

Cooperation for the Prevention of Homelessness Using Examples of Selected Countries of the European Union¹

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Abstract

Partnerships between the various institutions are important for a given entity in the process of engaging stakeholders. They lead to the solution of problems that affect all partners. In the context of partnership, individuals, groups and organisations representing different sectors agree to cooperate. Their aim is the fulfillment of their obligations or to undertake specific tasks, bringing their skills and resources together, incurring the risks and costs, and sharing the benefits resulting from the achievement of common partnership goals and the objectives of individual member organisations. Cross-sectoral partnership consists of representatives of the three sectors. These are usually large partnerships entered into with the aim of implementing national, regional, and even international projects, among others, in terms of social assistance. This article illustrates selected examples of actions taken on behalf of homeless individuals that are implemented by entities representing the various sectors, undertaking to cooperate and implement projects for the benefit of this social category.

Key words: homelessness, social policy, the European Union, partnership

Introduction

Partnerships between various institutions are of vital importance for an entity in the process of stakeholder engagement (Grayson, Hodges 2004: 235). They may lead to solutions to problems that affect all partners. R. Tennyson and L. Wilde (2000: 12) have defined partnership as cross-sectoral alliances within which individuals, groups and organisations representing different sectors agree to cooperate to fulfill an obligation or undertake a specific task, bringing their competences and resources, collectively bearing the risks and costs, as well as sharing the benefits resulting from the achievement of the common objectives of the partnership, and objectives of the individual member organisations.

Cross-sectoral partnership is composed of representatives of three sectors. These are typically large partnerships entered into in order to implement regional, national, and also well as international projects, among others, in the field of social assistance. An example would be the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), which promotes and allowed the international exchange of knowledge and expertise between entities operating on behalf of homeless people in Europe. Based on the recommendations of FEANTSA, that social

¹ Broader results of the research were presented in a monograph (Szluz 2014).

policy conducted in the context of preventing homelessness brings results, it is necessary to observe the so-called ten approaches/methods:

- 1) *based on evidence*—an understanding of the problem is the “key” in developing appropriate policies;
- 2) *comprehensive*—a method of combating homelessness involving crisis intervention policies and social rehabilitation of the homeless, as well as the prevention of the phenomenon;
- 3) *multidimensional*—cooperation between relevant ministries allows the building of an effective strategy and avoids the negative consequences of their application in various spheres;
- 4) *based on human rights*—access to adequate and sustainable housing is a necessary condition which allows the enjoyment of basic human rights;
- 5) *participation*—the involvement of all entities, i.e. public authorities, service providers and clients, in the implementation of solutions in the field of social policy in relation to homelessness, as well as coordinating activities;
- 6) *statutory*—intended to strengthen the homelessness strategy with legislation which is appropriate in this field;
- 7) *needs*—based on the premise that social policy regarding the problem of homelessness should be developed taking into account the existing needs of individuals, rather than guided by the structural needs of the organisation;
- 8) *from the bottom-up*—relies on developing homelessness policy at the local level within a national or regional strategy framework;
- 9) *pragmatic*—comprised of two elements: realistic goals are needed and possible to achieve, when relevant social problem research is conducted, as well as when a clear and realistic timetable containing short-term and long-term goals is developed;
- 10) *balanced*—creation of a balanced approach for combating homelessness through adequate funding, political commitment at various levels (state, regional and local), as well as conducting an information campaign (FEANTSA 24.10.2010; Szluz 2011a: 20).

In this article are selected examples of action on behalf of homeless individuals, which are implemented by entities representing particular sectors, undertaking to cooperate and implementing ventures for this social category.

The cooperation of entities in counteracting homelessness

The leading role in solving and preventing homelessness is played by Austrian provincial and municipal departments with their social budget, which finances social services, as well as housing for individuals in need of assistance, and supporting undertaken activities. In Austria, municipalities are responsible for the allocation of council housing, which is known as “emergency housing”. An innovative solution is the programme entitled “Four Walls and More”, in which was launched a promotion of alternative accommodation for men and women in uncertain housing situations (BAWO Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe). All private and public institutions, which are active in terms of assisting the Austrian homeless or those threatened with this problem, have been invited to participate in this project.

In Belgium, specifically in large cities, many NGOs have been established which ensure support and assistance for the homeless. Measures have been taken with the aim of addressing training and employment barriers in this social category; therefore cross-sectoral cooperation, as well as cooperation with training and employment agencies, turned out to be very important. Approximately 44% of entities expanded their cooperation in this field (Lescrauwaet, Menxel, Blow 2007: 17). The Social Assistance Ministry of the Flemish government supports the project for improving services for the homeless, with the aim of establishing cooperation with employment agencies and increasing the number of training courses.

Among the services provided to the homeless in the Czech Republic, they may be specified as performed by: the state, regional or municipal authorities, and NGOs. Cooperation between entities is advisable, but has still not been implemented in full. 2,450 beds are offered to the homeless every night by the SAD organisation. This assistance is directed to only a portion of the people. The majority of individuals seeking assistance in the centres need shelter, food and other basic services. It is necessary to maintain a balance between the provision of such services and the individual's own obligation in caring for themselves. SAD cooperates with all local, national and European authorities, and NGOs. The organisation undertakes cooperation at the European level in the field of social policies, housing policy, and in terms of the exchange of personnel and experience (FEANTSA 29.08.2012).

An attempt to establish a national NGO, which was to act in specific regions of the country, was undertaken by Denmark. In July 2000, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, along with the Ministry of Social Affairs, launched a national plan to counter homelessness. Local authorities have the task of: preventing or limiting problems with the payment of rent, which is intended to prevent evictions; providing temporary housing for families who have lost their home; as well as providing an adequate number of facilities for the homeless (FEANTSA 17.08.2012). The regulation determines and includes services provided in a situation of homelessness, however it does not contain a statutory right to housing, nor does it fully satisfy the needs of those individuals who have difficulty in independently obtaining a dwelling. As a result, local social assistance centres and local authorities have wider possibilities in terms of interpreting and developing forms of intervention. Services for disadvantaged groups are almost entirely funded through public funds. NGOs such as SAND, The Danish National Organisation for the Homeless, participate in the provision of these services (FEANTSA 18.08.2012). Regional committees operate at the local level and establish cooperation with local politicians, consulting before making a decision. SAND organises regional meetings for committees, provides information, conducts activities in the field of education, provides training for volunteers and wards, and publishes a bulletin. In addition to the state institutions and NGOs that operate in Denmark, there are many private establishments that operate in the area of social assistance. An example, from which other countries have taken inspiration, is the Kofoed School in Copenhagen (Szluż 2013: 133; Szluż 2011b: 217–218). It is a private institution founded during the economic crisis of 1928. The experience of the founder, who was struggling with the problem of unemployment, contributed to the appearance of the idea of creating

places for activities and educating those individuals who lacked a livelihood or a perspective to make change.

The provision of housing through the public sector is one of the most powerful tools influencing the overall level of pricing in the housing market in Estonia. An alternative form of ensuring such premises is the implementation of projects by NGOs or public-private partnerships. A strategy has been introduced which is aimed at social integration (Estonia's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion). Some rules have been adopted for this Estonian strategy: an integrated approach to reducing poverty and social exclusion—the solutions must offer activities among the policies: economic, educational, work-related, social protection, healthcare, and housing policies. For an individual this means ensuring a coherent system of assistance in accordance with their needs, which involves cooperation between the various institutions, both at the local level as well as national.

In Finland, a novel approach to the problem of homelessness was proposed through the implementation of the “Housing First” model. Its indicated objective is the liquidation of temporary facilities and replacing them with forms of long-term housing. Before the introduction of this programme, the approach to long-term homelessness was dominated by the so-called “Staircase Model” model, known as the ladder model, in which homeless individuals overcame several stages (FEANTSA 24.10.2010: 10, 19). They should use the premises under certain conditions, for example, shelters with low standards, temporary accommodation for specific subgroups, transitional housing; but in order for this they had to have previously solved social and health problems. It was pointed out that one social worker should assume responsibility for two people in supported housing. The new Finnish strategy is connected with the use of a broad spectrum of activities in the field of social work. In the new program, financial responsibility is divided in half between the state and local authorities. An essential element in this process is a strong political commitment supported by financial resources. The program to reduce long-term homelessness is based on a broad partnership agreement.

In November 2009 a strategy to prevent homelessness in France was introduced and became the basis for the “Housing First” solution. It was prepared taking into account the principles of a humanitarian approach and unconditional refuge. Each individual should have access to a crisis facility; unconditional access to this type of facility allows the beneficiary to not be obliged to disclose any personal data. It emphasised the need to provide integrated services in a particular area, i.e. taking action in each department with regard to people threatened with homelessness. It initiated the operation of teams in the field (mobile teams), the operation of an intervention phone line, emergency accommodation, day centres, as well as other services associated with addressing the needs of homeless individuals (FEANTSA 24.10.2010: 4, 7-22). The initiatives are aimed at coordinating services and accommodation.

In Greece, action for the homeless is taken by: local municipal authorities, the Church, and NGOs. It was noted, that the national coordinating organisation may undertake the following actions:

- 1) evaluation of all institutions providing services to the homeless, it will be the criterion for the continuation of funding;
- 2) a division of labour in order to ensure that they are not duplicated by organisations;
- 3) designing, implementing and coordinating research, as well as publishing the results;
- 4) representing the country in European and international fora, at conferences, as well as workshops;
- 5) the establishment and assured operation of a national telephone number for individuals requiring assistance;
- 6) participation in the “National Plan for social inclusion – the prevention of homelessness in Greece” strategy (Stamatis 2012: 14).

A comprehensive program to prepare for an independent life includes, inter alia: cooperation with organisations providing vocational training; creation of a network of local services which includes support for homeless individuals with special needs, e.g. drug addicts, women experiencing violence; improving cooperation between the entities providing assistance; (FEANTSA 2008: 9-10).

Through the introduction of legislation in Spain, all municipalities which have greater than 20,000 residents are obliged to provide social services to the homeless. As a result, new centres were created, as well as an improved quality of service. NGOs in this country play an enormous role in assisting the homeless, specifically those associated with the Church. It is the same in The Netherlands, the fight against homelessness is the task of municipalities, which are responsible for preventing and overcoming the problem. NGOs also offer assistance by undertaking a number of activities, for example, participation in the conducting of research regarding this phenomenon, the operation of centres, and the provision of services. In Slovenia, the municipality should possess housing resources for disadvantaged groups. Ljubljana is the only city that offers housing – their number is limited – designated for families with many children, the disabled, single parents, victims of domestic violence, as well as homeless individuals.

Irish organisations that operate shelters cooperate with other entities in terms of: psychiatric care, supported employment, and the elimination of debt. Noted among the postulates to be implemented by 2016 is the need to develop early preventive intervention activities in social assistance structures, in this the development of indicators that act as an early warning system. Another task that was indicated was the preparation of a strategy of action for the homeless – combining integrated and preventive strategies with the aim of eliminating long-term homelessness (i.e. lasting more than six months), improving coordination of initiatives, and strengthening the involvement of individual entities (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government 2008: 22-26).

In Lithuania, it is not possible to provide effective support for beneficiaries without the cooperation and coordination of initiatives, for a number of reasons: some clients

may use the services of many organisations; small organisations may receive less money from funding due to a lack of skills and capabilities to manage large projects; the more organisations that take part in competitions, the harder it is to receive funding (rather than creating a partnership); diagnosing the problem; without information on the services provided by other organisations, they can not effectively support clients; a lack of the networking and cooperation of NGOs may cause an insufficient representation of their views (Zaronaite 25.08.2012). In 2002, it was emphasised that the relationship between the state and NGOs had not been clarified, that the legal system solutions in this field were not specified, and the rules of financing NGOs from state budget subsidies in both their activities, as well as in ongoing projects (Matonytė, Zdanevičius 2002). In terms of benefiting from the use of structural funds, this constituted a very serious problem in integrating with the EU. Many services which are implemented by NGOs, such as prophylactic programs, canteens, and temporary-stay shelters were not granted permanent funding.

Observers of the homelessness phenomenon in Latvia put forward several proposals aimed at curbing, as well as trying to solve, the problem of homelessness. In terms of the cooperation between entities, it was stressed that it was essential for:

- 1) the involvement of public institutions, NGOs, as well as those operated by the Church, private individuals, as well as volunteers providing social services to the homeless;
- 2) the continuation of activities undertaken concerning the configuration of a uniform information system as well as improving cooperation between local government institutions, in order to prevent evictions;
- 3) the support of international institutions in promoting international cooperation in solving problems: poverty, and homelessness, etc. (Lapina, Skubure 2003: 8-9).

In turn, assisting the homeless in Germany is the task of public administrations, which cooperate in this field with third sector organisations, which also have the right to independently create their own initiatives. Social housing rental agencies are also in operation, undertaking activities oriented at ensuring premises in the private sector to the homeless. Their responsibility is to guarantee building owners, for example, the payment of rent, determining the amount of rent for the housing, and the absence of anti-social behaviour (Gosme, 2008: 11). In federal legislation, it is stated in the Social Assistance Act that cooperation between the public sector and the third sector is intended to complement social assistance entities and lead to their more effective actions. Consequently, the fact that homelessness is treated as a threat to public safety, adequate accommodation for the homeless is at the discretion of municipalities, which are obliged to ensure that the homeless have suitable housing that meets basic social standards. (Taeubner 1993: 1).

New orientation in the field of social policy in Portugal was related to, inter alia: taking initiatives covering a wide range of cross-sectoral cooperation (the entities: public, private, NGOs). Innovative forms of partnership at the local level have been designed and aimed at combating poverty and exclusion and has led to the involvement of various entities, among them, state services, local authorities, non-

profit organisations and citizens' groups in the network, and partnership, which was associated with increased mobilisation, effort, and responsibility.

The Slovak Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family is the central body responsible for matters relating to social assistance. FEANTSA data shows that there is a lack of strategy for tackling homelessness at the national level. The basic law in terms of social assistance became Act No. 195 in 1998 which clarified the services rendered. Indirectly, it sets out the actions to be taken in favour of homeless individuals. The Act defines the right to safeguard the basic living conditions of homeless individuals; although the entity which is directly responsible for this, can not be explicitly determined (FEANTSA 2004: 10). It highlights three key entities involved in services for homeless individuals: NGOs, district authorities and local authorities.

Church organisations (charities) in Slovenia mainly offer material support; shelters provide facilities which are part of the social assistance centre. NGOs undertake and implement programs for homeless individuals. There is not a distinct separation between organisations that deal with social problems. There are entities which function exclusively to solve the problems of homeless individuals, as well as those whose addressees are several target groups.

Modifications introduced in Sweden with regard to public scrutiny of housing allocation have led to a change in the perception of homelessness, meaning, from a structural problem of housing to an individual one. This has resulted in the development of a local homelessness strategy at the municipal level (Löfstrand 2005). These issues are to be treated as national problems connected with the housing market or the labour market. They are currently assigned as the responsibility of local authorities and social assistance, and can be extended to cooperation with non-profit organisations.

Preventing the problem of homelessness primarily rests with local authorities (public) at the municipal level, which are responsible—on the basis of the Act on Social Services—for supporting those individuals who are incapable of acquiring and possessing a dwelling. Part of the social assistance system is the “secondary housing market”. This segment of the system is comprised of various types of transitional housing, for example, shelters and training or supervised housing.

The National Board of Health and Welfare has called for, based on their own and international experience, the preparation of a strategy to prevent homelessness at both the national and local level, with a view to cross-sectoral partnerships (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2007: 3, 13–14). NGOs play an important role at the local level. The government is trying to encourage these entities to undertake a variety of activities for homeless individuals, for example, in terms of disseminating knowledge and inspiring relevant projects, regulations, and good examples of the implementation of their ideas. This can be achieved in the form of seminars, support for regional initiatives, and making comparisons between the municipalities concerned, for example, in statistics.

The Swedish strategy commonly applies the “housing ladder”. On the one hand, the requirements involved with transitioning to the next rung is constantly increasing,

thus the time needed to obtain one's own dwelling increases. However, on the other hand, examples exist in which consumers' rights as tenants have been strengthened, resulting in achieving a better housing situation. Another option is the "housing first" model (Källmen, Blida), which means that the homeless are offered housing, as well as receiving support.

According to 2007 government resolutions, the aim of the activities were the proposal of reintegrating 3,500 homeless individuals back into the labour market, through partially assuming their houses, their rent, as well as employment costs. The aim of the project, implemented through EU and EFS funding, was development of a network, and the activation and involvement of the entities (Källmen, Blida). Those involved were representatives of local authorities, employers, employment agencies, service providers, prisons, childcare facilities and other social institutions, as well as NGOs. Organised seminars were aimed at initiating and sustaining dialogue, as well as action for social inclusion.

In 2012 a so-called central electronic database was introduced in Hungary and as a result all social services receiving state funding must be represented in the form of detailed data by all users (FEANTSA 17/03/2014). Problems appeared involving the opportunity for registering services, as the homeless in larger Hungarian towns usually benefit from several services in the same day, with respect to emerging needs. Its aim is to develop cooperation between entities.

The British social assistance model differs from the Scandinavian and German models; what is related is the fact that the social insurance market has not taken shape in such a wide range and extent (Wisniewski, 2005: 3–5). Local strategies for assisting the homeless are developed and implemented throughout the country. Materials are prepared in which so-called good practices that have been implemented in the UK are shown. The advantage of the British solution is the combination of state assistance activities and third sector organisations which are operated by churches and religious associations, as well as the flexibility of proposed initiatives. The greater part of aid is based in the British system of conditional benefits which is connected with a verification procedure - if the entity applying for assistance truly needs it.

Until the year 2000, there were no legal regulations regarding prevention and assistance for the homeless in Italy. The implementation of rules for reforming the system of aid commenced in 2000. Four main types of local policies directed toward combating poverty and social exclusion can be identified: systemic actions, initiatives for social inclusion, interventions aimed at strengthening coexistence and strengthening communities. The activities are mostly implemented in partnership with local authorities and the third sector.

Summary

Models for cooperation between entities implementing tasks to assist the homeless are developed in the individual countries of the European Union. FEANTSA, on the basis of its 20 years of experience, has prepared a "tool for the development of

integrated strategies to combat homelessness” (Olech 19.07.2007). These types of strategies are based on the following principles:

- 1) accurate and cyclic diagnoses (a census of homeless individuals at the national, regional, local and individual level;
- 2) are incredibly extensive and comprehensive (including components of crisis intervention, early intervention, prevention, and social integration);
- 3) are multidimensional (they integrate various dimensions associated with homelessness – work, health, housing, social assistance, the judiciary, education and training, etc.);
- 4) are based on the human right of a person to have housing and a decent living;
- 5) relate to the philosophy of participation and responsibility (of all entities – responsible for the formation of social policy, responsible for implementation of this policy, as well as an environment of only people who are experiencing homelessness);
- 6) are associated with lawmaking and the stability of laws (they are independent of current political problems);
- 7) are sustainable and maintainable (they have their own budget, political support, the support of public opinion providing continuity);
- 8) are based on real needs (refer to actual needs and to the quality of life of homeless individuals and people threatened with homelessness; they are monitored cyclically);
- 9) are pragmatic and realistic (have realistic and measurably established goals and results, adequate action, a clear and precise implementation period, and the goals are hierarchical);
- 10) are worked out from the bottom-up (referring to local and regional problems), consider various models of support, focus on delivering services closer to the people, transferring solutions to the highest local level.

An important task therefore, is to establish cooperation between the partners representing the different sectors.

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