
Challenges to Development of Policy on Homelessness in Slovenia

Maša Filipovič Hrast¹

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana

► **Abstract** *At national level several countries have adopted strategies to combat homelessness, while Slovenia seems to be lagging behind in this development. This policy review aims at portraying the situation in the country and untangling some of the determinants of the slow development of policies addressing homelessness. We base our review on the analysis of relevant legal and policy documents, available research in the area as well as eight interviews carried out with relevant stakeholders, such as academics, NGOs, local level policy makers and national level policy makers. The context of Slovenia's housing market is portrayed as important determinant with high homeownership rates and poor development of the rental housing stock. Additionally, the position of housing and homelessness on the policy agenda is given specific attention. What we identify is relatively low development of the 'convincing narrative', which is linked also to lack of research in the area, and general position of homelessness in housing and social documents and agendas. Furthermore, the coalition building is weak, linked also with dispersed responsibility between different actors and levels, despite advances seen in the NGO sector.*

► **Key words** *_ housing, homelessness, policy development, Slovenia*

¹ The author thanks all the interviewees for their participation, and also Tilen Dernovšek for the help in carrying out the interviews.

Introduction

In the majority of European countries, the number of homeless people is increasing (Busch-Geertsema *et al.*, 2014). At the same time, attention to homelessness issues at the policy level is also increasing. This is evident at the EU level as well as at national levels. In 2014, for example both the European Parliament and the EU Committee of the Regions called for a European homelessness strategy (Gosme and Anderson, 2015). At national level several countries have adopted strategies to combat homelessness, or even with a more ambitious goal of ending homelessness (see Gosme and Anderson, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2016). Slovenia seems to be lagging behind in this development; this policy review aims at portraying the situation in the country and untangling some of the determinants of the slow development of policies addressing homelessness.

Nevertheless, addressing homelessness is linked not only to the development of specific homeless strategies, but generally to housing policies and housing availability as well as welfare state functioning. One of primary factors stimulating increases in homelessness is the nature of and changes in the broader housing sector (Elsinga, 2015; O'Sullivan, 2016). Availability and accessibility of housing affects the position of vulnerable groups in the housing market and therefore is a primary point of reference to understand trends in homelessness and approaches to addressing the issue. Here, characteristics of the housing sector in Central and Eastern European countries are noteworthy (see Tosics and Hegedus, 2003; Lux, 2014; Stephens *et al.*, 2015), especially the underdevelopment of the social housing sector and the predominance of homeownership, which makes entry into stable, permanent housing more difficult for groups that are more vulnerable. Furthermore, new risks arising during the period of economic crisis, such as high unemployment rates, poverty and, in several European countries, increasing eviction rates may be determinants of the nature and extent of housing vulnerability (see Kenna, 2018).

The other important context within which policies addressing homelessness are developed is the broader welfare system. This in itself frames pathways of vulnerability and determines instruments addressing homelessness. Well-developed and functioning welfare systems can prevent many paths through which homelessness occurs, and the nature and extent of homelessness and the profile of those impacted by it may vary according to different welfare systems (Pleace, 2017). Existing welfare policies therefore frame different approaches to tackling homelessness. Central and Eastern European countries have a specific (post-socialist) legacy, where major reforms were also carried out within the welfare sector (Hegedus, 2011; Lux, 2014). Additionally, for a longer period European welfare states have been facing challenges, such as ageing populations and new social risks, alongside significant cutbacks and retrenchment due to economic crisis and

a more neoliberal policy agenda (see Schubert *et al.*, 2016; Taylor-Gooby *et al.*, 2017). Within the context of retrenchment of welfare programmes, the development of new strategies might be hindered, which is another contextual determinant to consider in the Slovenian case.

Therefore, the analysis of homelessness policy development in Slovenia will be framed within the wider context of the development of housing policy and the housing sector, as well as welfare state development and ways in which the risks of poverty and more complex social exclusion are tackled.

Regarding the development of targeted homeless policies, experiences from abroad indicate that an integrated homeless policy is most effective, as indicated in Finish homeless strategy (Place, 2017). However, many factors are relevant for the development of such policies. Firstly, existing research that enables following the extent, profile and trends in homelessness is important. The corpus of knowledge on homelessness enables development of more appropriate policy measures in national contexts, but it also enables placement of the issue on the public as well as political agenda, as has been indicated in several countries, such as Czech Republic (Lux, 2014), Belgium (Hermans, 2017) or in the Nordic countries (Benjaminsen and Knutagård, 2016).

Secondly, the role of the NGO sector is often vital in terms of advocacy of the most vulnerable and for the development of specific strategies. This is linked to the position and strength of the NGO in national contexts, their level of development and professionalisation (Lux, 2014; Fehér and Teller, 2016) as well as how internally connected and cooperative is this sector, e.g. in the form of an umbrella organisation. This influences the development of homelessness strategy, as the case of Poland illustrates (Wyganska, 2009) or the Flemish case (Hermans, 2017). Local level initiatives also have an important role, as they can be scaled up within the national context, as in the case of Prague (Lux, 2014). In addition, using external experts and learning lessons from abroad is significant in forming complex and well-developed strategies (Gosme and Anderson, 2015; Hermans, 2017; Place, 2017).

Public perception of homeless people is also an important policy concern; framed by cultural and welfare contexts, public opinion has an impact on policy approaches and how high the issue is on the policy agenda. In transition countries, homelessness has often been framed as an expression of deviance (Fehér and Teller, 2016) and linking homelessness to personal problems (Lux, 2014). Based on welfare attitudes research and following van Oorschot's (2000) deservingness theory, the groups that are more often seen as being responsible for their own problems, that are perceived as different from the majority of population and not contributing to society will be perceived as less deserving of welfare aid. These groups will conse-

quently not be prioritised by policy makers and also the policy addressing such groups will be easier to cut, e.g in times of welfare retrenchment (see Van Oorschot and Rosma, 2017).

The goal of this policy review is to analyse the challenges associated with the development of (integrated) homelessness policy in Slovenia in the context of the above-described 'determinants' of this policy development. We base our review on the analysis of relevant legal and policy documents, available research in the area as well as eight interviews carried out with relevant stakeholders, such as academics, NGOs, local level policy makers and national level policy makers². The factors affecting policy development are hard to disentangle and we do not claim to have completed a comprehensive review of all relevant determinants hindering development of policy on homelessness in Slovenia, we do however try to shed light on some of the important ones.

Homelessness in Slovenia: Contextual Framework and Policy Developments

As indicated in the introduction, this review aims to analyse homelessness policy development or more precisely, its lack of development in Slovenia. To help understand this process, we firstly describe the housing sector and welfare state framework and then more specifically address the development of services and programmes in the field.

Housing sector and housing policy context

The housing sector in Slovenia is, as is characteristic for other Central and Eastern European countries, marked with a predominance of homeownership, with 75% of households being homeowners in 2015, while private rental and social rental sectors are both very small; only 5% are renters with market rent and 5% with reduced rent³. After the largescale privatisation of public housing, the development of the social rented sector in Slovenia was slow and left to the municipal level. This has led to the lack of housing for vulnerable groups, as put forward in one interview:

² The following interviews have been carried out in the period from May 2019 to September 2019. Three interviews were carried out with academics working in the field, two with NGO representatives and one with a local policy maker, and one with a professional policy advisor. These interviews were carried out in person or by telephone, recorded and transcribed. Additional interview was carried out by e-mail (sending the questions and receiving written answer) by a policy representative at the national level (from the relevant Ministry).

³ Data sent from Statistical office of RS, specific calculations done (to distinguish among the merged category of reduced rent or free), available on Eurostate, August 2016.



Well, the state takes care of housing based on, so called, system, principle of enabling, so everyone takes care of themselves, only for the poorest the states takes care of. This all sounds very nice, but, the problems is, that there was not enough supply, not enough new housing, demand has increased but the supply was low. (Academic B)

This housing structure also dictates housing pathways. Housing accessibility often depends on family help, as cohabitation is more common in Slovenia, children leave the housing of the parents later than in many European countries (Mandic, 2008), and purchase of housing is based on significant help from relatives, either monetary or in-kind (Cirman, 2006). Therefore, groups that have poorer family resources are significantly more vulnerable in a system based on famililalistic support.

Until this will continue, that parents, I think, are the ones helping the state, then things will remain as they are (...). Various instruments [implemented by the state, add, by auth.] are not serious... they are only so that the state looks as it is doing something. In reality, the state does not see any problem, and the citizens put up with this, as the parents solve the problems of their children and then nothing happens. (Academic B)

Most relevant for vulnerable groups is social housing and emergency dwellings, which only some of the largest municipalities offer. The demand exceeds the supply by far, with long waiting lists (Sendi, 2007; Mandič *et al.*, 2012; Mandič and Filipovič, 2015, National Housing Fund, 2017), e.g. even four years for single persons (MOL, 2017). The main barrier to achieving the increase in provision of social housing as presented by the municipalities is the lack of financial means and therefore no significant increase in such provision is envisioned in the near future, as indicated in a study of National Housing Fund (2017).

This problem is recognised also by policy makers and experts.

With new coalition agreement, there is a promise of additional financing of housing, 0,4% of GDP, which is €189 million for addressing housing problems, so that things will get better. There is more and more talk about the housing problems and I really hope that policy makers will see this and start seriously addressing the housing problems. (Policy officer, municipal level)

This is a problem, that housing policy, now, for social housing its responsibility of municipalities, and they also have limited means for addressing this issue. (Academic B)

In general, housing policy and development has been neglected (see Sendi, 2007), with housing programmes being adopted late and far between, which indicates low priority of housing in general on the policy agenda, also mentioned by several interviewees.

Regarding housing problems, in general in Ljubljana or in all Slovenia, the fact is that since independence this is a neglected problem. Mainly due to the fact that systematic financing of housing, of housing supply at the national level has been discontinued.. (Policy officer, municipal level)

I would say that everything has remained the same, somehow, it did not change. Say in last 10, 20 years there were no radical changes, it stayed the same. I think the reason is public discourse, the story of housing issues, housing problems, housing policies, it is really an underdeveloped story. (Academic A)

The most recent housing policy document is the Resolution on National Housing Programme 2015-2025. Addressing extreme housing vulnerability is not among the policy priorities within the document, although there is a general goal of improving the accessibility of dwellings and strengthening the rental sector as one of its priority goals. In the private rental sector, it envisages establishment of a new institution for management of rental housing markets. This was mentioned in the interview with the municipal policy expert as a potentially important way of making rental dwellings more accessible. Additionally, changes are planned in the cost of social rents and in subsidies for rent, with possible increases in both. The Resolution also states that the Housing Fund will in the future be responsible for financing emergency housing units, in cooperation with municipalities. However, four years on since adoption of this Resolution, no significant changes have been implemented in this area. One of the important projects that has been implemented is resettlement of evicted households, with 11 housing units offered for this, and a new cooperation protocol set up to improve cooperation. Regarding development of a public institution for management of rental housing, a working group was established and initial research carried out (Kerbler and Sendi, 2019). In October 2019, the proposal of the new Housing act was presented to the public that would implement many of the goals set up in the programme. How these will be adopted and later on implemented remains to be seen. Not surprisingly therefore, interviewed experts were also critical of the document, pointing to the implementation gap that existed already, and is therefore likely to remain also in the present. The implementation gap is something that has been noted as an important shortcoming in reforms of CEE countries (see Hegedus, 2011).

Well, regarding the new housing programme, yes, well, nothing new, a programme where a lot of nice things are written, but the question is implementation. If we look back, the previous housing programme, from 2000 to 2009, it contained similar things, very good things, goals and our analysis has shown, that almost none of them were realized. (Academic B)

Welfare state development and trends

The Slovenian welfare system is described as a mix of conservative-corporative and social democratic systems and after transition it was marked with gradual changes, often diverging from more extensive welfare state restructuring typical for other Central and Eastern European countries (Kolarič *et al.*, 2009). The poverty rates in Slovenia are lower than in the EU on average, and despite worsening social conditions due to economic crisis, the general at risk of poverty rates have remained lower than average in the EU, and have after a peak in 2015 (14.3%) dropped again (Eurostat, 2018a).

The economic crisis in 2008 has affected Slovenia considerably and put additional pressure on existing welfare systems, which have already been under pressure due to the intensive ageing of the population (Filipovič Hrast and Rakar, 2017). This has led to reforms of the system, of which one of the most comprehensive was reform of the social protection system (with new legislation coming into force in 2012). Within these changes, however, financial social assistance as an important financial support for the most vulnerable, such as homeless people, has remained largely intact and has even been increased (Stropnik, 2015; Filipovič and Kopač, 2016). A positive trend that can be observed is the increase in GDP share for expenditure on social exclusion, which has almost doubled from 2000 (1.6% of social protection expenditure) to 2015 (3.11% of social protection expenditure) (see Table 1). However, the low share of expenditure on housing is indicative, which has increased, but in 2015 comprised just 0.1% of total social protection expenditure, which is much lower than the average for EU 15 (2.08% of total social protection expenditure) (see Table 1).

Table 1: Social Protection Benefits by Function, 1995-2015
(% of total social expenditure)

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Slovenia					
Total expenditure		100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Social protection benefits		97.42	97.85	97.90	98.30
Family/children		8.97	8.41	8.69	7.50
Unemployment		4.15	3.20	2.69	2.69
Housing		0.00	0.06	0.04	0.10
Social exclusion n.e.c.		1.60	2.78	2.34	3.11
Sickness / healthcare and disability		38.65	40.00	38.65	37.43
Old age and survivors		44.05	43.40	45.49	47.47
EU 15					
Total expenditure	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Social protection benefits	95.61	95.92	96.15	95.82	96.45
Family/children	7.55	8.00	8.08	8.23	8.25
Unemployment	7.75	5.80	5.68	5.92	4.72
Housing	2.13	2.09	2.19	2.05	2.08
Social exclusion n.e.c.	1.22	1.14	1.72	1.90	1.92
Sickness / healthcare and disability	34.36	34.34	35.20	34.98	36.00
Old age and survivors	42.60	44.54	43.28	42.73	43.49

Source: Eurostat, 2018b

Despite some positive trends, the general direction of welfare state reforms has been that of retrenchment and cost containment (Filipovič and Rakar, 2017), which sets the limits for potential expansion of underdeveloped sectors, such as homelessness services and programmes (see next section). Homelessness has not been defined in legal documents or strategies. Social Protection Act (Zakon o socialnem varstvu; Official Gazette, 2006, with latest changes in 2019) mentions the provision of crisis accommodation in general and development of crisis accommodation for homeless people has been part of national programmes in the field of social protection. In the last Resolution on National Programme of Social Protection for the period of 2013 to 2020 the goals are reduction of poverty and increasing social inclusion of the vulnerable. Homeless services and their further development are part of the resolution, focusing on increases in day services, increasing the availability of temporary accommodation, as well as development of additional programmes of housing support. We discuss service sector development in more detail in the next section.

Another important welfare policy context is that since independence, some of the tasks in the field of social protection that were previously national have been transferred to lower levels, i.e. to municipalities. Housing of vulnerable groups, e.g. with social or emergency housing is one such task. The municipalities also face severe underfinancing and lack of governmental systemic support to tackle such problems, as we have already mentioned. On the other hand, the social problems in general

are seen as the responsibility of the state. Homelessness as being at an intersection of both seems to present a challenge as it is unclear which level is predominantly responsible for addressing it.

Regarding local communities, this is a problem all the time, that our local communities do not see this as a problem that should be addressed at the local level. The social problems are something that the state should take care of. So I think here there is a lack... that also from local level these programmes should be more supported. The exceptions are of course Ljubljana and Maribor as the biggest, but the rest... A bit unfortunate is also the large number of municipalities, and then the smallest do not approach this. (Professional, policy advisor A)

Local policies, I think, Municipality of Ljubljana has done a lot in their local strategy in addressing homelessness, and also finances a lot. We are lucky we have succeeded, but this is an exception, I think, that we cooperate with Housing Funds, but the key is Ministry for environment and planning, which doesn't address this issue at all. (NGO representative B)

We cannot reach this field. It seems far removed. To affect the housing strategy. I think there is no one to talk to on that side [i.e. Ministry of environment and planning, add. auth.] (...) they do not see this (i.e. the homelessness) as their theme. Homelessness was never perceived to be part of their scope of work. (Academic C)

This is also linked to poor cooperation among various levels and actors, which has been mentioned in interviews.

You know, every ministry, there is no cooperation... this goes without saying, this is something all know... I have a feeling that this cooperation should be improved, from Ministry of social affairs appeal should be, to all others, to work together, based on needs of people... (NGO representative A)

Municipal housing Fund works well, is active and they also see that there is a lack of housing finances. They say this in public, but there is no strong position, for cooperation, for all to come together on various points... I do not see that, I think everybody thinks they are doing ok themselves, they do not build alliances. (Academic A)

Research on homelessness in Slovenia

A good research base that gives knowledge of the extent and profile of homelessness, drivers and pathways as well as changes and trends is one of the important bases for informed policy making. This kind of information is vital for the presentation of the problem to the wider public as well as policy makers and is the ground

base of formation of policies in the field. Lacking information can therefore present one of the most important drawbacks for development of (comprehensive) policy on homelessness.

In Slovenia, there is no official data on levels of homelessness, and no official definition of homelessness. The existing data encompasses the number of users of different services for homeless people, which the Social Protection Institute of Republic of Slovenia has gathered regularly since 2007. In 2017 the number of users was 3 605 (Smolej Jež *et al.*, 2018). This kind of data of course does not encompass all types of homelessness, as many homeless people may not be using any services, and also there is the possibility of counting the same people more than once, if they use multiple services. Based on evaluation by umbrella organisation of organisations working with homeless people, there are more than 6 700 homeless people in Slovenia (Lozej, 2017). Due to lack of data, the exact extent of homelessness in Slovenia is not known, and trends are not clear. In general, evaluations indicate that homelessness is increasing (Hofler and Bojnec, 2013) and that its structure is changing, as there are some indications that the number of homeless children and families is increasing (see e.g. Dekleva and Razpotnik, 2015). One of the interviewees⁴ also mentioned a more significant diversification of the homeless population, as along with the mentioned families, young people and foreigners from European and non-European countries are also increasingly represented.

The research on homelessness in Slovenia is very limited, with a few research projects mainly focused on one municipality – such as Dekleva and Razpotnik (2007), Razpotnik and Dekleva (2009), Košan and Dekleva (2015), and just one national project (Dekleva *et al.*, 2010). Following an increase in the number of studies in the time period before the economic crisis, the volume of research projects in this field have later again decreased. The lack of research has been put forward several times in the interviews as an important drawback for policy development in this sector.

Also the role of research, as a sort of catalyst should be there, in various bodies and fora. This is the only solution I can see. (Academic A)

The fact is that we do not have a number of homeless in Slovenia (...) The number the Ministry of Labour, Family and social affairs gives out, are number we organisations give, number of people that come to us. But there is no general number, people who sleep outside and not come to us, there was never such a count. We need this. We need a number, extent. Then we can make a strategy. (NGO representative B)

(...)the problem is that nobody knows how many there are [the homeless, and by auth.], because nobody works on that.(...). (Academic B)

⁴ Interviewee with Academic C.

The lack of research is also an important obstacle to reducing stereotypical portrayals of homelessness that exist in the media, predominantly linking them to beggars with alcohol abuse problem (see Razpotnik and Dekleva, 2007; Filipovič Hrast, 2008). Also media coverage of the topic in Slovenia seems to not focus on governmental actions and solutions and does not call into question the adequacy or approach of current policies (see Filipovič Hrast, 2008). Media are symbolic resources that frame who homeless people are, causes of homelessness and solutions (Jacobs *et al.*, 2003; Hodgetts *et al.*, 2005). The lack of focus and the individualised instead of systemic approach to this social problem hinder development of comprehensive policies. Negative popular views of homelessness have been found in CEE countries (see Lux 2014; Fehér and Teller, 2016). Based on deservingness theory (see van Oorschot, 2000), this position can also play a significant role in determining the position people have toward welfare state programmes and policies addressing these groups and is not conducive to the development of wider and more comprehensive policies.

Trends in service provision for homeless people and role of NGOs

The provision of homeless services is part of the welfare system structure, which is pivotal in addressing various vulnerabilities and is one of the determinants of the profile of homeless people and paths into homelessness (see Pleace, 2017). The Slovenian welfare state, when observing service sector development, can be described according to Esping Andersen's (1990) typology as having characteristics of the social democratic regime, with well-developed services evident in public education, childcare and health care. However, homeless services only started developing in the late 1980s and 1990s, firstly as part of the public network of providers of social services. However, the development in the decades that followed did not strengthen public sector services, but instead saw the development of the role of the NGO sector in provision of these services. In 2017, among 23 service providers, six are part of public services, i.e. centres for social work and public institutes, while the rest are NGOs (Smolej Jež *et al.*, 2018). This we can observe as an ongoing trend of delegating the responsibilities of the state to other providers. However, the state has remained an important financer of the services, as it co-finances the programmes – approximately 50% of the required funding, while an additional third of co-financing usually comes from the local levels – municipalities (Smolej Jež *et al.*, 2018).

This transfer can mean improved service delivery and innovations that may come from smaller, more flexible NGOs; however it can also mean withdrawal of the state in addressing specific vulnerabilities.

NGOs had an important role, by adapting to the needs of local communities. We have several very successful programmes that have come closer to the needs of the users. The response of local levels varies, in some cases they are responsive, in some less. (Policy officer, national level)

There are very local solutions, that arise, and try solving the issue at local level, but they are not systemic solutions. (Academic C)

The public services do not concern themselves too much with this, of course there are individual exceptions that work in individual organisations, and they send people here... we are financed for this, it is true, but I think that public institutions do not concern themselves with this, which is for me very problematic. (NGO representative B)

In Centres for social work, they are concerned increasingly with so many different other things, that working with homeless, through transfers, they are paid and other rights they have, as other materially deprived, but to work more in depth, no, that not at all. (Professional, policy advisor A)

An important positive trend has been an increase in service provision in the last 10 years as the number of services has tripled from the beginning of the 2000s (Smolej Jež *et al.*, 2018). What seems to be a more negative part of the development is that the increasing number of programmes has not also meant a significant diversification of the programmes for homeless people, as the largest increase in service provision is due to the increasing number of shelters. There is some innovation in the sector, evident in new programmes such as prevention programmes (prevention of eviction), and also development of programmes that offer housing support and resettlement programmes, linked to the Housing First approach, which however remain small-scale initiatives. Nevertheless, the sector is not responding to the heterogenisation of the homeless population and therefore does not address its needs.

Regarding the support for (homeless) families, there were no special steps taken. (...) It is a problem, if they use the same services... Firstly, they do not use them. They do not reach them. And, the programmes that exist are not appropriate for families, for children. (Academic C)

The interviewees have also mentioned this relatively small progress and innovation within the service sector.

In all the years that I follow these programmes, they have not changed a lot (...) They remain on this classic programmes, so that a significant shift, in terms of content, conceptual shift, it is not there. (Professional, policy advisor A)

Yes, we need to make a step forward in our programmes. I think, we are still following the staircase model (...) I think we need to change. (NGO representative B)

Challenges to adoption of specific policies addressing homelessness

As mentioned in the introduction, cooperation within the sector is important to achieve policy development. An important part in the development of this sector was linking the organisations working with homeless people within the umbrella organisation Brezdomni – do ključa. This can be seen as important progress in developing cooperation between services, and sharing of experiences, which also happens in the congress of homeless organised yearly. This progress was also emphasized by the NGO representative.

I think it is important, this cooperation, I think NGOs cooperate more, which is a progress, maybe it sounds funny, but I think we were before, each on separate ends. (NGO representative B)

Civil society is one of the actors where pressures for policy development often start, and can be an important actor in formations of adopting policy strategies for homeless people (see e.g. Lux, 2014; Fehér and Teller, 2016; Hermans, 2017). Also in Slovenia there were initiatives for preparing a draft national strategy for homeless and socially excluded populations within the NGO sector, first in 2010 based on multiple actors and international experts in the context of a conference on social exclusion, poverty and homelessness and development of a proposal of national strategy in the field of homelessness⁵ and later in 2016 within the umbrella organisation Brezdomni do ključa.⁶

However, a more significant breakthrough has not happened despite the efforts of the NGOs, due perhaps to persistent lack of interest of decision makers for this topic. Also, the position of NGOs in Slovenia is not perceived to be very strong, due to low professionalisation of the sector, as well the sector not being heard by policy makers (see Rakar and Deželan, 2016). The low level of success might also be linked to general housing issues, as we have mentioned when describing the housing policy context.

The experts and NGO representatives were positive regarding the need for an integrated policy approach, either in form of coalition formation, a coordinated response, or a more targeted strategy to address the problem.

I think that we would need to link all sectors, as was the case of Finland, where it came from top to bottom, the preparation of comprehensive strategy... the idea is that all ministries that are relevant for this area, they cooperate, Ministry of environment and planning, Ministry of labour, family and social affairs, Health Ministry, together with local communities to build a strategy. (NGO representative B)

⁵ <http://www.kraljiulice.org/library/491/konferenca-o-socialni-izkljucenosti-revschini-in-brezdomstvu-knjizica.pdf>

⁶ <https://sobotainfo.com/novica/lokalno/problematika-revschine-brezdomstva-je-vsakodnevna/119935>

We need a consultative body, that would work continuously, in which important policy actors would carry informed democratic debate, in which they articulate their various interests and try to combine them, so that they reach a common goal, that would be improving the housing situation of the deprived. (Academic A)

Nevertheless, a significant scepticism also remains, that the strategy in itself is not enough and that an implementation gap might still remain.

Of course strategic documents are very important, but with them also policy makers wash their hands saying 'we have accepted the targets and we will work on that'. But then changes must be made at concrete level, and it depends on individual stakeholders, either Housing Funds or local communities that are in touch with the problems, on how much emphasis they give to these problems in society. (Policy officer, municipal level)

By all means a strategy is important, but I believe that strategies without concrete action plan, with clear division of responsibilities and clear resources will not bring improvements, sadly. (Policy officer, municipal level)

The problem of all these policy documents we have, for example in other areas, is that they might be well written, but implementation is usually poor... but to at least have a document, it would be a step in a right direction. (Professional, policy advisor A)

Conclusions

The above policy review and institutional context indicates some of the developmental issues that hinder more comprehensive policy development to address the homelessness problem in Slovenia. Jacobs *et al.* (2003) suggest that three conditions are necessary for a housing problem to be recognised, defined as a problem, and acted upon: first, a convincing narrative needs to be developed; second, a coalition of support has to be constructed; and third, this coalition needs to ensure that institutional measures are implemented.

To structure a convincing narrative, the lack of research presents a hindrance in Slovenia, along with limited and individualised popular public views and media representations of homelessness. The narrative of housing, as was put forward by one of the interviewed experts, is in general not developed enough. This can be linked to wider housing and welfare contexts, where housing issues were left completely to private domains and are being addressed primarily through market and family, while welfare reform has been prioritising other pressing issues such as the ageing of the population and the need for cost containment in times of welfare restructuring and later in times of the crisis.

Regarding the second step, formation of coalition, again we can identify several obstacles. These range from dispersion of responsibility of the issue between local/municipal level and national level, to problems of cooperation among various actors, as debated by experts in the interviews. Especially pronounced was the poor cooperation among relevant Ministries. This of course is common in other countries in the context of formation of policies targeting homelessness, where challenges of overcoming political divisions and reaching a consensus among actors were noted (see Lux, 2014; Hermans, 2017).

We can also identify a potential advantage, and that is the improved cooperation among the NGOs working in the field. However, goals relating to common narrative (step one) might still be hard to reach, as views on the issue and ways to address it are still rather varied. There is also the problem of slow innovation, which one of the experts interviewed noted, and is evident in the slow development of the sector's more innovative approaches, despite these being mentioned in the strategies in the field of social protection. Furthermore, underfinancing of the third sector as well as low levels of professionalisation (Rakar *et al.*, 2011, Rakar and Deželan, 2016) hinders their negotiating position toward policy makers.

These determinants therefore seem to be among the relevant reasons that adopting a (comprehensive) homelessness strategy seems a far removed goal in Slovenia. Despite having an important role in coalition building and setting the agenda, such a strategy is not a goal in itself, as steps for implementation and realisation is what is really needed. Perhaps an important move toward more holistically addressing the housing of vulnerable groups within wider housing policy is the proposal of the new Housing Act in 2019, however the implementation and effects of new goals and policies will remain to be seen.

► References

- Benjaminsen, L. and Knutagård, M. (2016) Homelessness Research and Policy Development: Examples from the Nordic Countries, *European Journal of Homelessness* 10 (3) pp.45-66.
- Busch-Geertsema, V., Benjaminsen, L., Filipovič Hrast, M. and Nicholas Pleace, N. (2014) *Extent and Profile of Homelessness in European Member States: a Statistical Update, EOH Comparative Studies on Homelessness* (Brussels: FEANTSA).
- Cirman, A. (2006) Kako dosegljiva so stanovanja za slovenska gospodinjstva? How accessible is Housing for Slovene Households? V: Mandič, Srna (ur.), Cirman, Andreja (ur.). *Stanovanje v Sloveniji 2005*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, str. 55-70.
- Dekleva, B. and Razpotnik, Š. (2007) *Brezdomstvo v Ljubljani* Homelessness in Ljubljana. (Ljubljana: Pedagoška fakulteta v Ljubljani).
- Dekleva, B. and Razpotnik, Š. (2015). Cestno brezdomstvo v Ljubljani [Street Homelessness in Ljubljana], *Socialna pedagogika* 19(3/4) pp.275-297.
- Dekleva, B., Filipovič Hrast, M., Nagode, M., Razpotnik, Š., and Smolej, S. (2010) *Ocena obsega odkritega in skritega brezdomstva v Sloveniji: zaključno poročilo študije [Evaluation of the Extent of Hidden and Visible Homelessness in Slovenia]* (Ljubljana: Inštitut RS za socialno varstvo, Fakulteta za družbene vede UL, Pedagoška fakulteta UL, p. 90).
- Elsinga, M. (2015) Changing Housing Systems and their Potential Impacts on Homelessness, *European Journal of Homelessness* 9(1) pp.15-35.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1990) *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press).
- Eurostat (2018a) *Income distribution and monetary poverty*. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> [Accessed 3 December 2018].
- Eurostat (2018b) Social protection data. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/social-protection/data> [Accessed 3 December 2018].
- Fehér, B. and Teller, N. (2016) An Emerging Research Strand: Housing Exclusion in Central and South East Europe, *European Journal of Homelessness* 10(3) pp.67-85.
- Filipovic Hrast, M. (2008) Media Representations of Homelessness and the Link to (Effective) Policies: The Case of Slovenia, *European Journal of Homelessness* 2 pp.115-137.

- Filipovič Hrast, M. and Kopac, A. (2016) Slovenia: Continuous Gradual Change of the Welfare State?, in: K. Schubert, P. de Villota and J. Kuhlmann (Eds.) *Challenges to European Welfare Systems*, pp.693-718. (Switzerland: Springer).
- Filipovič Hrast, M. and Rakar, T. (2017) The Future of the Slovenian Welfare State and Challenges to Solidarity, in: P. Taylor-Gooby, B. Leruth and H. Chung (Eds.) *After Austerity: Welfare State Transformation in Europe after the Great Recession*, pp.115-135. (Oxford University Press, Oxford).
- Gosme, L. and Anderson, I. (2015) International Learning as a Driver of Innovation in Local-Level Policy-Making: Achievements and Challenges from Peer Review of Local Homelessness Policies, *European Journal of Homelessness* 9(1) pp.37-58.
- Hegedus, J. (2011) Social Safety Nets, The Informal Economy and Housing Poverty: Experiences in Transitional Countries, *European Journal of Homelessness* 5(1) pp.15-26.
- Hermans, K. (2017) A Flemish Strategy to Combat Homelessness, *European Journal of Homelessness* 11(2) pp.135-145.
- Hodgetts, D., Cullen, A. and Radley, A. (2005) Television Characterisations of Homeless People in the United Kingdom, *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 5(1) pp.29-48.
- Höfler, K. and Bojnec, Š. (2013) Kvalitativna analiza vzrokov in posledic brezdomstva [Qualitative Analysis of Reasons and Consequences of Homelessness], *Socialno delo* 52(4) pp.261-272.
- Jacobs, K., Kemeny, J. and Manzi, T. (2003) Power, Discursive Space and Institutional Practices in the Construction of Housing Problems, *Housing Studies* 18(4) pp.429-446.
- Kenna, P. (2018) *Loss of Homes and Evictions Across Europe: A Comparative Legal and Policy Examination: Elgar Land And Housing Law And Policy Series* (Cheltenham; Northampton: E. Elgar).
- Kerbler, B. and Sendi, R. (2019) Dostopnost do stanovanja: izvajanje resolucije o nacionalnem stanovanjskem programu. (Accessibility of Housing: Resolution on National Housing Programme) Urban Planning institute, MOP: Zagotavljanje kakovostnih in dostopnih bivališč: vloga različnih deležnikov za doseganje cilj, (Ensuring Good Quality and Accessible Housing: Role of Various Stakeholders) okrogla miza14.10.2019. Ljubljana.
- Kolarič, Z., Kopač, A. and Rakar, T. (2009) The Slovene Welfare System: Gradual Reform Instead of Shock Treatment, in: K. Schubert, S. Hegelich and U. Bazant (Eds.) *The Handbook of European Welfare Systems*, pp.444-461. (New York: Routledge).

Košan, H., in: Dekleva B. (2015) Končno poročilo o izvedbi terenske akcije "Tisti, ki hodite mimo... in tisti, ki ostajamo na ulici" (Final report on action "Those who pass by... and those who remain on the street"). Available at [http://www.kraljujlice.org/library/979/hana-kosan-in-bojan-dekleva-\(2015\)-koncno-porocilo-o-izvedbi-terenske-akcije-tisti-ki-hodite-mimo--in-tisti-ki-ostajamo-na-ulici.pdf](http://www.kraljujlice.org/library/979/hana-kosan-in-bojan-dekleva-(2015)-koncno-porocilo-o-izvedbi-terenske-akcije-tisti-ki-hodite-mimo--in-tisti-ki-ostajamo-na-ulici.pdf).

Lozej, M. (2017) Po nekaterih ocenah je v Sloveniji med 3000 in 6700 brezdomcev. (Evaluations Indicate There Are Between 3000 and 6700 Homeless in Slovenia) Statistical Office of RS (SURSTAT). Posebna objava 3.10.2017.

Lux, M. (2014) Milestones in the Development and Implementation of a Governmental Strategy on Homelessness in the Czech Republic, *European Journal of Homelessness* 8(2) pp.95-118.

Mandič, S. (2008) Home-leaving and its Structural Determinants in Western and Eastern Europe: an Exploratory Study, *Housing Studies* 23(4) pp.615-636.

Mandič, S. and Filipovič Hrast, M. (2015) Alternative socialnemu stanovanju: pogledi prosilcev o različnih možnostih [Alternatives to Social Housing: Applicants' Views of Various Policy Options], *Urbani izziv* 26 (1) 5-16 pp.69-81.

Mandič, S., Filipovič Hrast, M., Mrzel, M. and Rozman, T. (2012) *Kako izboljšati ponudbo najemnih stanovanj v mestni občini Ljubljana: končno poročilo*. (How to Improve The Rental Housing Fund in Ljubljana Municipality: final report) Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Fakulteta za družbene vede, Center za proučevanje družbene blaginje.

MOL (2017) *Stanovanjski program mestne občine Ljubljana*. (Housing Programme of Municipality Of Ljubljana) Ljubljana: Javni stanovanjski sklad MOL [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ljubljana.si/assets/Seje/15494/7.-toka---stanovanjski-program-2017-in-2018-ns-jss-mol.pdf> [Accessed 29 January 2019].

National Housing Fund (2017) Poročilo – ugotavljanje potreb o vrstah stanovanjskega fonda v občinah. (Report on Diverse Housing Needs in Municipalities) Stanovanjski sklad RS. 3.4.2017.

O'Sullivan, E. (2016) Ending Homelessness in Ireland: Ambition, Adversity, Adaptation?, *European Journal of Homelessness* 10(2) pp.11-39.

Pleace, N. (2017) The Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016-2019: The Culmination of an Integrated Strategy to End Homelessness?, *European Journal of Homelessness* 11(2) pp.95-115.

Rakar, T. and Dezelan, T. (2016) Opolnomočenje civilnodružbenih organizacij v Sloveniji. (Empowerment of civil organisations in Slovenia) Teorija in praksa – Theory and praxis journal: revija za družbena vprašanja 53(2) pp.449-468.

Rakar, T., Deželan, T., Šifkovič Vrbica, S., Kolarič, Z., Črnak-Meglič, A. and Nagode, M. (2011) *Civil Society in Slovenia. 1st printing* (Ljubljana: Uradni list Republike Slovenije).

Razpotnik, Š. and Dekleva, B. (2007) *Na cesti – brezdomci o sebi in drugi o njih. [On the Street – Homeless About Themselves and Others About Them]*. (Ljubljana: Univerza v Ljubljani, Pedagoška fakulteta).

Razpotnik, Š. and Dekleva, B. (2009) Homelessness and the Accessibility of the Health Care System, *Socialna pedagogika* 13(2) pp.111-130.

Resolution on National Social Protection Programme 2013-2020 (2013) Official Gazette 39/2013.

Schubert, K., de Villota, P., and J. Kuhlmann (2016) *Challenges to European Welfare Systems* (New York: Springer Publishing).

Sendi, R. (2007) *Stanovanjska reforma: pričakovanja, potrebe in realizacija* (Housing Reforms: Expectations, Needs and Realisation) (Ljubljana: Urbanistični inštitut Republike Slovenije).

Smolej Jež, S., Rosič, J., Ramovič, S., Vidrih N., Žiberna, V., Kovač, N. and Kobal Tomc, B. (2018) *Spremljanje socialnovarstvenih programov: poročilo o izvajanju programov v letu 2017 (Evaluation of Programmes of Social Protection in 2017)*. Ljubljana: IRSSV.

Stephens, M., Lux, M. and Sunega, P. (2015) Post-socialist Housing Systems in Europe: Housing Welfare Regimes by Default?, *Housing Studies* 30(8) pp.1210-1234.

Stropnik, N. (2015) *ESPN Thematic Report on Minimum Income Schemes Slovenia 2015* (Brussels: European Commission, European Social Policy Network).

Taylor-Gooby, P., Leruth, B. and Chung, H. (2017) (Eds.) *After Austerity: Welfare State Transformation in Europe after the Great Recession* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Tosics, I., and Hegedus, J. (2003) Housing in South-Eastern Europe, in: S. Lowe and S. Tsenkova (Eds.) *Housing Change in Eastern and Central Europe*, pp.21-45. (Aldershot: Ashgate).

Van Oorschot, W. (2000) Who Should Get What, and Why? On Deservingness Criteria and the Conditionality of Solidarity among the Public, *Policy and Politics* 28(1) pp.33-48.

Van Oorschot, W. and Roosma, F. (2017) The Social Legitimacy of Targeted Welfare and Welfare Deservingness, in: W. Van Oorschot, F. Roosma, B. Meuleman and T. Reeskens (Eds.) *The Social Legitimacy of Targeted Welfare: Attitudes to Welfare Deservingness*, pp.3-36. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar).

Wynnanska, J. (2009) The Development of a National Homeless Strategy in Poland: Achievements and Challenges, *European Journal of Homelessness* 3 pp.201-214.

Zakon o socialnem varstvu-ZSV (2007) Social Protection Act- [Online]. Available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO869> [Accessed 10th October 2019].