

Sustainable ways of preventing homelessness (Copenhagen, 22 November 2013)

Facing homelessness in the Republic of Croatia¹

Andrea Krznar
Ministry of Social Policy and Youth

Marina Dimić Vugec
CERANEO – Centre for Development of Non-Profit Organisations

1. Introduction

Croatian Bureau of Statistics data show a high poverty rate which is, including social benefits, 20.5% in 2012, while the rate of material deprivation in Croatia is 32.3%. In 2010 the poverty rate was 20.6% and in 2011 it increased to 21.1%, which was significantly higher than the EU27 average (16.4% in 2010 and 16.9% in 2011). A large number of the unemployed, as well as employees with low or irregular incomes, young people who do not work, a large number of children, the elderly and pensioners, people with disabilities, single-person women-households, marginalised groups who are in addition to poverty also exposed to various forms of discrimination – all those groups directly or indirectly enter into the circle of the poor and socially excluded and require the concerted efforts of all stakeholders in society.

Groups that are exposed to the increased risk of social exclusion can be distinguished by the cause of their exposure to this risk but since the causes of poverty and social exclusion are usually multidimensional, these categories are mostly overlapping. The risk of poverty and social exclusion is primarily associated with long-term unemployment and economic inactivity, so in groups with a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion can be primarily found people excluded from the labour market or those with low incomes, refugees, asylees, and foreigners under subsidiary protection, vulnerable ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, as well as groups that are less numerous, but are faced with the risk of extreme poverty (the homeless, ex-prisoners). Over the past two years in Croatia, there were no significant changes in the profile of poverty. Yet in 2009 an increase in relative poverty among children and adolescents is evident.

The obligation to fight against poverty and social exclusion is defined by fundamental international documents promoting human rights such as the Millennium Declaration, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the European Social Charter, which specially emphasises "the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion" as one of the basic civil rights. Also, it is important to highlight key strategic documents and/or initiatives of the EU, such as Europe 2020 and the European platform against poverty and social exclusion, as well as the Social Investment Package (SIP).

Therefore, The Programme of the Croatian Government (2011-2015) and other national documents provide a broader strategic approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion. In accordance to this, the drafting of the "Strategy for Combating

1 Prepared for the Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion programme coordinated by ÖSB Consulting, the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and Applica, and funded by the European Commission.

© ÖSB Consulting, 2013



Poverty and Social Exclusion in Croatia (2014-2020)" is started in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders - representatives of state and public authorities, representatives of local governments, employers' representatives, trade unions and civil society organisations' representatives. The strategy draft respects the fundamental Pre-accession strategy documents such as the Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion of the Republic of Croatia (JIM) and the Joint Assessment of the Employment Policy Priorities of the Republic of Croatia (JAP), the results of the implementation of the JIM and JAP as well as associated national implementation plans. Namely, the Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion which Croatia signed in March 2007 highlights the priorities in the field of the fight against poverty and social exclusion including, among others, priorities in the field of housing through development of social housing concept, developing a system of subsidies and assistance to households with poor housing conditions, expanding the capacity of shelters for the homeless, as well as solving the housing problems of the war exiles.

2. Homelessness in Croatia – current situation

2.1. General provisions

Unlike Denmark, in the Republic of Croatia there is no single strategy related to homeless persons on the national level. Within the jurisdiction of individual Ministries there are certain housing policies that resolve housing issues of certain population categories (e.g. veteran population or protected tenants). Still, the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth is preparing the Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in Croatia (2014-2020). In the Strategy are planned strategic activities related to the improvement of care for the homeless, including shelters and support programs and programs of necessary accommodation. Upon the adoption of the Strategy a three-year Implementation Programme will be prepared, which will further elaborate the above mentioned activities.

On the other hand, the term "homeless" is defined the first time by the law in 2011 in the Social Welfare Act. The same definition of the homeless is prescribed by the latest Social Welfare Act ("Official Gazette No. 33/12"). According to the mentioned provision, a homeless person is a person who does not have a residency nor means to satisfy the need for housing and is temporarily accommodated in a homeless shelter, or resides in public or other places which are not designated for housing. The mentioned definition is in line with the ETHOS typology and includes a "rough sleepers" homeless category.

Furthermore the Act stipulates that the large cities and county seat towns are obligated to ensure funds in their budgets for meal services in public kitchens, as well as funding of homeless shelter accommodation services. The Act determines also that large cities and county seat towns are obligated, in line with their financial capabilities, to encourage and to ensure other forms of material assistance and support to the citizens in their territories, such as meals in public kitchens, temporary accommodation of homeless persons in shelters, accommodation of persons who receive sustenance support in social housing, subsidies for particular social and other services pursuant to general acts and this Act, and to encourage civil society organisations work and voluntary work in the social welfare and to develop other forms of social welfare on their territories. If large cities and county seat towns are not able to ensure funds for meals in public kitchens, temporary accommodation of homeless persons in shelters or accommodation of persons who receive sustenance support in social housing, regional self-government units will also participate in funding of such supports and services, in line with their financial capabilities.



Temporary accommodation is defined as a short-term accommodation which is acquired (among other) in crisis situations. Crisis situations are situations in which vulnerable groups (a child who is found without parental supervision or in vagrancy, an adult who happens to be outside the place of residence or permanent residence, or has no permanent residence / stay (homeless) and is unable to take care of him- or herself, pregnant woman 3 months before the birth, or parent with children under the age of one year, children and adults - victims of domestic violence and victims of human trafficking) are provided with temporary care outside the family and are enabled to access to other community-based services, until they return to their own or a foster family or until the accommodation is ensured to them in other way. The same provision applies to foreigners and stateless persons without residence in Croatia when their life and health are endangered.

During temporary accommodation in crisis situations, beneficiaries are provided with temporary housing, food, care, acquisition of necessary clothing, reimbursement of transportation costs to the place of residence in their own or foster family, social welfare home or other institution, and the service of expert support for the social inclusion and other service, depending on assessed beneficiary's needs.

The right to a temporary accommodation is recognised by the social welfare centre for the period this need exists, usually for up to 6 months, and exceptionally for one year. In order to prevent, mitigate and remove causes of social exclusion of homeless persons, temporary accommodation service providers, social welfare centres and local communities are obliged to cooperate and jointly plan activities to ensure their residence and re-inclusion in local community everyday life.

2.2. Data and researches

There are 12 homeless shelters in the Republic of Croatia in 2013, compared to 2011 when 9 shelters were registered. Shelters are situated in large cities and founders of shelters are cities, associations, charitable and religious organisations. The total accommodation capacity of the shelters is 400 users. When talking about numbers it is important to note that there is no exact data on the number of homeless in Croatia; data on homeless are collected within the national Census in 2011, but the data on the number of homeless collected in this is smaller than the one that is tracked by the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth. Also, there are very few researches on this issue, focusing mostly on shelters' beneficiaries. Still, in one of two researches conducted by the City of Zagreb in cooperation with social welfare centre, one NGO dealing with homelessness, the Misdemeanour court, two psychiatric hospitals, social welfare home for persons with mental health problems, police and County jail in Zagreb, it is discovered that there are around 400 homeless persons in the area of the City of Zagreb. There was no such research on national level, but there are estimations of professionals working with homeless that there are about 1,000 homeless persons living countrywide.

In 2012 the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth sent a comprehensive questionnaire to the shelters countrywide in order to get insight to the profile of average shelters' beneficiary, costs of shelters, and profile of employers working in shelters. On the sample of 384 beneficiaries using then registered 10 shelters, the Ministry made an analysis on the profile of homeless persons using shelters. The analysis showed that most of them are men, in average around 50 years old, living in the shelter for up to two years. Usually they are a single, divorced or never married, without children. Basically they have finished high school, and have around ten years of work experience. The main source of their income is financial support received through the social welfare system. In most cases, they have good health, with no recorded physical, mental or intellectual impairment. Also, most of them possess a



valid identification document, such as a personal identification card and / or passport and a valid health insurance card.

When it comes to youth homelessness, the above mentioned analysis showed that 9.9% of the sample are homeless up to 29 years old and 13.3% of the sample belong to the age group 30-39 years. Unfortunately, there is no earlier data on this issue which would enable comparison, but considering the fact that the youth unemployment rate is very high and constantly increasing in the last few years, it can be assumed that the number of youth homeless is proportionally increased.

2.3. Some examples of good practice

In Croatia, there are some examples of individually tailored models of support to the homeless, but unfortunately it can not be said this is spread countrywide. For example, the reintegration programme of the "MOST" (Bridge) Organisation in the City of Split can be mentioned here. This programme includes providing information to users, counselling and individual work, empowerment workshops, work and occupational activities, assistance in the acquisition of documents, mediation in searching for part-time or full-time employment and tenant accommodation, contacts with institutions, provision of one-off assistance for medications, travelling and similar, inclusion of users in voluntary activities and cleaning and landscaping actions for the welfare of the community.

Also, as a good practice example the programme of the day centre/accommodation of homeless persons in Zagreb can also be mentioned. This programme is operated by the "Ulični suputnik" (Street Companion) Organisation and it is independent of the reintegration programmes provided by the existing shelters. The day centre for homeless persons, which is active in Zagreb for a full year, has the purpose of ensuring re-socialisation projects which would enable homeless persons to change their status. One of the projects of the Organisation is also printing and publishing the "Ulične svjetiljke" (Street lamps) magazine which is the first Croatian magazine on the homelessness issue. Homeless persons are also participating in creating this magazine by writing articles and sharing their experience and stories with readers. Currently the magazine is being sold on the streets of 7 bigger cities in Croatia. The distribution of the magazine is organised by volunteers, but it is sold exclusively by the homeless. Half of the profit from magazine sale goes to the homeless and the other half is intended for printing the next issue of the magazine.

"Knjigom do krova" (With a book to the roof) is one of the projects of Zagreb's Libraries, developed on the basis of the homeless persons support programmes which have been conducted since 2009 in Zagreb's Libraries in cooperation with the Voluntary centre Zagreb. The goal of the project is to empower homeless persons by knowledge and skills to actively participate in social and cultural events and the labour market. The activities include holding IT and IT literacy workshops for homeless persons in the City of Zagreb's shelter and City Library: basic use of computers, internet search; writing and creating CVs and employment applications; how to find information regarding employment on-line, e-mail, application of acquired knowledge – finding information on employment opportunities, writing CV, sending e-mail attachments. After participating in the workshops, users of the shelter in the City Library, with the purpose to renew acquired knowledge, may use computers and internet access with the assistance of a volunteer on duty. Besides the assistance mentioned above, support in employment search is also provided within the scope of the project. The project has received a USD 15,000 donation from the international non-profit organisation EILF, within their PLIP (Public Library Innovation Programme) project.

Housing First in Croatia will be piloted in Rijeka and Split in partnership with the Association Terra Rijeka and the Association Most Split. This project will be



coordinated by CERANEO – Centre for Development of Non-Profit Organisations. The main challenge for implementing this project in Croatia is to ensure housing units and sustainable budgets through state and local funds, and private investments. For successful project implementation it is also important to establish a strong political commitment to the Housing First concept.

Finally, it can also be noted that the Ministry of Social Policy and Youth in collaboration with local and regional authorities, homeless shelters, centres for social welfare, social welfare homes, civil society organisations, etc. develops a plan for homeless accommodation during extreme winter conditions. The plan is updated every year before the winter, ensuring that all stakeholders included in providing homeless care have clear guidelines on what to do in that specific, often dangerous, period of the year.

3. Key challenges

The lack of exact and comprehensive statistical data on homelessness in Croatia can be recognised as one of the key challenges in preventing and tackling the homelessness issue, since this should be the starting point for the overall assessment of the needs and, according to this, for targeted and focused action. Implementing effective economic policy that will decrease the high unemployment rate (16.9%)², especially the rate of youth unemployment (51.8%)³ is also one of the key challenges in preventing and fighting homelessness. Furthermore, it is important to take into account that the existing economic situation of the country does not give too much space for new expenditures in the social welfare sector, so it will be a challenge to find a way to improve homelessness policy and the position of those people, using existing sources on local and national level but also, by taking advantages of new features such as EU structural funds in the social services development. This need is specially emphasised when talking about ensuring affordable and sustainable housing models, especially for the young homeless population. In order to be successful in these efforts, it is extremely important to have a strong cooperation and quality horizontal and vertical coordination between all levels and stakeholders working on the homelessness issue, in any kind of way.

4. The way forward

Taking into account everything mentioned above, it is clear that the Republic of Croatia is facing a lot of challenges which make efforts in improving care for homeless persons more difficult than in more developed countries like Denmark. As already noted, a thorough analysis of the existing situation and needs in the homeless care in cooperation of all competent authorities at national, regional and local level in cooperation with civil society organisations will give the basis for the development of a comprehensive policy in addressing homelessness in Croatia, including the implementation of activities aimed at alleviating and eliminating poverty and social exclusion, homelessness, and supporting the return to the family and inclusion in the community (for example, assistance in finding housing and employment, education, health care, assistance in resolving conflicts in the family, etc.).

During this process, good practices from EU countries and beyond, particularly in relation to the welfare of young homeless people, will be analysed, adjusted to the national context and implemented either as a whole, or in some extent. In this context, the Danish example of a comprehensive approach to addressing the homelessness issue will be for sure one of the references.

² Eurostat data for August 2013.

³ Eurostat data for the second trimester of 2013.



Bibliography

Babić, Z. (2007) *Socijalni transferi i učinkovitost socijalne pomoći u Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb : Ekonomski fakultet Zagreb.

Bunić S., ur. (2013) *Druga prilika – Izazovi i perspective u radu s beskućnicima*. Zagreb: Knjižnice grada Zagreba.

CERANEO (2012) Development of innovative programmes of prevention and social inclusion of homeless through the activities of civil society – project documentation.

CERANEO (2012) ETHOS Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion / ETHOS - Europska tipologija beskućništva i stambene isključenosti. Available at: <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article120>

Croatian Constitution. *Official Gazette* No. 85/10 / Ustav Republike Hrvatske. *Narodne novine* br. 85/2010. Available at: <http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/232289.html>

European Commission (2010) *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2010*. Available at: <http://www.ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=5503&langId=en>

European Commission (2013) *Questionnaire on member states' methods and findings for assessment of homelessness and housing exclusion, strategies and measures to tackle them and the monitoring of progress*.

Eurostat (2013) Unemployment rates by age group. Available at: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdec460&plugin=1>

Ministarstvo socijalne politike i mladih / Ministry of Social Policy and Youth (2012) *Report on the implementation of the Joint Social Inclusion Memorandum (JIM) of the Republic of Croatia in 2011*. Available at: http://www.mspm.hr/djelokrug_aktivnosti/medunarodna_suradnja/jim_zajednicki_memorandum_o_socijalnom_ukljucivanju_rh/joint_memorandum_on_social_inclusion_of_the_republic_of_croatia

Ministarstvo zdravstva i socijalne skrbi RH (2007) Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion of the Republic of Croatia / Zajednički memorandum o socijalnom uključivanju Republike Hrvatske. Available at: <http://www.mrms.hr/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/jim.pdf>

Social Welfare Act, *Official Gazette* No. 33/12 / Zakon o socijalnoj skrbi, *Narodne novine* br. 33/2012. Available at: http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2012_03_33_798.html UNECE (2011) *Innovation in the Services Sector: Review of Experiences and Policies*. Available at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=16163>

Statistical and other data of Ministry of Social Policy and Youth, Zagreb, Croatia.

