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# Young Homeless People in the Czech Republic: A Comparative Perspective

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› **Abstract\_** *This article looks at results from the project Combating Social Exclusion Among Young Homeless Populations (CSEYHP), funded by the EU Seventh Framework Programme under the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities theme. The project was a comparative investigation of youth homelessness (across different ethnic and migrant statuses) in four countries: the Czech Republic (CZ), the Netherlands (NL), Portugal (PT) and the UK, and this article reports on responses from non-governmental organization (NGO) workers with regard to the risk of homelessness for young populations in the four countries, comparing samples drawn in CZ with those of the three other participating countries. Available evidence on visible and invisible homelessness, particularly in CZ, is summarised, and risk factors associated with youth homelessness in CZ are discussed, as is the need for housing, supported accommodation services and health services, including social services and link workers.*

› **Key Words\_** *youth homelessness, street homeless, institutional care, social services, risk factors, reasons for homelessness, housing services.*

## Introduction

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The Combating Social Exclusion among Young Homeless Populations (CSEYHP) project involved four countries: the Czech Republic (CZ), the Netherlands (NL), Portugal (PT) and the UK. The aim of the project was to investigate histories of youth homelessness in the four countries, the comparability across these countries of reasons for young people becoming homeless, and the similarity of risk factors for homelessness across European states. A considerable amount of research has been done in the UK with regard to risk factors for homelessness among young people, but the question remains as to whether these risk factors are shared with other European countries where less research has been done on the topic. It was possible to anticipate some of the findings from Portugal on youth homelessness based on the known strength of the family welfare regime in that country. It was not, however, possible to anticipate findings on risk factors for youth homelessness in the Czech Republic. As such, the situation of young, Czech homeless people is of particular interest.

The first hypothesis to be tested was that homeless youth across Europe experience similar risk factors. From previous studies of youth homelessness it is known that the social contexts in which young people become homeless are particular to each country. In 2008, an EU-funded research project on young people and social change – the Up2Youth project – compared the structure of welfare policies, education and training systems, labour markets, youth unemployment policies, gender relations and representations of youth across the EU27 countries. Findings suggest that attaining adulthood has become more problematic, as has the timing of the transition from youth to adulthood; many young people experience this transition as reversible, where they may alternate between independence and returning to the parental home where they again become dependent (Walther et al, 2009). Up2Youth identified the current life courses of young people as de-standardised, fragmented and diversified, and found that transitions to adulthood take place distinctly within the different welfare regimes: liberal (Anglo-Saxon); universalistic (Nordic); sub-protective (Mediterranean); employment-centred (Continental) and post-socialist (Central and Eastern European).

The second hypothesis of this article is that it is not the type of welfare regime or its relative poverty (in terms of financial benefits and services) that makes it so difficult to address the problem of youth homelessness in CZ; instead, a lack of awareness-raising, of prevention programmes, and of special services for young homeless persons make reinsertion more difficult. There are currently no such services aimed specifically at young people, and all services target adult homeless persons.

The research posed a significant challenge, as both government agencies and NGOs working with homeless people believed it almost impossible to reach young homeless people. However, comparison with the NL, the UK and PT proved enormously beneficial to understanding youth homelessness in CZ, as NL and the UK have extensive facilities for young homeless people, while PT has a family welfare system. This article will focus on youth homelessness in CZ and refer to other countries in the project for comparative purposes.

## Methodology

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This article reports on results gathered in Phases 1 and 2 of the CSEYHP project. In Phase 1, each national team interviewed 12-16 expert respondents from non-governmental organizations. Expert interviews were conducted using a semi-structured schedule in order to cover common topics across the four countries, and to allow respondents to express their views on issues not explicitly raised in the schedule. Interviews lasted up to 2 hours and were audio recorded. Phase 2 involved interviews with homeless youths that were conducted by co-researchers, themselves homeless or formerly homeless young people. Following training, each team of co-researchers interviewed 54 young homeless people including young men and women, and young people from different ethnic groups and nationalities, and they provided comments on the interview process and the actual interviews.

The sample of young homeless people recruited in CZ was drawn mainly (88%) from young people living either in unfit accommodation – such as squats – or on the streets; this compares with 11% of the Dutch sample (6 were living on the streets), 9% of the Portuguese sample (6 were living in shanty-type accommodation), and 7% of the UK sample (4 were living on the streets). The UK sample consisted principally of young people living in long-term supported accommodation (72% had lived in foyers or hostels for more than three months), compared with 17% in NL and PT, and none in CZ. The samples used in the CZ and UK demonstrate the extreme divergence in provision in these two countries. The NL sample included those living in short-term accommodation of less than three months (37%), long-term supported accommodation (17%), private rented accommodation (9%), refuges (7%), with a partner (6%), social housing (4%), and other. The PT sample was made up of those living with parents in owner-occupied accommodation (11%), social housing (19%), private rented (19%), long-term facilities (17%), squats/shanty-type accommodation (9%), and with a partner (7%).

The sample of young homeless people in each country was not intended to be representative, but to reflect the range of young people across Europe who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Quotas allowed us to ensure that, within a

limited sample size, people born outside of the host country were included. The UK and PT samples have equal numbers of young women and men, the CZ sample includes 15 young women and 39 young men, and the NL sample includes 23 young women and 31 young men. The total survey population therefore comprises 92 young women and 124 young men. Overall, a third of the sample is under 20 years of age, while two thirds are 20 years and over; however, those under 20 account for 61% of the UK sample, a third of the samples in NL and PT (35% and 30% respectively), and only 7% of the CZ sample. The women included in the sample are younger than the men, with 46% of women aged less than 20 and only 24% of men.

**Table 1. Sample of Young Homeless People in 4 countries. CSEYHP database.**

Sample Quota	UK	PT	CZ	NL	Total
Born in country/ ethnically dominant	17	18	44	20	99
	(8F/9M)	(9F/9M)	(14F/30M)	(8F/12M)	(39F/60M)
	7,9%	8,3%	20,4%	9,3%	45,8%
Born in country/ ethnic minority	21	18	3	15	57
	(12F/9M)	(9F/9M)	(0F/3M)	(7F/8M)	(28F/29M)
	9,7%	8,3%	1,4%	6,9%	26,4%
Immigrant	16	18	7	19	60
	(7F/8M)	(9F/9M)	(1F/6M)	(8F/11M)	(25F/35M)
	7,4%	8,3%	3,2%	8,8%	27,8%
<b>Total</b>	54 (25%) (27F/27M)	54 (25%) (27F/27M)	54 (25%) (15F/39M)	54 (25%) (23F/31M)	216 (100%) (92F/124M)

Note: F – Female; M – Male

The representation of ethnic minority youth in the NL, PT and UK samples reflects the colonial pasts of those countries; many of those interviewed are of mixed heritage, having one parent from either the dominant ethnic group or from another ethnic minority group. In PT and CZ the ethnic minority sample includes a number of young Roma: 8 in PT and 3 in CZ. The majority of the Czech sample (47) was born in CZ, while the remainder is from Slovakia; the other three samples include a variety of countries of origin. Achieving a balanced sample of young people was most difficult in CZ because of the patterns of migration and youth homelessness in that country.

Interviews were conducted using a two-part schedule. The first part began with an open-ended question about turning points in the young person's life, while the second part was semi-structured in nature and included many open-ended questions. This design was chosen to ensure the provision of comparative information across the four countries while also gathering information specific to each respondent.

Our research into youth homelessness in CZ followed the pattern of the other three countries. First, a national report reviewed existing evidence on the situation of young people in CZ, including previous studies of homelessness, and reported on expert interviews with key respondents working in homeless NGOs. Secondly, co-researchers were recruited and trained, and thirdly, young homeless people were recruited for interview by means of leaflets distributed by the Salvation Army, outreach workers and by other NGOs. This article compares evidence on youth homelessness in CZ with situations in NL, PT and the UK, and reports on the outcomes of Phase 1 (key respondent interviews) and Phase 2 (interviews with young homeless people).

## Definitions of Youth Homelessness

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As there are no specific provisions on youth homelessness in CZ, the definition of homeless youth used in the research is, in some cases, broader than the ETHOS categories of 'roofless' and 'houseless'. Young people were included for interviews if their living conditions corresponded to one of the following: without proper and/or legal housing; sleeping rough or staying with friends; in hostels or other accommodation intended for less than one year; dependent on support services; living in care or using move-on support; social council tenant having experienced family homelessness (inadequate housing) followed by re-housing. In CZ one of the main problems was, and continues to be, the absence of an official and generally accepted definition of the concepts of 'homeless' and 'homelessness'. The term 'homeless' is used in Czech legal terminology to describe a person without citizenship. In the 2006-2008 national reports on Strategies of Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NAPSI), homeless people are described as those persons "without any roof over their heads and finding temporary shelter in various charity organizations" (Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí, 2006, p.76). The Act on Social Services, valid since 2006, uses only two concepts of homelessness: people without shelter, and people in an unfavourable social situation due to loss of housing. Following pressure for a definition of homelessness from academic circles and NGOs dealing with the issue of homelessness, the Czech government adopted the FEANTSA definition, but extended it to include young people who had previously been living in social care.

## The Scale of Youth Homelessness

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### *The visible homeless youth*

A considerable amount is known about the scale of youth homelessness in the UK where the scale of service provision ensures good visibility, and the relevant information for NL comes from both regional and national studies; in PT and CZ, however, a lack of services means that estimates of the 'invisible' homeless are likely to include young people that would be visible in the other two countries through their engagement with services. In 2006-7, 43 000 young people were accepted as being statutory homeless by local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales, and 31 000 young people were living in supported accommodation (Quilgars *et al.*, 2008). The total estimate of young homeless people in NL is 6 090, but such estimates are problematic due to inadequate registration. In PT, the main studies on visible homelessness focus on those sleeping rough or living in shanty-type accommodation; a national study (Castro and Caeiro, 2004/05) identified 560 people living in shanty-type or unfit dwellings; 2 173 people who were housed but "sporadically sleep on the street/in shelters"; and 1 855 people sleeping on the streets. The majority of these were between 25 and 34 years old, and the reasons they gave for their homelessness were: family problems (25%); health (23%); unemployment (22%); and housing problems (17%). Of 1 100 contacts with homeless people registered by a group of outreach teams in Lisbon, 33% were immigrants.

The issue of homelessness began to appear in CZ in the 1990s as one of the negative consequences of the overall transformation of Czech society. After 1989, the first general estimate of the total homeless population was 35 000 in 1996 (Hradecká and Hradecký, 1996). However, homelessness issues only became part of the political agenda with the accession of CZ to the European Union. In CZ, estimates of the problem focus on the visible homeless living on the streets or in winter shelters, but the number of homeless in the ETHOS operational categories 1-4 (Roofless, Overnight Shelter, Homeless Hostel, Temporary Accommodation, Women's Shelter) is not known to the Czech Statistical Office (CSO), the government body responsible for the periodical census of people, households and flats. Obtaining estimates for these categories is dependent on research carried out by NGOs working in the field, and on data from NGO grant applications to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and European Structural Funds (administered by the Ministry) (Hradecký, 2006b).

A 2004 field census of the visible homeless population in the Prague area identified 3 096 such persons (Hradecký *et al.*, 2004), of which 2 662 were men (86%) and 434 were women (14%); those under the age of 25 made up 14% of the total (337 men, 102 women). The predominance of men and older homeless persons among the visible homeless in Prague is similar to that found in other Czech cities. In 2006, research was carried out on the clients of Prague's temporary winter shelter. It was

found that a diverse client group used this service, including recently released ex-prisoners, young people from institutional care, and people who had moved to the capital to look for work. On 29 January 2006, 227 people (206 men and 21 women) were in the shelter between 8 and 9pm. A third (33%) was from Prague and 48% came from other areas of CZ, while 19% held other nationalities (Slovakian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian). The majority of the homeless were aged between 26 and 65, with only 20 persons between the ages of 18 and 25 (Hradecký, 2006b). Of the shelter's clients, only 10% were women – usually partners of the men who slept in the centre; single women were rare.

### *The 'invisible' homeless*

In the UK and NL, administrative procedures such as homeless applications make visible some homeless young people who remain 'invisible' in countries without such services; this is the case in both PT and CZ, where it was found that young homeless people were mostly invisible. In CZ, the circumstances of many homeless people are invisible to the general population, but are partially known to the government; some data on accommodation for immigrants (operational category 5) and people living in insecure accommodation (operational category 8) are available, and the CSO has precise and detailed data on households that fall into ETHOS categories of inadequate accommodation (categories 11, 12 and 13; Hradecký, 2006b). According to the 2001 census there were 222 persons living in mobile homes not intended as a place of usual residence (Ethos category 11.1); there were 44 836 persons living in dwellings defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation (12.1); and 12 519 persons were living in recreational facilities or weekend houses. 9 018 young people aged 15 to 24 were found to be living in such categories – 0.6% of the whole population of this age group. 7 537 (84%) of them were living in dwellings defined as unfit for habitation, 1 413 (15.7%) were living in recreational facilities, and 32 (0.3%) in mobile homes.

Overall in CZ, estimates of the scale of youth homelessness are based on evidence from NGOs who work with young homeless people but who mostly work with older homeless people; they report that the former make up less than 15% of the total homeless population and that the majority are Czech citizens and male, with few or no qualifications, often with a history of drug-abuse and a background of institutional care or broken homes. Many are from the dominant ethnic group, although none of the organizations interviewed kept ethnic or religious statistics, and in any case those with Roma backgrounds are often reluctant to declare themselves as such due to social stigma. In 2005, a three month study of the young homeless people in one Prague district led to the development of a dual typology of youth homelessness in the area, comprising squatters and drug-users. The squatter group consisted of those who wanted to lead an independent and free lifestyle with

a group of peers or like-minded people sharing alternative values. They were mostly 20-30 years old and lived in vacant houses which they kept in more or less good condition. They tended to abuse alcohol and soft drugs; family relations were often disrupted but some contact was retained; and social isolation was not as deep as in the drug user group. They worked occasionally at temporary jobs in construction or cleaning services, and also got some money from begging; the help identified as being most required by this group was hygiene and medical services (Naděje, 2005). The drug-user group consisted of young people facing a deeper social decline due to drug abuse. Generally under 25 years of age, they tended to have broken family relations and to live in abandoned and remote places with which they felt no emotional bond. They earned money by doing temporary jobs and through petty theft, or by collecting items they could later sell. Their interest in social services was limited to satisfying basic needs (food, hygiene), and their main focus was on obtaining drugs (Naděje, 2005).

### **Expert Respondents on Reasons for Youth Homelessness**

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In Phase 1, as well as reviewing the literature of each country on the issue, each team interviewed 12-16 experts from organisations working with young homeless people. Expert witnesses from each country identified a range of issues that they believed were associated with an increased risk of homelessness.

In NL, expert interviews linked youth homelessness with family background problems, and it was found that young people who had had to deal with multiple support agencies and social workers later had problems with attachment. Dutch experts also emphasised the risks associated with debt. They reported that young homeless people lacked the ability to handle money or pay fines that they had accrued, and debts led to their being unable to pay their health insurance, find accommodation, or return to education. Several Dutch experts also identified specific problems for migrant youths: being raised by single mothers and having to take on the responsibility of an adult male at a young age; differences between young men and women in migrant cultures; clashes with traditionally orientated parents; and having to deal with cultural differences without a support network. Migrants may have further problems with residence permits.

Some NGO experts in PT also linked the issue of youth homelessness with 'dysfunctional' families – families lacking in discipline, or in some cases abusive, broken families. Experts also referred to young people without parents and whose extended families were unable to take care of them, leading to their going into social care. A second major area that Portuguese experts linked with homelessness is the low level of education among young people with learning difficulties. A third area,



also identified in the UK, is the problem of families that have always lived on benefits, and whose children also adopt this approach. In the UK, NGO experts reported that the young people they work with become homeless for a variety of reasons. They spoke first of individual risk factors for young people in terms of their own behaviour (including low aspirations), not getting on with their family, and parental behaviour. In the UK, key respondents also reported a problem of area violence and gangs leading to homelessness.

Expert interviewers in CZ identified four reasons for young people becoming homeless: being taken into institutional care, becoming criminalised, the lack of housing and homeless services for young people, and family breakdown. Expert interviewers who reported family breakdown as an issue also emphasised institutional care and criminal records as important reasons.

*“I would tick ‘B’ (disintegration of the family, conflict in the family), ‘D’ (poverty in the family), and ‘F’ (institutional care). In the case of poverty in the family, the problems are with alcohol, gambling etc., which are transmitted (to the children)... We could say all points from your list play a role, but family disintegration is a major risk factor with our clients... Families are usually not biological; i.e. they have a step-mother or step-father or just one parent. For example, the client finds out when he turns 16 that he was adopted. It usually ends up that he ‘monkeys around’ and when he turns 18, he runs away. Death in the family is rare; poverty is frequent. Abuse or violence is also rare. Institutional care – that is regular and so are criminal records.” (Naděje, NGO)*

As in many other countries, the age of adult responsibility differs in the civil and criminal codes. According to the Czech Civil Code, a person becomes an adult and fully capable of taking on rights and responsibilities at the age of 18; they obtain the right to vote and to marry under the Family Act (Nr. 94/1963). According to the Czech Criminal Code, on the other hand, a young person becomes criminally responsible at 15. If a young person has a criminal conviction, it is five years before that conviction is spent.

*“We have contact with prisons and mental institutions that our clients contact us from. In CZ nobody counts the fact that such a person was convicted twice. When our clients do something while on the run from a children’s care institution and nobody tells them that it’s a crime, then when they turn 18, they go to prison. Once we had 3 boys in such a situation. When they returned from prison we thought – ‘what should we do with them?’ So we went with them to the hospital, hoping they could do the simplest and most basic work. But they wanted a clean criminal record. Two boys gave up after half a year looking for a job. The third one was very upset that he couldn’t work, as he was trained to be a butcher but hadn’t completed his training. So I suggested he could watch over a garbage site. The first thing they*

*asked for was a clean criminal record. This is why we can't find a job for him – not even temporarily. His record will not be clean for another 5 years, so a boy like him is blocked for 5 years... He wanted something permanent to pay the rent because housing is the biggest problem.”* (Projekt Šance, NGO)

Several Czech expert interviewees reported that young people who have lived in institutional care are at particular risk of homelessness. In child care institutions there are currently around 20 000 children under the age of 18, and each year more than a thousand have to leave care when they reach that age. However, there is no follow-on support available for them, despite the risks for these young people having been acknowledged in recent legislation. Being taken into institutional care may be related to the inability of parents to provide care, or it may relate solely to their poverty. In the case of the latter, CZ has been criticized by the EU for not applying family support policies and for breaking up families; unsupported families experience poverty, a lack of adequate family housing, and a lack of social housing.

*“It is necessary to abolish children's institutions in CZ. There are countries in which they have only one or two. In the CZ there is no adequate substitute for family care and the potential of foster care is unused. Indeed it is a truism that all problems begin in childhood, but if care homes did not do so much harm to the kids, which they have to deal with all their lives, we would never have such an influx of badly integrated and badly socialized clients... But some things are getting better; there are already institutions of a family care type where they at least learn some basic things like how to take care of themselves, and are not shocked when they see bread which is not sliced.”* (Dom, NGO worker)

The impact on young people of being taken into care is far-reaching. Exclusion from education is not the biggest concern, as child care facilities are usually connected to some sort of educational institution; instead the problem is that children attend schools that they did not choose, and if they leave these institutions prior to the age of 18, they may be at risk of becoming criminalised (see above), and they may be refused accommodation. The focus on institutional care means that until 18 years of age, the housing and care of young homeless people are the responsibility of the state. For children and young people under that age, who are not yet legally adults, nothing but emergency care can be provided by NGOs, who must refer them to state agencies. However, some key respondents said this situation could be avoided by not checking documents.

Key respondents in CZ also mentioned the disadvantages that homeless young people have when searching for employment – even without a criminal record. The most disadvantaged groups entering the job market are young people without education, or with incomplete or unfinished elementary education, and those graduating from so-called ‘practical’ schools (Ministerstvo, 2006, p.48). Most homeless

youths have had a basic education or an apprenticeship. Some of the main issues for homeless youths include the quality of jobs they can obtain, their (in)ability to keep jobs, and their general lack of the necessary qualifications. Employment Offices offer jobs to the homeless and some NGOs work in cooperation with them.

Housing problems more broadly in CZ are seen as a major contributing factor to youth homelessness.

*“I think that the issue of housing in general is highly problematic and relates to the whole of society, but even more to the socially vulnerable and also young people. One of the factors influencing ending up on the street is a lack of adequate housing – especially in Prague, where it is very expensive. But the issue of employment in this region (Prague) is not such a big problem – maybe in some other parts of the Republic. In Prague employment is high and I think a young person can find work if s/he wants to. But there is a problem with qualifications and lower salaries, so we return to the housing problem.” (Naděje, NGO)*

## **The Risk of Youth Homelessness**

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Three clusters of factors can be identified: risks for young people relating to their family background and parental behaviour; risks for young people relating to their own behaviour (school exclusion, truanting, running away, drugs and alcohol); and risks relating to social exclusion and poverty (workless households, poor areas and poor families). The situation of young homeless people in the Czech Republic is of particular interest.

### ***Family background and parental behaviour***

The Czech sample had the highest proportion of respondents who had lived with two or one birth-parents at the age of 12 (70% as opposed to 63% in the UK, 56% in NL and 50% in PT). However, more young people in the CZ sample reported difficult childhoods; a third of both NL and CZ samples reported that they were hit frequently during childhood, and they were also more likely to report mental health and alcohol problems in their parents. Young people in the PT and UK samples were most likely to report a good relationship with two parents or their lone parent (PT 37%; UK 29%). They were also more likely to report having a good relationship with one parent and a bad relationship with the other (PT 30%; UK 33%). A majority of young people in the PT and UK samples reported a good relationship with at least one parent (67% and 62% respectively), compared with 49% in NL and 28% in CZ.

A quarter of the total sample from all four countries (216) had had experience in care, while another quarter would have liked social services intervention when they were growing up; overall 53% had either lived in care or had wanted intervention.

Further, some young people who had experienced care episodes would have liked more social services intervention, and earlier. The sample containing young people most likely to have experienced care was that of NL (49%), followed by CZ (24%).

**Table 2. Care experiences and requirements for care.**

Lived in care or wanted care	CSEYHP	
Never in care and didn't want social services intervention	<b>47%</b>	NL exceptionally low at 24%, PT 50%, CZ 51%, UK 61%
Never in care but wanted social services intervention	<b>27%</b>	Highest in PT at 33%, NL 28%, CZ 24%, UK 22%
In care at some time in their childhood	<b>26%</b>	NL exceptional at 49%, CZ 24%, PT 17%, UK 16%

### *Young people's behaviour*

Nearly half of the young people in the UK and NL samples reported having been excluded from school (43% and 48% respectively) while this fell to 30% in CZ and 26% in PT. However, 80% of the CZ sample admitted to truancy, as did 70% of the NL sample but only 57% in PT and 46% in the UK. Three quarters of young people in the NL sample had problems with teachers (74%); this figure was 56% in CZ, 48% in PT and 35% in the UK. Over half of the CZ sample had no school certificate. More than half of the NL and CZ sample stated that they had argued with parents because of being in trouble with the police; this was only a third in the UK and PT.

### *Homelessness and poverty*

More young people in PT than in any other sample reported that their parents had been homeless (16 out of 54); this was 11 out of 54 in the CZ sample, and although both UK and NL respondents were likely to say they didn't know, 8 UK and 13 NL respondents also reported that their parents had been homeless. The parents of most CZ young people had worked, though 7 reported having received a range of out-of-work benefits. Nine parents in PT and 8 in CZ received money from other family members to survive, compared with 3 in NL and 1 in the UK.

## Services for Young Homeless People

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### *Social housing*

In all four countries in the CSEYHP project, the availability of housing services differed greatly. 33% of all households in the NL are part of the social housing stock, and young homeless people can sometimes be moved directly into independent accommodation; support is provided for the first year, after which they will be offered a tenancy. In the UK, the decline in the social housing sector – now down to 18% of all households – means that while some young people are offered social housing tenancies, many others are supported in private rental accommodation. In PT the social housing currently available consists principally of units that were built to re-house people from ‘barracks’ (shanty towns). However, there is likely to be a considerable amount of ‘invisible homelessness’ here as many young people at risk of homelessness turn to family for support and live in the homes of parents or grandparents.

There has been no social housing in CZ since the reform of housing policy in 1989. The young people in our study, however, had limited access to family support networks (see below), such that the lack of social housing was identified by managers and key workers in most NGOs as a major issue leading to youth homelessness, along with issues of institutional care and the criminalisation of young people leading to unemployment.

### *Supported accommodation*

It was notable that while the homeless youths of the NL and UK samples were predominantly living in supported accommodation and/or were supported by key workers, and those in the PT sample were mainly living in supported accommodation or with their families, the CZ sample was largely made up of young people living on the streets or in squats – few use hostels, which mainly cater for older homeless people. While the majority of young homeless people in NL and the UK had a key worker or a link worker (83% and 74% respectively), this fell to under half in PT (48%) and CZ (45%).

In CZ most services for the homeless are provided by non-governmental and non-profit organizations, including charities, which are funded predominantly by the government from the state budget or through European funds, often administered through governmental institutions. The major funding agencies are the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the European Social Fund, but some leisure-time centres and their activities that form part of homelessness prevention activities strategies are financed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Education.

Reinsertion policies, which are complex and require inter-ministerial cooperation, are often co-funded by more than one agency. Overall, therefore, NGOs are dependent on government policy and funding guidelines.

Czech NGOs provide two types of housing. The first and most common is emergency accommodation, usually dormitory-style, where clients spend the night and leave in the morning. In this type of accommodation, contact with clients tends to be somewhat anonymous, and often relates to the provision of basic necessities such as food, clothing or hygiene facilities. The second, less frequently offered type of accommodation is the hostel – a more long-term type of collective housing where clients can access other types of support such as legal, social, psychological or monetary help. These facilities cater not only for individuals, but also for young mothers with children or whole families, and residence here often lasts for up to a year. In hostel-type accommodation, users are supported in becoming independent through the simultaneous provision of the shelter they need, and help with finding jobs and their own housing.

*“There is no systematic protection from homelessness; all solutions are ad hoc. Besides the half-way homes, there are hostels, social flats in cooperation with municipalities, and a form of protected housing within children’s institutions. In such institutions there are 44 underage mothers and 18 underage pregnant girls. In such cases we don’t find systematic protection either...”* (Hradecký, 2006a, p.14).

In CZ, supported accommodation is mainly directed at clients who simultaneously participate in re-socializing and integration programmes. According to NGO workers, applicants most often have little education, limited or no family support and mental and/or physical health issues, as well as limited capacity for relationships with others, all of which limits employment prospects. Within the NGO housing network there is also a very limited capacity for couples or families with children, and there is even less accommodation available for single women; this is in spite of the fact that 23% of those seeking appropriate accommodation are women aged 25 and under, while men make up 13% of the same age group. A further problem is that even some NGOs will not accept young people with criminal records:

*“In our case, we have mostly clients with debts, unemployment problems and criminal records. We are one of the few asylum homes that take people with criminal records.”* (Dom, NGO worker).

Most service providers offer some kind of training, such as the development of computer skills, state-financed re-training courses or, for motivated clients, the possibility to finish high-school or do an apprenticeship. Some have special contacts with job agencies that are trained to deal with their clients in a sensitive way and to look for jobs appropriate for, and available to them. Because many

clients are from dysfunctional families or have been in institutional care there is an emphasis on life skills training and managing in everyday life: how to obtain documents, pay bills, apply for social benefits etc. In some projects, clients are taught how to manage a household. Some NGOs have their own workshops where clients produce objects for sale; they might make pencils or bracelets, or colour mugs and candles, and each object carries the name of the person who made it. The goal is to accustom young homeless people to working and then refer them to job agencies connected to the NGO. One issue reported by key workers is that institutional care tends to lead to the development of dependency patterns in some young homeless people, which is partly reinforced by the NGO system of care.

### **Informal Support**

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To what extent did family support or other informal support systems compensate for the lack of services available to young homeless people in the Czech Republic? First, young people in PT and CZ were more likely to have a supportive relationship with grandparents whilst growing up: 24% in PT and 20% in CZ. After their mothers, grandparents were most frequently cited by young people as their main source of support growing up; grandparents were listed ahead of fathers – even by those who had also named their father as offering them support. However, the availability of support from the extended family in these two countries was very different from that in NL and the UK. Just over three quarters of young people in the Portuguese sample (76%) currently had support from adult relatives, including grandparents or godparents; in the three remaining samples, a minority of respondents had such support: 28% in CZ, 24% in NL and 19% in the UK. Grandparents were taken in PT to be part of the extended family network, while in CZ, support from grandparents was more frequently a substitute for parental support, and there was rarely support from any other family member.

Young Czech respondents were the most isolated. The majority (61%) of young Portuguese homeless people had multiple attachments to family and/or partners; this was 30% in NL, 28% in the UK and only 9% in CZ. Those in the NL and CZ samples were most likely to report having wanted to return home without being able to (67% and 65% respectively). Expert interviewers in CZ reported that the social networks of young homeless people usually consist of peers in similar situations. The combination of dependency, poor social capital, and a lack of trust in society often makes it difficult for young people in CZ to change the course of their lives.

## Conclusion

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In terms of the risk factors associated with youth homelessness, those interviewed in the CZ differ from other respondents in a number of ways; they were more likely to have been raised in a two birth-parent household, but with parents who were more likely to have had drug or alcohol problems. In CZ, before young people turn 18, homelessness services can only be provided to those in institutional care; the main problems with this type of care are that it tends to produce passive and dependant individuals, and it fails to provide follow-on support (mostly housing support) to those that have left. We would argue that for young people who are at risk of homelessness and are living with their parents, there is a lack of preventive services, such as services for drug addiction, that are specifically tackling this risk. We would also suggest that there is a lack of awareness-raising about this social phenomenon among the non-homeless population, where there is often a tendency to blame the victim. In the case of young adult homeless persons, we argue that the main issues are the lack of social housing and early intervention services, but also the lack of supported accommodation, which would provide young people with facilities over a sufficient period of time to enable long-term work with individuals. Last but not least, the lack of services specifically targeting young homeless people in the Czech Republic is a serious issue that often leads to a reluctance on the part of young people to seek services that are available, but also makes it even more difficult to get rid of the stigma that accompanies homelessness in the Czech Republic.



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