a population of 26,000 people, of which 39% are immigrants. The area's unemployment rate of 5.2% is above the national average of 3.7%, and a relatively high proportion of the population receive social benefits and disability pensions. Against this backdrop, the Qualification Programme could prove particularly useful, namely via the opportunity it offers to participants to take Norwegian language classes.*

*The NAV office has 90 employees, among which 13 consultants are dedicated to the Qualification Programme. The target for 2009 is to attract 150 participants to the Programme, which would represent just under a quarter of the area's unemployed. At the time of the Peer Review, 80 people were participating in the Programme.*

*Of the 13 members of staff, eight work directly with participants, steering them through a detailed programme of modules that will help their return to the job market. One staff member concentrates on participants with a drug addiction, while the remaining ones concentrate on outreach, developing contacts with employers and helping participants who are applying for work placements.*

*The staff at Grorud described the importance of the first stage of the QuP, which helps participants manage their immediate problems, such as debts or housing, as these can be so overwhelming that they prevent them from focusing on getting a job and having a 'regular life'.*

*Among their main challenges, the staff cited that of balancing quality with quantity. Nevertheless, the very low drop-out and absenteeism rates highlight the Programme's success, particularly in a borough like Grorud with all its problems.*



## NETWORK OF INDEPENDENT SOCIAL INCLUSION EXPERTS

### Report highlights difficult progress in combating homelessness and housing exclusion

Homelessness and housing exclusion represent a very serious challenge in most Member States and, although significant improvements have been made in some countries, a recent overview prepared by the Core Team of the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion shows that things are clearly getting worse in others, especially as a result of the economic and financial crisis.

The overview draws on 27 non-governmental country reports, assessing the situation in terms of the social and economic inclusion of homeless people and access to adequate housing in each Member State. It finds that the key barriers faced by countries when trying to develop effective strategies for tackling homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE) include insufficient political commitment, lack of understanding of the causes of HHE, lack of agreement on definitions and appropriate indicators, fragmentation of policy responsibility, as well as an absence or inadequa-

cy of data and of monitoring and reporting tools.

#### **No common definition of the problem**

Currently, definitions of HHE vary widely across Member States, with almost half of them lacking any official definition at all. This makes it impossible to get a clear and accurate picture of the extent of HHE and of the main trends across the EU. It also prevents policymakers from having a proper understanding of the problem and adopting appropriate measures.

The “ETHOS” definition<sup>1</sup>, developed by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), which classifies homeless people according to their living situation (the roofless, who are sleeping rough; the houseless, who have a temporary bed in institutions or shelters; those in insecure housing, including people facing eviction or domestic

violence; and those in inadequate housing, such as overcrowded houses or caravans on illegal campsites), could provide an appropriate starting point for a common definition. However, so far, only a small handful of countries have adopted the ETHOS or a similar definition, with many preferring a narrower definition that focuses more on homelessness than on housing exclusion and that even sometimes excludes entire categories of homeless, such as refugees and immigrants.

#### **Addressing the root causes**

Although there are significant gaps and limitations in available data in numerous countries, five main categories of causes of HHE stand out across the EU-27. These include structural factors (such as high unemployment levels or the way housing markets operate, causing shortages in adequate accommodation and non-affordability of housing); institutional factors (e.g. risks relating to people leaving care institutions or

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the ETHOS definition: <http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/pg.asp?Page=484>.



prisons); personal factors (e.g. mental illness and drug abuse); family and relationship breakdowns; and discrimination and lack of legal status (e.g. the position of migrants and of ethnic minorities such as the Roma).

Some country reports highlight the importance of recognising that homelessness is generally due to multiple causes and that strategies must address each of these factors. However, many Member States continue to focus excessively on individual reasons for homelessness while neglecting structural explanations.

There does nevertheless appear to be growing recognition of the need to address structural causes and the more successful countries in combating HHE move beyond temporary/crisis accommodation measures to more comprehensive progression strategies to help people move from temporary accommodation to supported accommodation and/or into more permanent housing such as social housing.

In terms of preventing HHE, two approaches are particularly evident: developing initiatives to reduce the

number of evictions and increasing support for people leaving institutions to access suitable housing. Increasing the supply of social housing, as well as its affordability, is also considered key to preventing HHE. Indeed, excess demand for public housing and relatively long waiting lists represent a widespread problem which in some cases results from the sell off of existing public stock and/or the priority being given to private housing and deregulation of the housing market.

Some Member States have made considerable efforts to develop instruments to improve the affordability of housing. These include rent subsidy systems, rent allowance guarantees, regulations on maximum rents, mortgage tax reliefs, housing allowances and the determination of rent levels based exclusively on household income. Various countries have also implemented policy measures to enhance housing standards, whether via financial bonuses, increased regulation and oversight or advantageous loans.

However, only a minority of Member States have developed truly integrated strate-

gies that go beyond accommodation issues, covering access to employment, income support as well as access to services such as health and social services – i.e., strategies that adopt an “active inclusion approach”. Others still continue to apply only piecemeal strategies.

### **Good governance**

The governance structures of a country emerge as a particularly important factor in developing effective policies to address HHE. Most commonly, responsibility for HHE policymaking lies with the central government, while responsibility for delivery is devolved to regional and/or local levels. In some countries, policy responsibility is also largely devolved.

Without effective coordination and integration mechanisms, such devolution arrangements have sometimes led to a fragmentation in responsibility and insufficient coordination between ministries and agencies. In some cases, it has also resulted in an unclear or inefficient allocation of resources, hindering local capacity to actually deliver policies and programmes.





A policy's success will also depend strongly on the extent to which stakeholders are involved in its design, implementation and evaluation. An increasing number of Member States have established mechanisms ensuring an active involvement of key stakeholders, such as local authorities and NGOs, in the planning, delivery and monitoring of services. However, in most cases, the

beneficiaries themselves are still seldom consulted and a few Member States continue to ignore relevant stakeholders when drawing up their strategies.

Based on this panorama, the report makes fifteen suggestions for policy at the national and/or EU level to strengthen the fight against homelessness and housing exclusion. These cover

aspects relating to definitions, governance, resources, measurement, monitoring and evaluation, and the exchange of knowledge and good practice.

<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/network-of-independent-experts/reports/2009-second-semester/conclusions-2nd-2009>

## News

### Upcoming Peer Reviews

21. - 22.1.2010	Germany	The Federal Foundation Mother and Child for pregnant women in emergency situations
4. - 5.2.2010	Spain	Modernising and activating measures relating to work incapacity

### 2010: European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion



Following the Commission's proposal, the European Parliament and the Council have designated 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. The campaign aims to reaffirm the EU's commitment to making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty.

<http://www.2010againstopoverty.eu/>

This newsletter is published under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013). This programme is managed by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission.

For more information about PROGRESS see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=327&langId=en>  
Further information on the Peer Reviews and the Policy Assessment as well as all relevant documents are available at: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu>

More information on policies and activities on Social Protection and Social Inclusion in the EU can be found at: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=750>

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