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**ДІЯЛЬНІСТЬ ОРГАНІВ ПУБЛІЧНОЇ ВЛАДИ
ЩОДО ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ СТАБІЛЬНОСТІ ТА
БЕЗПЕКИ СУСПІЛЬСТВА**

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WORK ACTIVITY OF THE HOMELESS

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The problem of homelessness has been recognized by the Council of Europe. The international legislation provides that owning a home is a basic human right (the European Social Charter of 3 May 1996, Article 31). Signatories to the Charter are required to prevent homelessness and promote social housing. (Wright 2005). The problem of homelessness has been the subject of many studies of Catholic social science. In his message for Lent (1997), John Paul II emphasised the fact that the right to housing is the fundamental right, and a homeless person cannot be deprived of human dignity. The problem of homelessness is a subject of debates and programmes, both at a local and national level (for example programmes of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy). In 1989, FEANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless) was created. This international and non-governmental organization aims at preventing homelessness and developing new ways of working with the homeless. This organization comprises over 100 NGOs, including the ones from Poland. Although homelessness is a problem that is noticed and recognized as important, it is not exactly known what its social reach is.

It is difficult to estimate the number of homeless people, hence the estimates of homelessness vary considerably. According to the UN statistics (1987), over 100 million people worldwide are homeless. The Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax* (1985) estimates the number of the homeless at 700 million, of which 100 million are without any shelter. The studies conducted in English speaking countries show that age of the homeless is decreasing, which means that the problem of homelessness affects younger population. According to The Institute for the Study of Homelessness and Poverty, there are at least 10 000 young homeless people in Los Angeles alone. (Ferguson and Xie, 2008). Approximately two fifths of the total homeless population lives in Latin America, mainly in Brazil, but homelessness is not only a problem of developing countries. In the US, 1.5 million people live on the street (Hagan, 1997). In Poland, different estimates of homelessness are given. It is difficult to determine the number of the homeless population, as definitions of homelessness vary and there are not sufficient detailed studies of the problem. (Wojtczak, 2006).

Without an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of homelessness in the given area, it is impossible to develop effective social policy, not only at the national and regional level, but also within individual organizations that deal with this problem. Poland has no strategic plan for comprehensive and coordinated actions aimed at solving the problems connected with homelessness, social reintegration and prevention, and not just providing care for the people who have already lost their homes. (Przyemeński 2006).

The registration of homeless people in the Employment Office does not solve the problem of work activation of the homeless. These people often register themselves for the sole reason of getting health insurance. So, the welfare institutions, to minimize their

costs, persuade homeless people to register. However, this does not result in any activation, because the homeless just do not want to take jobs, often excusing themselves with poor health. On the other hand, their health problems are not grave enough to apply for a state pension. Additionally, they often do not have their contributory period history adequately documented.

The instability of employment and the irresponsibility of the homeless are still other problems connected to work activation. Even if the homeless finds a job, most likely thanks to the welfare institution, he cannot keep it for a longer period. This is an unfavourable phenomenon as it discourages the employers from hiring the homeless, and it also perpetuates the negative stereotypes. Therefore, a special care should be taken to ensure that all persons directed to work are responsible, trustworthy, and able to carry out the tasks delegated to them.

Another problem the interviewees find hard to handle is making the homeless do some work for the shelter. The homeless do not want to work for the shelter, they want money for it. Normally, these are simple chores for the shelter, which serve not only the economic function (reducing the cost of running the shelter), but also the therapeutic one, because they teach systematic work and responsibility. Residents of the shelters do not always want to do such work, in spite of punishment of being removed from the institution. They are not afraid of such a situation, because they realize the ineffectiveness of the punishment: after being removed, they will find some other place or they will return to the one they were removed from when other institutions such as local authorities or the police will put pressure on the staff. This is difficult not only for the employees, but very detrimental to the process of rehabilitation of the homeless. The solution might be to establish a diversified network of support institutions, of which some could be specialized in working with the homeless particularly resistant to pedagogical activities. The current social assistance system does not motivate the homeless to work. People living in the shelters are treated equally, regardless of whether they pay for their stay or not. Therefore, some residents prefer to remain passive and not to get involved in the community work. The homeless people as a community play a significant role in the activation. The community can discourage individuals, or on the contrary, encourage them, and even exert pressure on starting to work for the shelter. Therefore, the ability to work with a group is crucial, as well as adequate social techniques, which require specialized knowledge of sociology. (Bielecka-Prus, Rydzewski, Maciejewska 2011)

Homeless people are often characterized by a lack of motivation to fight for improving their living conditions. Helplessness, inability to cope in life, the passive attitude of waiting and a low work ethos contribute to falling into and remaining in homelessness. Such an attitude may be caused by many factors, among which improper socialization and family dysfunctions play an important role. The lack of motivational tools (low chance of getting social housing), lack of prospects for improving their lives (difficulties in finding work) results in the lack of some idea for their own lives. The interviewees recognize the problem but they cannot and even have no right to plan the future of their charges. They can only use their skills to help the homeless to understand themselves and encourage them to be more active.

The learned helplessness of the homeless is another problem. In particular, this phenomenon applies to people who lived in the welfare centres, where livelihood was provided, for a long time. Like other people in such institutions (e.g. children's homes), the homeless quickly abandon the daily routine of duties, and lose contact with the

outside world. As a result, when they leave the shelter, they cannot cope with everyday problems, such as controlling the family budget, taking care of the cleanliness, etc.

It is also worth noting that the institutions that help to get a permanent job are especially appreciated among the homeless. People interested in finding a job are looking specifically for such centres. The homeless people who are not interested in finding employment are likely to choose shelters, where there is not so much pressure on professional activation. This self-recruitment process can lead to a situation, where the especially problematic homeless people accumulate in the shelters, where the motivating actions are weak.

The homeless are undoubtedly a heterogeneous group. Their life experiences are multi-threaded, and often very complicated. This diversity requires looking for different measures to tackle homelessness. Some of the homeless benefit only from the institutions that offer them assistance in meeting their basic needs. It should be noted, however, that the vast majority require creative assistance. These are the homeless who want to change their social status but they are not able to do it by themselves. It seems that only correct diagnosis of a homeless person will make it possible to develop an appropriate individual assistance programme. Assistance activities should be complementary, multidimensional, long-term and organised by specialized service providers interacting with each other in all stages of getting out of homelessness.

Another very important issue is qualified and experienced staff working in institutions helping the homeless. An ongoing cooperation with psychologists, addiction therapists as well as volunteers is vital. It will bring tangible results in the therapy of a homeless person, and on the other hand, will relieve and aid the social welfare employees in their activities. It is worth remembering that institutions should offer only temporary shelter, as permanent residency in the shelter may result in the individual becoming too dependent on the facility. Additionally, the rotation of residents is low, which narrows the scope of assistance. The homeless who have been diagnosed and want to change their status should be provided with creative assistance. Looking for housing and employment, and offering support seem to be necessary to restore in the homeless the ability to function properly and participate fully in social life.

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