

SOCIAL POLICY TOWARDS A PHENOMENON OF HOMELESSNESS

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Abstract: The author of the article discusses a problem of the social policy towards homelessness. In the first part there are presented three planes of that policy: social and economic policy acts, groups of social assistance institutions for the homeless and assistance at a level of a homeless person. In the second part the author concentrates on conditions and analyses causes of homelessness, ways of overcoming it and return to the society. Later there are discussed various types of social assistance institutions, and protective, prophylactic and activating programmes carried out at the local and regional level by communes, at the central level by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Then types of social assistance (ad hoc and programme) and strategies of social policy are presented. In the end the carried out research concerning homelessness is considered and conclusions presented.

Key words: homelessness, homeless people, social policy, social assistance, social assistance institutions, social assistance strategies, social policy programmes.

A problem of homelessness

In case when we want to define a notion of homelessness, it may cause some difficulties. One can take into consideration its various conditions for example the living situation of a given person, a symptom of pathology, a phenomenon or a difficult social problem, we can define homelessness as a relatively permanent situation of a person not having his/her home or an own flat. It can be an effect of various factors, such as a voluntary selected life style (e.g.vagabondage), disaster events (orphanhood, natural calamities), desperate decisions (e.g. emigration), manifested own deviation behaviours or of other people, or at last a defective social policy (e.g.housing deficite).¹

According to *Słownik języka polskiego* a homeless person is a man who does not have his/her home, left it or is an exile. Understanding this notion is associated everyday with behaviours manifested externally, essential is the fact of a lack of a place to live.²

One of groups of definitions of the homelessness determines that it is cultural and personal state of a man and a complex social phenomenon. A personal component is underlined (loss of will, skills and motivation) and that they cannot manage with a difficult life situation, they are not able to decide about their fate.³ Another category of definitions concentrated on economic and legal regards, indicating that main prerequisites leading to homelessness are among others poverty, a lack financial and material means, a lack of realisation of a tenancy contract, exmissions. Among social sciences there are mentioned determinants of breaking and decline of social bonds, marginalisation, loneliness or mental diseases.⁴

In Europe homeless people are designated in various ways – roamers, vagabonds, a dangerous class, paupers and in the United State of America they are defined as glibert-trotters, dullards or undirected.⁵

We can also find a legal definition of a homeless person, who will be in force since 1 January 2013. A homeless person is considered to be a person who does not live in housing premises (in understanding of provisions on protection of tenants' rights and housing resource of communes), and as well which is not registered for a permanent residence (staying in a determined locality under the same address longer than three days and nights), and also a person who does not reside in a housing premises and is registered for a permanent residence in the premises, in which there is not possibility to reside.⁶

Homelessness was associated with originality, independence, avangarde and it was also identified with unwillingness to observe law and social principles. There occurred as well negative notions connected with it, such as a social margin, alcoholism, and also diseases and resourcelessness. In the contemporary times the problem of

1 T. Pilch, I. Lepalczyk: *Pedagogika społeczna. Człowiek w zmieniającym się świecie*, Warszawa 1995, p. 433-434

2 J. Chwaszcz J: *Osobowościowe i społeczne...*, cit. ed., p. 16-17

3 E. Jagodzińska: *O przyczynach bezdomności w Polsce – wybrane zagadnienia*, Warsaw 2001, p. 2

4 L. Stankiewicz: *Zrozumieć bezdomność (aspekty polityki społecznej)*, Ed. Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, Olsztyn 2002, p. 20-24

5 A. Nowak: *Bezdomność jako problem społeczny w dobie niepokojącej współczesności (realia instytucjonalne a możliwości niesienia pomocy)*, [in:] „Auxilium Sociale” 2005, no. 2, Information leaflet.

6 Art. 6 act of 12 March 2004 on social assistance, (Dz.U. no. 64, item 593)

homelessness has a negative implication.⁷

In the literature causes of homelessness are formulated in different ways. They may result from increasing poverty and lack of cheap flats, loss of employment, inefficiency of social services, lack of social support, migration, mental handicaps or mental deterioration resulting in alienation of this group, orphanhood, or staying in reformatory institutions and as well various types of addiction.⁸ One differentiates also individual predispositions to be homeless, among others there should be mentioned psychical and somatic disorders, various types of addictions, incorrect course of the socialisation process and life philosophy.⁹

However, there occur cases, in which the conditioning of homelessness is the lack of an option of return home after leaving a penitentiary institution (the longer the period of staying outside the society, the more difficult return and re-integration).¹⁰

The majority of authors differentiating types of homelessness, gives the following criteria: a time of duration (periodic, fricative, short-term, temporary, permanent), conditions of it (under pressure, voluntary), its results (partly, complex), a manifested form (evident, hidden, situational), concrete manifested kinds (street, of prisoners, squatters, pensionaries of shelters and nights' lodgings, immigrants and asylants)¹¹

One can as well assume another classification of the homeless people and differentiate the categories: the homeless because of necessity and by choice, objective and subjective, real (deep) and potential (shallow), evident and hidden, long-term and temporary and also a group of homeless foreigners.¹²

The homeless people most often have earlier unpleasant experiences from which they want to escape, they live day by day with everyday life, a moment and they do not think over the future. They isolate themselves from the social and cultural life, which is connected with their attitude towards other people and their external appearance. They create a typical, extreme marginal culture, characterising itself with a feeling of fatalism and an attitude of resignation.¹³

Research concerning this group of people are not complete, only orientational. As well there are not carried out statistics of the homeless people. However, they indicate that among the homeless women one can find most often young, unmarried women, waiting the birth of a child, half of them come from institutions for the children or were discarded by the closed family, they have a full or incomplete secondary education, and only every fifth has vocational qualifications, they are often psychically sick or prostitute themselves. In cases of men, the majority among them are older, single people (bachelors, divorced), half of them do not have a family or do not keep in touch with them, about 43% of them has only a vocational qualifications, the remaining ones have a secondary education or have not any qualifications, as far as 73% among them were convicted in the past, some are addicted to alcohol or suffer from a psychical disease.¹⁴

Among inhabitants of institutions for the homeless people one can meet most often lonely men (about 90%) overusing alcohol. In their case an effort to make them independent is useless – to find a place to live and work, because their abstinence often lasts only till the first or second payment; it happens that flats are changed into a hang-out. They cannot admit themselves that alcohol is the source of their problems and they often return to the institutions as *old recidivists*. They experienced several disaddiction treatments and staying in a place where drunk are kept until they become sober, were exempted, their health is destroyed. Working with such people is very difficult, often very ungrateful and does not bring expected results.¹⁵

A man to fulfil his basic right – a feeling of dignity, needs to have his *own place to live*, a place where he would feel *where he belongs*, where his needs (e.g. of safety) will be satisfied. Such space – the own flat allows him to feel completely himself and this right should be inalienable, it is connected with the right to a decent life. The right to a home is the right to own these goods (a flat), which is the basic, closest and indispensable environment of life, connected with the family life. In the flat life is going, various purposes and activities are realised, a feeling of safety is being created. This right should be protected, because it is often endangered. The state should ensure realisation of this right (issue adequate norms) in a commonly known and accepted way and create conditions for its acquiring.¹⁶

The homeless people are hungry everyday, they feel resourceless, are sometimes nervously and psychically broken down, many of them simply vegetate. It happens that they lack a system of values, they have a feeling of total senselessness, which leads to various kinds of addiction and also socially undesired behaviour. Such a

7 J. Chwaszcz: *Osobowościowe i społeczne wyznaczniki funkcjonowania bezdomnych mężczyzn*, Lublin 2009, p. 15

8 L. Stankiewicz: *Zrozumieć bezdomność...*, cit. ed., p. 59-65

9 J. Chwaszcz: *Osobowościowe i społeczne...*, Lublin 2009, p. 46-49

10 E. Humienny: *Wychodzenie wciąga: skok na głęboką wodę*, Wrocław 2010, p. 18

11 L. Stankiewicz: *Zrozumieć bezdomność...*, cit. ed., p. 67-71

12 J. Chwaszcz: *Osobowościowe i społeczne...*, Lublin 2009, p. 18-20

13 L. Dyczewski (red): *Kultura grup mniejszościowych i marginalnych*, Lublin 2005, p. 235-238

14 T. Pilch, I. Lepalczyk: *Pedagogika społeczna...*, cit. ed., p. 438-439

15 P. Domański: *Umierali sto razy...*, [in:] „Świat problemów” 2003, no. 3, p. 21-22

16 H. Skorowski: *Problematyka praw człowieka*, Warsaw 2005, p. 171-176

situation is too great burden, therefore in this group often occur diseases and psychical disorders and also suicides. The homeless people experience everyday various kinds of lacks and conflict situations, as well pressures from various sides. This phenomenon is also connected with engagers of health, life and public rights.¹⁷

The phenomenon of homelessness makes impossible satisfying basic and individualised needs, which leads to situations of strong tension, stress and frustration. A reaction can be aggression, which manifests in fights, assaults, thefts and burglaries.¹⁸

Escaping of the homelessness state is very difficult, though not impossible. Every case must be individually treated. One of beneficial reasons of getting out of the homelessness state is considered an individual want to change own way of life. Unfortunately there also happens a passive group, which only wants to survive.¹⁹

In the contemporary times the market economy is badly understood and performed, while basic ethical values are omitted, in the result of this man's social rights are broken and are not observed, such as the right to a home. „Out attention turns to many-million number of human creatures deprived of an adequate home, or any home, in this order to wake conscience of everybody and find a solution of this serious problem, which causes a series of negative effects on an individual, family and social plane.”²⁰ This phenomenon possesses a social aspect, it is a problem arising fears that it violates the basic man's right which is his dignity and want to possess his own premises.²¹

Social policy towards homelessness

Assistance to the homeless people should be carried out in three planes connected with one another: on the society level (performance of an active social-economic policy preventing homelessness), institutions of assistance for the homeless people (creating for them decent living conditions or ensuring medical assistance) and at the level of a homeless person (supporting his/her motivation for life and work, assisting in fight against addictions, re-integrating them with the society and family). The homeless people do not often have to do with institutions which can be connected with a lack of interest or fear. Shelters or other aid institutions should become for them schools of becoming independent and observing obligations and teaching to avoid a consumptive attitude, based on respecting dignity and filled with the atmosphere of trust and understanding.²²

When we consider programmes preventing homelessness and supporting going out of it, two dimensions of activities are essential: firstly – indispensability of improvement of social and living situation of such people and secondly, a possibility of making independent some of them at least. The following groups of principles should also be observed, which are based on an individual solving of situations of the homeless people, these which result from conditions of origin of this process (violence, divorce or *przemoc*, *rozwód* or *exmission*) and focusing on foreigners. In our country the institutions operate which assist the homeless people. One can divide them into two groups:

- stationary institutions to which we include shelters, lodging-houses, readoption flats for homeless people, social assistance hostels, houses of life activity, homes for lonely mothers, homes for older and sick people, commonwealths;
- non-stationary institutions. These are: eating-houses, outposts of sanitary and material assistance, outposts of giving food, social intervention emergencies, medical outpatients' clinics, baths, homes of daily stay.²³

Turning attention to assistance to the homeless people showed that it will be performed best at the local level. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Health, departments of social policy, are responsible for financial means from the state budget, which are related to this matter, the Marshal's offices and regional social policy centres. Among institutions one can mention social assistance centres, health service or police. One of the essential questions is that the homeless people often do not have an identity card and are not registered for residence, which is required at the territory of our state and brings with various kinds of problems.²⁴

In the primary legal act which is the fundamental act, we can learn from art. 75 that „the public authorities carry out policy promoting satisfying the housing needs of citizens, in particular they counteract

17 A. Białas: *Zjawisko bezdomności kobiet w ujęciu teorii psychologicznych*, [in:] „Auxilium Sociale” 2003, no. 2, p. 46-47

18 D. Makowiecka: *Kryminogenne aspekty bezdomności*, [in:] „Auxilium Sociale” 2005, no 1, p. 195

19 L. Stankiewicz: *Zrozumieć bezdomność...*, cit. ed., pp. 101-105

20 H. Skorowski: *Moja Europa? Refleksje nad kulturowym wymiarem integracji europejskiej*, Warsaw 2005, p. 99, [in:] Jan Paweł II: *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. Polish text, Warsaw 1988

21 H. Skorowski: *Moja Europa?...*, cited ed., p. 99-100

22 L. Stankiewicz: *Zrozumieć bezdomność...*, cited ed., p. 102-110

23 There, p. 41-53

24 B. Szluz: *Świat społeczny bezdomnych kobiet*, Warsaw 2010, p. 63-64, 68

homelessness, support development of the social building trade and support the citizens' activities aiming at obtaining their own flat"²⁵, and in art. 68 that everyone has the right to health protection, independently of his/her material situation.²⁶ Protection of the citizen's rights with institutional guarantees is connected with a determined political and social situation, with adequate material conditions.²⁷

Another very important act, in which there appears this subject, is act on social assistance. The institution of the social assistance has a task among other to support people and ensuring for them satisfying their basic living needs, and it also helps among others to create living conditions, which allow to maintain the fundamental right, which is the right to dignity.

Assistance is granted particularly because of homelessness. In accordance with it among tasks, which the self-government of the province performs, one can find such ones which are related among others to working out, updating and performing the provincial strategy from the scope of social policy, including particularly problems of the social assistance, counteracting against social exclusion, cooperation with extra-governmental organisations, animation and promoting of new solutions. Among the social allowances granted to the homeless people one can mention a possibility of shelter, a meal, indispensable clothes, stay and services at the social assistance home, performing the burial, assistance in acquiring employment or obtaining housing conditions. The homeless people can also be granted a target allowance which will cover a part of total costs of the health insurance. He/she can as well take part in an individual programme of getting out of homelessness, which consists in supporting in solving living problems (family, housing ones, and also assistance in finding employment. It is worked out by a social employee together with a homeless person.²⁸

The state policy concerning the matter of flats realises social objectives, among others through assistance in building communal premises and centres for the homeless people, it creates also possibilities to buy them out for ownership, offering suitable conditions.²⁹

At the territory of our state there was not established a scale of a very complex problem of homelessness. It was perceived that it becomes more and more common and it seems to be a symptom of social pathology. Questions of drug addiction, alcoholism, unemployment or delinquency co-exist with this phenomenon. Among cause of homelessness one can find a lack of ability to become independent, managing one own's life and insufficient assistance while getting out of this state, because according to research assistance institutions concerning homelessness are included in supporting and life-saving and welfare institutions.

Assistance should be connected with consequential activities in the governmental and extra-governmental sector. One of the strategies is the departmental MPiPS programme „Homelessness”, in which the founders turn attention to the fact that each case should be analysed individually, take into consideration its specificity and select adequate means. This programme aims to (financial and meritoric) support with activities of territorial organisational entities and extra-governmental organisations. It is grounded on three planes of activity: of prophylactic, target and activating character. It was found that it is indispensable in every commune to create a local assistance plan of assistance for the homeless people and a minimum of three permanent places of residence and also supporting institutions, i.e. shelters, lodging-houses, eating-places and kitchens for the poor. Assistance is as well important, also assistance in treating addictions, giving medical assistance or assistance in issuing identity cards.³⁰

In 2005 another very significant “Protective programme of counteracting against social exclusion of the homeless people and endangered with homelessness”. Assistance should also be granted by public and non-public institutions. Their activity is connected with functioning of territorial self-governments, and in case of non-public institutions, they have to support and supplement tasks of the public administration. The main objective of this programme is overcoming the social exclusion and assistance in getting out of homelessness. Realisation of this is based on overcoming difficult situations, social support, access to a home, therapy, treatment, social grounds and guaranteeing their basic needs. However, in 2006 the successive MPiP program began to operate under the name: „Return of a homeless person to the society”, which is based on joining assistance, coming from public and non-public institutions. It discusses an issue of building the support of governmental and non-governmental institutions at the local level. This programme contains prophylactic, protective and activating strategies, and their realisation is carried out at the regional and central level.³¹

One of the newest programme is the „Strategy of social policy for the years 2007-2013”, which has as its objective running a complex policy of the state which will allow for equal realisation of social rights, change

25 Art. 75 Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997 r. (Dz.U. no. 78, item 483)

26 P. Winczorek: *Commentary to the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997*, Warsaw 2000, p. 91

27 W. Skrzydło: *Polskie prawo konstytucyjne*, Lublin 2010, p. 169

28 Art. 3, 7, 21, 36, 39, 49 act of 12 March 2004 on social assistance (Dz.U. no. 64, item. 593)

29 J. Orczyk: *Polityka społeczna. Uwarunkowania i cele*, Poznań 2008, p. 210-211

30 B. Szluz: *Strategie pomocy osobom bezdomnym*, [in:] W. Walc, B. Szluz, I. Marczykowska (ed): *Opieka i pomoc społeczna wobec wyzwań współczesności*, Rzeszów 2008, p. 225-228

31 B. Szluz: *Strategie pomocy...*, cit. ed., p. 229-230

fore better living conditions of families and supporting of people endangered with the social exclusion. It plans establishing adequate number of institutions for the homeless people and protected flats. The carried out research manifests essential problems which one can meet in the self-government and extra-governmental organisations. They relate mainly to a lack of financial means, entries on permanent grants, insufficiently determined procedures in case of admitting to the institutions drunk people.³²

The institutions rendering services for the homeless people can be divided into two groups: ad hoc assistance and a programme aid. Their new division and character was defined in the project of the „National programme of getting out of homelessness and development of social building trade for the years 2009-2015”. These are: warming-up places, night’s lodgings, eating-places, homes for homeless people and contracted flats (an independent premises for a homeless person granted on grounds of a contract with a social assistance centre for a maximum period of 2 years). It proposes as well a creation of another kind of institutions such as outpatients’ clinics and pharmacies for homeless people, an emergency intervention or homes of life activity. Persons staying in this type of institutions have a chance to get out of the state of homelessness, becoming independent and return to the community.³³

Since 1999 in the Podkarpackie Province there is carried out control of a number of the homeless people, which in the years 1999-2003 had an increasing tendency, and in 2005 decreased in a significant way. The Social Policy Department of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship elaborated the „Programme of realisation of tasks in the scope of evaluation of the state, effectiveness and coordination of activities on behalf of the homeless in the Podkarpackie Voivodeship in 2001”. Among the Voivode’s tasks were to be included a creation of infrastructure, purchase of the equipment, repair of the establishments, however the commune was to find a part of financial means for remuneration of the personnel. Cooperation with county labour offices was also essential. At the level of a local self-government, for the City of Rzeszów there was worked out the „Strategy of Solving Social Assistance Problems”, which focused on the issue of homelessness. Realisation of these tasks was to be performed by the Municipal Social Assistance Centre with cooperation of the father Albert (name of the institution) Rzeszów Assistance Association. Objectives leading to counteracting the phenomenon of homelessness, integration with the community (getting out of homelessness), and as well various kinds of assistance for the poorest and homeless (social labour, material aid, running a shelter, kitchen, bath, therapeutic groups, setting up a shelter for the homeless women).³⁴

The problem of homelessness is a multi-aspect phenomenon, its conditioning is different, which should be considered individually. Assistance ensured by the state institutions should focus on three main planes of activities: a prophylactic, protective level, getting out of homelessness. It focused mostly on ensuring assistance to survive and performing changes in the living situation of the homeless people. Prophylactic activities are also significant, allowing for integration of such people with the society and their becoming independent.

Activities of the institutions should take into consideration needs of the homeless. A conception is rational, which assumes that a commune should set up places of permanent residence for the homeless people, because in a local environment it is easier to obtain support and return to the community. Cooperation with extra-governmental organisations is also significant in realisation of social assistance programmes.³⁵ Alteration of treating these people is as well important and focusing on particular groups creating this environment.

32 B. Szluz: *Świat społeczny...*, cit. ed., p. 82, 85-86

33 There, p. 87-91

34 B. Szluz: *Świat społeczny...*, cit. ed., p. 233-235

35 B. Szluz: *Strategie pomocy...*, cit. ed., p. 230-232, 236

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