



**CERANEO – Centre for the Development of Non-Profit
Organizations**

REPORT

**Key trends in the area of homelessness in
Croatia**

2015.

CERANEO – Centre for the Development of Non-Profit Organizations

Evaluation of the care for the homeless and the development of innovative programs for prevention and reduction of the risk of homelessness

Report: Key trends in the area of homelessness

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PREFACE

CERANEO – Centre for Development of Non-Profit Organizations is a think tank organization that collects, analyzes and investigates problems in the area of social policy, promoting innovative approaches in addressing these issues, explores and advocates for greater role of civil society. Areas of activity: civil society development, welfare mix, monitoring of social indicators and the modernization of social policy, housing policy and homelessness, social innovations, philanthropy and treasury.

CERANEO has a long-standing experience of research of the problem of homelessness in Croatia and the EU. It has developed and implemented several national and European projects which promoted innovative approaches in the fight against homelessness. In July 2012, CERANEO conducted ETHOS typology of the homelessness and housing exclusion that had been developed by FEANTSA – Federation of national organizations working with the homeless. So far, the typology has been translated into 24 languages and the Croatian translation of the typology became the 25th official translation that has passed the process of FEANTSA verification. CERANEO is a formal member of the Croatian network for the homeless and was elected to represent the Croatian network for the homeless in the FEANTSA operation from October 2015.

The European project ‘Development of innovative programs of prevention and social inclusion of homeless people through the activities of civil society – Housing First – Croatia’ was conducted in partnership with the association Terra from Rijeka and MoSt from Split. Project financing was received from the EU/EDF funds, and it was partly co-financed by the City of Zagreb and with support from the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth. The aim of the pilot project was to gain an insight into efficient innovative models in the fight against homelessness that have become a part of social programs of European cities particularly focused on the model ‘Housing First’ and the possibility of the implementation of the same in Croatia. Through the implementation of this project we successfully connected with the organizations that implement care and housing programs for the homeless, and in three Croatian towns, Split, Rijeka and Zagreb, we have organized focus groups on the topic of the applicability of the Housing First model in Croatia. The participants were introduced to the application of the model in the European Union countries and the USA, and the results of the model implementation in 5 towns in member states were presented. Participants in the discussion mainly encountered the new concept of answering the needs of the homeless for the first time, and thus we gained an insight into the shortcomings of the existing system of the care for the homeless in Croatia.

At the same time, through co-financing by the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, within the three-year program of financing the project ‘**Development of innovative local programs of prevention and social inclusion of the homeless through the activities of civil society organizations**’ we have prepared an analysis of programs in Croatia and the comparison with the programs implemented on the European level. We observed certain shortcomings, but also potentials and capacities within civil society for the application of the innovative model Housing First in certain Croatian towns.

The pilot project promoting the right to housing – **Homelessness prevention in the context of evictions – VT/2013/056** - was financed by the European Commission DG Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion, and the implementation of the project was assigned to Human European Consultancy, FEANTSA and the National University of Ireland Galway. The implementation of this research project in Croatia was assigned to CERANEO, and we have been authorized by the European Commission – Directorate General for Employment, Social affairs and Inclusion. The aim of the project is promotion of the right to housing and prevention of homelessness in the context of evictions. The research will recognize early interventions and prevention measures, create the profile of evicted

persons and households and recognize risk factors and risk groups. This is the first project on the EU level, but also on the level of Croatia, that deals with the problem of evictions.

As coordinators of the project Social Council of the City of Zagreb which brings together experts from different sectors dealing with social policy and the provision of services in the area of social welfare through the publication ‘Social Picture of the City of Zagreb for 2012’ under the title ‘Working Together in Building a Strong City’, we emphasized the need for larger inclusion of public focus and public policies in the area of prevention of homelessness, especially with regard to a larger number of persons who live in risk of homelessness, and the increased number of evictions and lack of adequate answer in the system to the needs of families in such life circumstances.

Homeless persons were included in the conducted activities, and thus we received direct answers and proposals from the users in need who have experienced and continue to experience the existing system of care for the homeless on all levels. Their role as co-creators of individual recommendations and guidelines was extremely helpful and their contribution is considered to be a great asset for our organizational growth and gaining legitimacy for our reports and recommendations that will be an integral part of future policies, programs and measures on local, but also on the national level.

1. INTRODUCTION

Scientific research about homelessness in Croatia is extremely rare, so the problem of modest awareness of them exists. There is still no research about the problems and status of the homeless in Croatia, based on which policies and programs of the care for them could be created, thus improving the life conditions of this marginalized social group. Homelessness is still not constructed as a social problem which necessitates the engagement of greater material and professional resources (Bunić, 2013). Mlinar and Vidić (2013), through the experience of work with the homeless state that the homeless in Croatia are not what they used to be in the beginning of the 1990s, i.e. single persons whose lifestyle is characterized by vagrancy, alcohol abuse, begging and other asocial behaviours. They claim that today the homeless are young people capable of work, older persons capable of work waiting for the first condition for realizing the pension right, mentally ill and older persons who are not ensured the realization of the right to housing in shelter or foster family, families with children who fear separation of children due to inability to ensure appropriate conditions for the development and life, young people leaving institutionalized forms of care after reaching the age of majority (or upon the completion of secondary school education), persons with intellectual difficulties and other groups of social welfare users.

New populations at risk are Croatian defenders deprived of their rights, unemployed people without family support, homeless women, mentally ill persons, young families with loans, early holders of tenant rights, former convicts, former addicts, young individuals and families who bought their housing units through taking loans from banks under very unfavourable conditions, i.e. loans in Swiss francs. A particularly vulnerable group are the tenants in private ownership who used to have life tenancy who are under constant threat of eviction by the owners (estimated at 3,000-4,000). The increase of young homeless persons is a cause for concern, as these are mainly persons who left other institutions, such as correctional institutions, prisons and similar, who are monitored by the system which fails to do anything to ensure a job or housing for them.

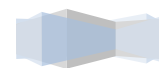
Although the Social Welfare Act of 2011 defined the concept of a homeless person and regulated the obligations of the counties and towns in financing their temporary housing, their position in society is



still marginalized and they are rarely in the focus of public debates. In spite of the new legal regulation, the rights of the homeless are reduced to single financial supports and temporary placement in shelters that turn into permanent placements for most of them. The homeless are frequently discriminated against in the realization of social rights, because they cannot realize social welfare or social services, health protection, social housing or employment in certain public services. According to the Social Welfare Act, they have the same rights as other users, but frequently they do not have equal opportunities in realizing these rights. Most of them do not have permanent housing or residence, and without that they cannot be issued identification documents, register with employment agency, realize health protection or seek help from local self-government in solving their housing problems.

There are no housing programs for vulnerable groups in Croatia, nor are there national prevention programs. Additionally, we do not dispose of appropriate housing fund for housing emergencies. There is a need for developing a social housing strategy. With the accession of Croatia into the European Union, the level of protection of the homeless has to be increased. In developing policies, strategies and programs it is necessary to use the experience and good practice examples that have been developed, tried and evaluated in other member states. The importance of civil society organizations is emphasized, and there is considerable room for the development of social innovations. There are shortcomings present in the system of care for the homeless in Croatia, there is no adequate database or instruments for monitoring the number of the homeless, their needs or causes for the occurrence of homelessness. The homeless are mainly inaccessible to the institutions, and most activities from this area can most readily be conducted by associations, humanitarian and religious organizations that should certainly have material and professional support from the government structures. Programs and projects that they implement should be continuously professionally monitored by public social services (Bakula–Andelić and Šošar, 2006).

The exact number of the homeless in Croatia is not known primarily due to the problem of registering the users who mainly do not have regular dwelling or residence (Družić Ljubotina, 2012). Only the data about the number of users of shelters and soup kitchens is usually monitored. 13 shelters for the homeless are active in Croatia in large towns such as Zagreb, Split, Varaždin, Rijeka, Karlovac, Zadar, Osijek, Pula, Dubrovnik and Kaštel, with the overall capacity for the accommodation of 414 users. In thirteen Croatian shelters approximately 450 persons can be accommodated, but needs are significantly greater. According to the estimates, there are at least as many people in the streets without any accommodation, and the Croatian Homeless Network warns that there are several thousand Croatian citizens living in inadequate conditions, such as ships, trailers, without electricity and water, in basement apartments and garages. Furthermore, the Croatian Homeless Network warns that many Croatian towns still do not have shelters or hostels for the homeless. According to the report about the homeless by the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth and the data of the Centre for Social Welfare, in 2013 there were 462 homeless persons registered, out of which there were 368 men or 79.7%, and 74 women i.e. 20.3% (Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, 2014).



2. PROJECT INFORMATION

Project: Evaluation of the care program for the homeless and the development of innovative models of prevention and reduction of the risk of homelessness

Implementation period: November 2014 – November 2015

Project coordinator: CERANEO – Centre for Development of Non-Profit Organizations

Partners: Association MoST from Split and Association Oaza from Rijeka

Donor: Ministry of Social Policy and Youth

Project aim

Support to organizations of caregivers of the homeless in the form of informing, education and evaluation of the existing and the development of new care programs for the homeless.

The main activities of the project:

1. Preparation of a questionnaire for users located in shelters / hostels
2. Making evaluation questionnaire for caregivers of the homeless
3. Organization of focus groups in Split, Rijeka and Zagreb
4. Activities aimed at developing social mentoring for homeless
5. Development of a database of the homeless



3. KEY TERMS

WELFARE MIX

Welfare mix is a system in which the government, local authorities, civil society organizations, companies (profit sector), family (informal sector) and other stakeholders act in place of former monopolistic position of the state. In such system the government recognizes civil society organizations and other stakeholders, and cooperates with them in the process of preparation of decisions and decision-making, as well as implementation of social programs.

SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Social innovations are innovations which are social through ends and means – new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously fulfil social needs (more efficient than alternatives) and create new social relation or co-operations. These are innovations that are good that are not only good for society, but also increase the capacity of society and the individual to act. Social innovations mean removing the barriers: social barriers, political barriers, mental barriers; building the community identity, respecting good practice examples, mobilisation of a wider circle of stakeholders and social-political action.

HOUSING FIRST – the most widespread and the most efficient social innovation in the area of the fight against homelessness.

Housing First demands that people are placed in permanent form of housing as soon as possible through continuous, flexible and individual support as long as it is necessary, but on volunteer basis.

SOCIAL MENTORING

Social mentoring aims at individuals who are in danger of becoming or already are in a marginalised position in society. The aim of social mentoring is the empowerment of an individual in order to change their social status from socially excluded to socially included person.

SOCIAL MENTOR FOR THE HOMELESS – PEER EXPERT

Who? A peer expert is a former homeless person who has successfully left the vicious circle of poverty. By personal example and experience they provide support to homeless persons as members of a mobile expert team that works with the homeless.



4. FOCUS GROUPS

4.1. Topics of focus groups

1. Discussion about social mentoring for the homeless
2. Discussion about the preparation of a single survey for the users placed in shelters/hostels and the possibilities of implementation of the database about the homeless
3. Evaluation of the care programs for the homeless – presentation of the evaluation survey and results of the research in Zagreb
4. Workshop – identification of measures and activities in individual areas (housing, education, employment, social exclusion, health care and social welfare) with the aim of prevention and fights against homelessness

4.2. Focus group participants

The representatives of the following took part:

- Ministry of Social Policy and Youth
- Croatian Employment Agency (Zagreb, Split and Rijeka)
- Social welfare centres
- Law Clinic of the Faculty of Law of the University of Zagreb
- Partner organization Oaza
- Red Cross shelters, Zagreb
- CARITAS shelters, Zagreb
- Libraries of the City of Zagreb
- Establishment 'Dobri dom' from Zagreb
- Association MoST from Split
- Croatian Homeless Network
- Association St. Jeronim from Kaštel
- The town of Rijeka
- Social association 'Put'
- State administrative office in Primorsko-goranska county
- Police department of Primorsko-goranska county
- Association Terra from Rijeka
- CERANEO – Centre for the Development of Non-Profit Organizations



5. CONCLUSIONS OF FOCUS GROUPS HELD IN RIJEKA, ZAGREB AND SPLIT

5.1. Croatia without the real number of the homeless

The real number of the homeless in Croatia is not known. The relevant Ministry of Social Policy and Youth still does not dispose of a uniform database about this category of users. Such situation forced some shelters/hostels to use alternative applications and databases in order to get a comprehensive insight about their users to a certain extent. The lack of registry of the homeless is a chronic shortcoming in this area that is reflected in slow progress in other areas of care for this population, and therefore focus groups pointed out the need to formalise the issue of the registry of the homeless. The display of numerical situation in certain categories, such as the homeless, is of exceptional importance for preparing care measures and policies. Since we do not have such a number about the homelessness situation in Croatia, the homeless were not included in key measures, which in long term results in inefficient system of prevention and fights against homelessness, as well as slowing down the process of exiting homelessness.

5.2. Traditional/obsolete approaches in the area of care for the homeless

In Croatia, homelessness is becoming a new social risk, but it has not yet been recognised as such. Moreover, Croatia does not have an elaborated system of prevention or fight against homelessness, and the traditional approach in which the care for the homeless is mainly the job of the institutions still prevails. There is also a perceptible practice and tendency to provide foster homes for the homeless, while not enough is being done with regard to their integration. Due to that, through focus groups the emphasis was put on innovative models in the work with the homeless with the aim of informing the participants about the possibilities of implementation of such approaches in the Croatian context of the care and welfare for the homeless.

5.3. Experts support innovative approaches in the area of care for the homeless

Within focus groups, a social innovation 'Housing First' was presented. It advocates ensuring housing as an initial step in the care for the homeless, followed by a combination of housing and professional support in the area of mental and physical health, addiction, education and employment, where social mentoring on the peer level is of extreme importance.

Peer expert primarily serves as an example showing that changes are possible, and also provides a strong, positive and inspiring example to the mentored person. Also, he or she shows that the process of recovery is not just a theory, and serves as a living example providing the mentored person with hope of recovery. On the other hand, peer expert empowers the professional team working with the homeless by his or her example, and provides an insight into the role of the team from the perspective of the user, since he or she was in that role personally. Finally, the peer expert encourages action from the position which is focused on the recovery of users, since the expert has been on both sides.

Participants of focus groups expressed certain ambiguities regarding the issue of social mentoring by 'peer experts' implemented within the Housing First model. Since this is a social innovation that is yet to take hold in Croatia, the participants of focus groups have not



had an opportunity to encounter it yet, ambiguities were mainly related to the new approach in which the mentor is not an expert (most frequently a social worker), but the person who has lived through the same experience and successfully exited the problem, therefore a person who can justifiably be called “peer expert”. After the discussion and a more detailed description of the model itself, the conclusion of participants was that such a form of mentoring is necessary and welcome, primarily when we speak of gaining the trust of homeless persons and the development of their self-confidence. Some of the experts with long standing experience in the work with the homeless warn about a possible problem in the implementation of this form of mentoring in terms of motivation of persons who exited homelessness to provide services as ‘peer experts’. They state that such persons have usually moved on and are rarely willing to return to the story of homelessness. However, examples from the experience in the European Union countries show that it is possible to find those who were in such a situation and train them to serve as an example to those who are currently undergoing this problem. The need for education and ensuring the support system to this form of mentoring was also emphasised.

The next detected obstacle to the implementation of this social innovation in Croatia is the problem of resources of towns that do not have many social apartments that could be used for these purposes in order to fulfil the basic prerequisite – housing. An important characteristics of the Housing First model, which makes it superior to other models, is the fact that such approach gives a solid ‘springboard’ to persons namely through accommodation as an opportunity for further work to change the circumstances that led the person into homelessness.

An example from colleagues from the Czech Republic shows that the lack of social housing can be compensated through the rent of private ones and thus enable an efficient implementation of the Housing First model. The discussion in focus group resulted in an idea of life-care contracts between towns and persons who have no successors, and are willing to leave their property for general welfare.

5.4. Lack of professional staff in shelters/hostels

The experience of those employed in shelters and hostels points to the need for employment of additional professionals, as there is a chronic shortage of them according to their comments. Shelters are willing to employ additional professional staff, however there is a problem related to the lack of financial means that would subsidize the salaries of newly employed professionals. Towns as local self-government units frequently ignore their legal obligation to financially support shelters and hostels, which is ultimately primarily reflected in the lack of human resources. The need for standardization on the level of towns was emphasised, since the towns in Croatia currently help and finance the work of shelters in different scopes, as well as the need for standardization of the number of professional staff in relation to a certain number of users.

5.5. Experts need support

The employees in shelters and hostels emphasise the need for further training. Considering the nature of the work that is highly unpredictable, they frequently have to solve issues that are outside their competence and for which they lack professional knowledge and skills. Primarily



due to that, in focus groups they pointed out the need for additional training. Furthermore, apart from being unpredictable, the job in shelters often requires fast and efficient reactions of professional staff, which in time causes accumulation of stress, due to which participants in focus groups emphasised the need to introduce supervision.

5.6. Lack of cooperation and communication between key stakeholders

When speaking about particularly sensitive categories such as the homeless, the formality of institutions has to be taken into consideration, as it frequently causes the lack of trust of the users, which ultimately results in inefficient problem solving. Due to the aforementioned, synergic effects of the state institutions and non-profit organizations are much-needed in the work with this group of users. The lack of cooperation and communication between key stakeholders was addressed as a special problem in focus groups. Among other things, it was emphasised that civil society organizations can and should be a support to the work of state institutions in this area.

5.7. The need to invest in volunteers

The engagement of volunteers in shelters and hostels around Croatia is not equally represented or developed. The interest to work with a targeted population, as well as the accessibility of shelters/hostels, has largely predetermined the inclusion of volunteers in the system of care for the homeless. The fact emphasised by all shelters/hostels that have a practice of work with volunteers is that volunteer engagement largely influences the destigmatization of the homeless. Also, bearing in mind the specific features of the homeless population, they consider the education of volunteers to be very useful and welcome. Organizations that have a long term positive experience with the involvement of volunteers in their activities mention the necessity of good organisation of volunteers and concreteness of tasks that the volunteers would be in charge of as a necessary prerequisite for a successful cooperation on the relation organization-volunteer.

5.8. Work on raising public awareness for the problem of the homeless

Communication with the media is of exceptional importance for the visibility of organizations that care for the homeless. Good practice examples in this area so far indicate that the interest of the media needs to be raised to instigate reporting about solidarity and volunteer work instead about individual cases of homelessness. Organizations that followed these examples registered a great interest of the public for their activities and for volunteer work by the members of different age groups, which is perhaps the best example of the public awareness of the problem of homelessness.

5.9. Employment of the homeless

When speaking of the homeless in the context of employment, it should be considered that these are persons who have usually been out of work for a very long time, which makes the process of finding work and the inclusion to the labour market even more difficult. The level of education among this population is another aggravating circumstance for finding jobs, since the persons with low educational levels prevail among the homeless population. Taking into

consideration the aforementioned circumstances, it is clear why the need for appointing a special advisor at the Croatian Employment Agency was pointed out as a priority within focus groups. Additionally, the need for initial initiatives of shelters/hostels towards regional centres of the Croatian Employment Agency (HZZ) since there are still no general data which would influence the decision-making on the national level.

5.10. Young homeless persons

According to the words of focus group participants, this group has become increasingly visible recently. With regard to young homeless persons, great attention should be paid to the children leaving alternative forms of care. One of characteristics of this young population is incomplete system of responsibilities and work habits, which additionally obstruct the basic problem of low level of education and lack of work experience. In the situation where employers are fighting for survival on the labour market, and when HZZ subsidies are not so large so that the employers could allow themselves the luxury of paying attention to such persons, the characteristics mentioned above make this group particularly vulnerable. The aforementioned characteristics indicate a need to devise special approaches in the work with the targeted population, and to create specific measures and programs of retraining, additional training and vocational training that would facilitate their access to the labour market, as a starting prerequisite for the exit from homelessness.

Translated from Croatian by

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