

## Seminar 21: Structural Challenges and Homelessness Strategies (Room: TBD) - Chair: Kjell Larsson, SE

### Shmulik Szeintuch, IL: Homelessness strategies in European Union Member States: The state of play in 2024

In the past two decades European Union countries have been developing homelessness strategies. These efforts have been amplified by the Lisbon Declaration and the launch of the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH) in 2021.

The aim of this research is to analyze existing data on European Union national and regional homelessness strategies in order to enable policy makers, researchers, service providers and people experiencing homelessness to develop their own national, regional or local strategies, in a way that is best catered for their own country or locality, as well as to improve existing strategies in their next updated version.

An extensive literature review, an analysis of existing strategies, as well as a survey which targets a selection of European national policy makers, researchers, and representatives of the homeless sector will feed into the development of a proposal for a good homelessness strategy.

The discussion will aim to mainly pose questions that could help anyone who is developing a strategy to do it better, while averting possible pitfalls.



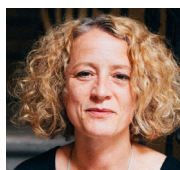
*Dr. Shmulik Szeintuch is a social worker and faculty member in the School of Social Work, Sapir College, as well as the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His main areas of interest are homelessness, street work and social policy. Shmulik has published research papers in Hebrew and English journals and books, as well as policy documents for The Israeli Ministry of Welfare. Finally, he is involved in policy practice, mainly in the area of homelessness. For over a decade Shmulik provided supervision to professionals in organisations working with people experiencing homelessness.*

### Eszter Somogyi, Nóra Teller, Balázs Váradi and Veronika Vass-Vigh, HU: Barriers to Moving to a Housing-Led System in Central and Eastern Europe

Based on qualitative interviews with providers and social researchers, and a literature review of housing policies, social policies and homelessness strategies, this 2023 commissioned research took account of the barriers towards moving to a housing-led system in Central and Eastern Europe, namely in Slovakia, Croatia, Hungary and Romania.

We concluded that some of the barriers that limit the introduction and application of more extensive housing-led policies seem to be shared ones across the four countries. Structural deficiencies have multiple detrimental effects on homelessness: relatively simple regulations and measures that could help prevent homelessness are often missing; municipality-affiliated social services mainly concentrate on emergency responses and are not always well-staffed, prepared or motivated. Rental agreements are often informal, and taxes are not always paid. While slowly catching up, the countries are still considerably less developed than the EU average. This has multiple adverse effects: there are more people on low incomes who are one crisis away from homelessness; there is very limited availability of nationwide means-tested minimum-income, housing-benefit or other targeted subsidy schemes. State and municipally owned housing stock is scarce. Rents and real estate prices have markedly increased, and social support schemes have not kept up. The political systems of the four countries, coupled with widespread negative stereotypes, have led to the emergence of political rhetoric and policies that either disregard or vilify people experiencing homelessness. Moreover, people experiencing homelessness in these countries often come from discriminated-against social groups (e.g. the Roma minority). Last but not least, a widespread lack of understanding of the causes and potential effective remedies of homelessness by both the public and politicians contributes to the expressly punitive manner of dealing with homelessness.

We also found that EU influence on the homelessness policies of these countries is important but remains limited so far, even though many of the small-scale pilot efforts were financed with EU funding. Still, there is impressive variability in homelessness policies across cities, which suggests that there is room for more and better policies. Based on our review as well as the lessons from select initiatives we formulated recommendations for policy-makers, practitioners and other stakeholders.



*Eszter Somogyi (MA in Sociology), a senior researcher at the Metropolitan Research Institute, Budapest, has more than twenty years of experience in research and policy consultancy related to urban regeneration, social and affordable housing policy and complex policy-making for vulnerable people. She has participated in numerous international research and social experimentation projects.*



*Nóra Teller (PhD, Sociology) works at the Metropolitan Research Institute. She is member of the European Observatory on Homelessness and has co-edited the European Journal of Homelessness for 16 years. She has 24 years of research and consultancy experience in social inclusion and housing inclusion measures, homelessness research, and housing desegregation in the urban and rural context.*



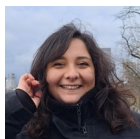
*Balázs Váradi (PhD, Economics) is a senior policy analyst at the Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis. He has worked as a policy evaluator and participated in policy design in the fields of education, employment health and social policy; in addition to his applied work, he also teaches Economics and Political Economy at ELTE University.*



*Veronika Vass-Vigh is a policy analyst at the Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis, specializing in labor market and social policy analysis. She holds an MA in Political Science with a focus on political economy from the Central European University in Budapest, as well as another MA in Political Science from Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia.*

**Franca Viganò, IT:** Representations of Homelessness in Social and Health Planning in Italy. Implications at the Local, Regional and National levels: the cases of Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna

The aim of this study is to understand how homelessness is represented in social and health measures in Italy during the period preceding the Covid-19 pandemic (2019-2020) and the period immediately after the initial outbreak (2020-2021). The analysis has been carried out with the help of the “What’s the Problem Represented to be?” approach by Carol Bacchi, investigating “problems” representations and proposed solutions. The two Regions featured in this analysis are Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna, with a specific focus on their two capitals: Milano and Bologna. Given the decentralisation of the Italian healthcare system, these Regions were chosen not only because of their high-performance levels, but also because of their differences and for their role as some of the primary recipients of the Covid-19 pandemic. The documents analysed were the Local Area Plans (Piano di Zona) for each city, together with Regional Guidelines, the normative framework surrounding these measures and, where applicable, National strategies used to approach marginalisation and healthcare. In Lombardy, local healthcare became important as an objective for future welfare planning. Integration of services and social marginalisation became evident as a health problem during the pandemic experience, while preparedness became a key word to operate on the territory. On the other hand, in Emilia-Romagna, the effects of the pandemic are visible in the way the concept of vulnerability exited the realm of poverty and it extended to the one of citizenship. Many characteristics of needs, together with some semantics once reserved for people experiencing homelessness, entered planning and policy documents for what concerns Italy and its Regions. The accent on people experiencing homelessness and their needs can still be represented as a subsidiary of poverty and/or other health vulnerabilities. While categorization can be dangerous, the representation of homelessness within the general social problems ensemble, often referred solely to the concept of poverty and material deprivation, risks overlooking specific obstacles that they might encounter when accessing services both before and after the pandemic.



*Franca Viganò holds a Bachelor's degree in History, Anthropology and Religion and a Master's degree in Ethno Anthropological Disciplines from La Sapienza University of Rome. She continued her studies with a second-level master's degree in Public Policy and Social Change at Collegio Carlo Alberto in Turin, where she had the opportunity to work as an intern with the research group of the Fundamental Rights Laboratory. After completing her studies, she worked as a researcher for CCM (now Amref-CCM Foundation) on the project: "Right to Health: a network in Turin to support the weakest" (with World Friends). She is currently enrolled in the third year of the PhD programme in "Human Rights, Society and Multilevel Governance" at the University of Padua.*