

Which Way to Go On?

Potential Framework of a National Homelessness Strategy

Expert draft
No. 0
Outline – for debate

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On the charge of Miklós Vecsei, Ministerial Commissioner
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Summary – Integration, Enhancing Re-integration

The past few years have marked the time of a half-turn in homelessness matters. As compared to previous years, significant changes have started; or, to put it more accurately, the signs of significant changes have appeared. To sum up the essentials: a paradigm-change has begun, in which homelessness is no more regarded as a terminal point, and homeless people merely as people needing care or needing to be hid and excluded, but as an individual and social situation from which there is a way out, a way back to integration to the society of those having a home. This approach is not yet dominant, but it has appeared more heavily as compared to past times. We would like to illustrate this with two examples.

One of the examples is that in 2005 – in a more organised way and at a larger extent as compared to previous, local projects – **supported housing programs** started, which offer more than the previously practiced institution-focused homeless-support. In the 15 years prior to that, both financing and regulation had focused on generating institutions where those not having a home may live or stay temporarily (separated from the majority of society; under overly poor circumstances and left with no way out). Different social help-services had evolved for those staying on the street. Supported housing programs are to change this desperate perspective. These programs offer the possibility of reintegration into mainstream society – as it turns out – significantly modifying the motivations, hopes, and ideas on the manageability of this situation of both social care professionals working with homeless persons and homeless people themselves.

The other example is that – partly as a result of having joined the European Union – the latitude of efforts aimed at **reintegrating homeless people into the labour market** has significantly changed. Support from the European Union is not aimed at passive help or comfortably maintaining a state of exclusion, but at encouraging substantial efforts to activate as large a part as possible of those having fallen out of the labour market and reintegrating them into the world of labour. The size and strategy of these resources have influenced Hungarian employment-policy, and within that, the support of homeless people in the labour-market (amongst whom there is an especially large number of those having been unemployed for a longer period of time, having been employed in the black or grey economy, having physical or mental challenges, or being of roma ethnical origin).

In the areas of housing and employment, two highly significant fields; a perceptible change of attitude has started.

Parallel with that, in the very same years, the rate of economic growth has slowed down, which has resulted in significant social tension, and has a hard hit on living standards of great masses; at the same time, the deficiency of the state budget has also increased significantly, as a consequence to which a number of measures have been taken, with adverse influence on the homeless-service-provision system and on people in a situation of homelessness.

We can only refer to a half-turn, because, up to this point, no national program has been developed, no determined and articulated political will has been shown beyond these initiatives taken in new directions. The desperate lack of a will of preventing the homelessness of large masses has a link to the above cited reasons as well; and, what is more, a number of significant government measures may result in the further increase of homelessness in our country.

Our intention with this program was to focus on the prevention of homelessness, helping the social integration of those having lost their means of living and having become homeless, and helping them re-integrate into the society.

As a starting point, we use the assumption that the present homeless service provision system is a result of the first, shock-like reactions, and was created in an attempt to mitigate the damages following the regime-change of 1989. Several elements (regulation, financing, provisional forms, provisional and decision-making organisations) of well-meaning solutions from those and later times have by now become institutionalised, which, for one thing – to put in a very general way – guarantees some kind of stability for the homeless service provision, and, although many times in a way alien to the system, has provided the opportunity for innovative local projects and professional experiments. On the other hand, however, it has basically stabilised the original “damage mitigating” process and provision forms as well as the regulation and financing means of maintaining those.

The purposes of this strategic program are different from those of usual government proposals (the number and effect of which in the past fifteen years should not be underestimated). The focus of it is not the partial, well-meaning correction or improvement of the prevailing homeless-service-provision system (although there is a continual need for such decisions as well). This program seeks answers to questions such as what means are there to notably prevent what can be called masses of becoming homeless in Hungary; what means are there to decrease the number of those living on the very verge of becoming homeless; what means are there to facilitate the reintegration of those ten-thousands having already lost their means of living?

Standards of financing and regulating based on “damage mitigating” processes and the so called homeless service provision institutions in line with those cannot answer those questions. If we confine ourselves to only slightly improving the prevailing conditions, we can basically count on the further increase of the extent of homelessness in our country in the medium or longer run, causing further serious personal and social (and, not of second importance, financial) damages.

The strategic program proposes steps and governmental measures that can be implemented in the middle term – or, to put it in a more lucid way, in about five years. The expected impacts may appear partly within that time period, and partly following that. It would be spectacular in the good sense of the word and also desirable to set numerically formulated targets (indicators) such as for example “the number of people living in public places will be decreased by two thirds in five years”, or “the number of those living on the very verge of becoming homeless will be decreased by 20%”¹. However, we find the formulation of such indicators too early at present. Still, the aim of establishing the regulatory and financial means as well as documentation and registration processes on the bases of which such strategic goals can be developed and executed in five years, is an aim that can be formulated and reached on the middle term. Determining concrete steps to be taken in order to strengthen the security of dwelling, prevent people from becoming homeless, decrease the number of those living in public places is also a goal that can be formulated and reached in the middle term (the present strategic program contains proposals concerning those); concrete numerical indicators can be established for projects involved in the executive processes.

¹ Present day reality is well characterised by the fact that so far only the Capital’s Local government formulated a longer-term homeless-service concept (in 1997), the most dominant, strategic indicator of which is that „*No-one should get frozen on the streets in the winter because of lack of help*”. We are aware that reaching even that goal needed significant efforts (such as service-organisation, financing, development, etc.), and we are also aware that a **responsible** formulation of such goals truly requires taking harmonised steps.

This strategic program determines steps to be taken in 3 (+1) main strategic, interventional areas. In the focus of the proposed measures and steps is the middle-term establishment of a new, uniform and directed – differentiated according to problem-types, but harmonized – housing-support system. The subjects of this housing-support system are those who are unable to provide a dwelling for themselves or their families by their own resources. In order to establish such a support system, it is necessary to perform the harmonised, systematic review and reform of the present housing-regulatory and housing-support system, the regulation and financial means of social services and homeless service provision within that, as well as the operation of homeless provision services. These main interventional areas shall be considered in the program one by one².

² In case there is a determined and steadfast decision-making, interventional intention and hard work, the execution of the strategy could be established under the comprehensive review and reform – the, truly timely, renewal of the present financial and institutional supporting – of the so called Social Act planned to take place in 2008.

**The structure of proposals
of the strategy**

**The responsibility of politics
Social Charta of Local governments**

**Strategic area no. 1.
Obtaining a flat – housing
support**

**Strategic area no. 2.
Regulation and financing of
homeless service provision**

**Strategic area no. 3.
„Opening onto the street”
program**

Reform of dwelling supporting

**Renewal of the regulation of
entitlement**

**Developing a positive zero
tolerance**

**Possibilities of increasing the
number of tenements**

**Checking indigency -
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**Necessary steps of
prevention**

**Widening the range of flat-
maintenance (retaining)
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**Reforming the normative
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**”Open services”
program**

**Strengthening the security
of housing**

**Establishing a system
around the supported
dwelling program**

**”Day centres” instead of
”Day warmers”**

**Modification of the Housing
Act, proposals**

**Establishing a Program
Office (Agency)**

„Entrance Hostel” program

Preface

Changing situations of national governmental politics, economic growth – employment – and income; quick alternations and fluctuations of periods of development – stoppage – consolidation make the realistic formulation of even a middle-term problem-solving strategy fairly difficult. Ten years ago, the only possible goal could have been the “face-lift”, or slow development, of the homeless service provision; the end of the tunnel was not yet to be clearly seen; the economic and social features of the era following the economic depression of the 90’s were difficult to make estimations for. Four or five years ago the frames of a national homeless strategy could have been marked by significant optimism; main indicators of growth, employment and housing-construction were improving, constructive and optimistic programs of re-integrating the excluded, the till-then losers could be formulated and started. Considering the present, current boundary conditions, outlining a primarily defensive, damage mitigating, mass-exclusion preventing and treating (but hardly slowing it down) “defensive strategy” seems reasonable. However, if we trust that the presently effectuated restriction-and-consolidation period is soon to put balances back on track and the era of sustainable development and balanced growth may start again in one or two years, than the formulation of a “defensive” strategy would be a substantial mistake, which would cause significant damages in the middle term. In this case, trusting a middle term recovery, the focus of a homeless strategy could be the question of “Who may get on the train?”. Under the conditions of moderate growth, what means do we have to prevent development from being accompanied by masses losing their livelihood; what means do we have to help those, who have lost their livelihood in previous periods, regain and stabilise it again? The following document is based primarily on the latter assumption; that is on the supposition that there is a chance of formulating ways of breaking out.

We start with the assumption that all future cabinets will stand for reducing homelessness, decreasing the number of homeless people, alleviating housing crisis-situations, improving ways of housing and chances of obtaining a dwelling. These ambitions, however, are naturally restricted by prevailing budget limitations. Therefore steps to be taken and proposals can also be divided into two large groups based upon this reality: steps that can be realised without increasing the real value of present resources spent on such goals; and steps that can be realised by increasing the real value of present resources spent on such goals.

The government is not responsible for all elements of homelessness, becoming homeless, or ceasing the homeless issue. It should be clarified, what is the government’s competency and what is not. We are talking mainly about issues that are the responsibility of governments; those are the areas that need governmental measures.

The Responsibility of Politics - Social Charta of Local governments

Like other significant social problems, the prevention and decrease of homelessness is impossible without wider social and political co-operation. The system of regulations-resources-services cannot be effective in itself, without active support of the public and politics. A significant attitude-change is necessary considering the roles of those involved in providing support and in the whole of the system of provision: participants of the central and local government must continually emphasize their commitment in order to cease social problems and exclusion, the same way as those involved in providing social support keep doing. This is not only important because of public support, but in the longer run it serves the establishment of a wider range of potential funding, where service-providers can not only rely on resources of the central-local government, but also on yet unexploited resources of a wider social and market involvement.

”Social Charta of Local governments”

We propose that the Parliament discusses and then accepts the document called “Social Charta of Local governments”, and recommends it for discussion and acceptance to the boards of local governments. The Prime Minister and the Mayors of local governments accepting the document should authorise it – as a document strengthening the common will, intention and co-operation – by signing it.

”Hungary’s social politics on the millennium”

A common statement of the cabinet and of the mayors of local governments

We, mayors of Hungary’s local governments, state that we have common tasks in improving the social situation of the population of our country. In the name of the common responsibility, hereby we make the following statement:

As a framework of our decisions, we accept the principles laid down in the document called “Social Charta of Local governments”.

1. Social problems of Hungary are the concern of all of us; the alleviation of social tension is a task for all of us

...

2. The establishment of the conditions of a common action subordinated to a common social-political interest – respecting the political, professional, institutional and authoritative sovereignty of the participants

...

3. Harmonisation tasks in the social policy of local governments

...

4. Outstanding support of those in greatest need and poverty, the mitigation of social exclusion and marginalisation, strengthening the nation’s social integration

...

5. Follow-up, evaluation

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”Social Charta of Local governments”

Principles of local governmental social policy

In this document we record the principles defining the frames of our actions. It depends on politicians as well as professionals how well accepted principles and practice can be harmonised. This provides tasks not only for decision-making local politicians, but for professionals working in the executive and decision-preparing fields as well.

1.1. Principles

- ❖ It is the task of local politicians, and among them those involved in social policy, that citizens may feel at home at the settlement they are living in.
- ❖ Self-organisation, solidarity and representation of citizens should get as large a role as possible in the strengthening of social cohesion.
- ❖ It is the responsibility of public figures to prevent the splitting of the settlement’s community, the exclusion of groups or individuals, and to enhance the integration of the settlement’s society.
- ❖ It can be formulated as a practical principle of local social policy that the focus of the system of provision is the citizen needing help.
 - It is an unalienable right of the citizen needing social help to have a respect for his/her human dignity and civil rights during the social processes, too.
 - All clients requesting and getting social service have a right to preserve their personal independence and moral dignity.
 - The aim of social processes is to realise and support these skills. During the social processes, the aims should be to improve living conditions of the clients, to make them a member of fuller rights of society, to make them citizens of the country who are able to exercise their rights and interests.
 - Clients should have an active role in determining and provisioning services for them. This regards rights of complaint and protest the same way as implementing means of individual and group interests.
 - Everyone has a right for social services regardless of their religious, denominational, ethnical, sexual, physical and mental condition. The claim of equal opportunities and the decision of equal judgement should be provided in an indiscriminative way.
 - It is an important function of social services to strengthen the autonomy, improve the skills and decrease the loneliness of the individual. The right of children and adults to live in families should be guaranteed.
- ❖ Besides the rights of citizens needing help, local social policy must respect other rights and interests of the citizens of the settlement. These include publicity of decisions, reasonable use and calculability of resources, simplification of administrative processes, provision of control, improvement of co-operation with civilian organisations and other provisioning organisations, and the establishment of new forms of processes connected to the above.
- ❖ It is a task of high priority for local social policy to alleviate outstanding inequalities of opportunities, as well as the mitigation of social tension (marginalisation, exclusion) arising from that; the improvement of opportunities and possibilities of self-supporting succeeding of those living in poverty. The treatment of these problems needs a well-aimed use of accessible resources. Local social policy must get involved in preventing citizens from getting drifted to the periphery of society.

It is the common interest of politicians interested in improving social services as well as professionals involved in support-services to determine the principles of social services. Co-operation in a regulated framework is the only way that this can be possible.

1.2. Developing Institutions and Processes

It is the task of local social policy to – within limits of institutional and financial possibilities – establish forms and processes of providing help that are in line with the formulated principles.

- ❖ Non-existent social services need to be gradually established.
- ❖ Services in the vicinity of citizens needing help need to be strengthened.
- ❖ Considering special drawbacks, the establishment of differentiated basic and specialised provision forms needs to be stimulated.
- ❖ During the above processes, developing the co-operation between different sectors and widening the range of forms and processes of co-operation between local governments and non-governmental organisations have a crucial role.
- ❖ It is time to establish regulations of sector-neutral “competition” and within that adaptation to novel tasks of “case-management” in order to be able to provide the most suitable forms of provision for each person.
- ❖ In line with the European practice – on the bases of exhaustive professional work – systems of contracts between the clients and the suppliers, that is between those needing help and the services providing the help need to be gradually established.
- ❖ These professional goals, along with the goal that the usage of money of tax-paying citizens needs to be transparent, demand a detailed description of the concrete professional content of each provision form and the establishment of institutional standards.

2.1. Social Administrative Conditions

Even recognising the independence of the more than 3000 local governments of the country it is possible to draw up contracts and agreements between the cabinet and the local governments as well as between the various local governments. These agreements can result in the improvement of rational operational conditions of social services as well as a share of duties in administrative tasks.

Co-operation of local governments supposes a common will and intention. However, co-operation is not merely a matter of will; it also means exercising practical principles and practicing commonly operated mechanisms. Consequently:

- ❖ Transparency of obtaining services must be improved.
- ❖ The number of those primarily entitled to services, unduly dropping out and falling behind, should be decreased. Even those in most poor condition should not be left out of support due to their cultural drawbacks hindering administrative processes.
- ❖ It is desirable from the aspects of both transparency and administrative efficiency to simplify and standardize validation processes and documents, as well as establish conditions of transferability of documents among local governments.
- ❖ Terms and levels of entitlement to different services could be more standardised.
- ❖ In the different fields of services, conditions of control and objective evaluation of concrete services and enterprises should be improved. This is an important aspect in terms of consumer protection and quality control as well.

- ❖ For the sake of developing administrative case-maps, there must be regular discussions among administrative professionals. In the course of those, well-tried solutions, achieved successes and experiences of changes can become widespread.

2.2. Target Groups of the Local governments' Social Policy, Alleviating Social Exclusion, Social Integration of the Settlement

For numerous citizens, social benefits may provide the only resources of livelihood. From the aspects of social peace and cohesion of certain settlements, it is a task of high priority to keep those citizens on the surface of normal livelihood that would otherwise, out of their own resources, be unable to make a living.

This problem jeopardises primarily the following groups living in poverty:

- ❖ Those aged or handicapped persons, who are not entitled to a social security income and have no families or relatives that would receive and support them, are especially disadvantaged.
- ❖ There are people who are not entitled to “classical” social services, because they are neither too old, nor too ill, but have been unemployed for a longer period of time and have no income. This group is also highly endangered of becoming homeless.
- ❖ Those who are treated with prejudice by the majority because of their ethnicity are especially jeopardised.
- ❖ The group of those who, without help, are unable to integrate into a society reluctant to receive them because of their deviant behaviour, “drug-dependence”, or a criminal record, are also multiply disadvantaged.
- ❖ Children living in fragmented, large or low-income families are also more and more significantly becoming poor; that is why the alleviation of the poverty of this age-group is also a task of high priority.
- ❖ Besides victims of poverty, old age and the lack of mental and physical health may also result in exclusion. The provision of adequate livelihood for the citizens of very old age, the physically seriously handicapped and the mentally challenged is also the obligation of social policy.

The inadequate social provision for marginalised and poor groups may result in serious problems in other areas, too. These problems may easily criminalise; their exaggeration may deteriorate the public order, general atmosphere and image of the settlements.

2.3. Perspectives of Social Resources and Scope of Tasks, and Their Proportion

- ❖ The tasks and demand are growing by the continuous ageing of society; a very aged population growing in size needs to be supplied for. This provides not only a quantity, but a quality challenge as well. The tasks are presented mainly in the professional and organisational boundary areas between social and health services.
- ❖ The growing period of time spent in unemployment also projects increasing tasks. The present system of support needs to be developed and extended in order to be able to handle situations arising from permanent unemployment. The provision and support of groups that are especially at risk of permanent unemployment – the roma population, homeless people, those having a limited capability of work – can be thus realised also.
- ❖ Task- – that is not institution- – oriented financing may significantly improve the efficiency of services. Conditions for a more integrated resource-usage must be established.

- ❖ This may have a significant impact on the proportion of tasks and resources, and it regards questions of rearranging tasks and resources. Similar problems can be anticipated not only in the relationship of central and local funds, but within the relationships of local governments, too.
- ❖ Professional politics wishes to relieve pressure on residential service provision by improving services reaching the home and family. The financing of operational costs composed of different elements in the transitional period presents a special problem: operational costs are characteristically higher than in the case of an established system. It is a reasonable goal to make savings from decreasing capacity re-arrangeable to the service areas that are to be newly developed. These savings presently show up in the central budget. The splitting of tasks and resources between the different sectors is yet unsolved. Presently, the only chance of reacting to these problems appears within concrete projects.

2.4. Sector-Neutral Financing

By today, a rather colourful palette of types of social services has evolved. A special, determining group is represented by the different religious and secular non-governmental organisations operating in entrepreneurial or non-profit forms. The growth of such organisations is appreciated by both politics and the wider public.

- ❖ The clear formulation of local governmental politics is unavoidable; in what areas and under what conditions do they wish to co-operate with non-governmental organisations.
- ❖ Frameworks of agreement on the bases of which local governments wish to include non-governmental organisations in the tasks need to be determined.
- ❖ Providing a rightful and fair distribution in these service areas needs special care. It must be avoided that the otherwise competitive demand gets over-donated by the financial resources of social provision. Consequently, special attention is needed at formulating the principles of provisioning for the adequate client-group.
- ❖ A basic legal tool of the public-financing of non-governmental organisations is the contract. A contract that is able to establish and institutionalise a guarantee-system serving mutual interests of the contracting parties.

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Main source of income of the respondent	Total of respondents		Respondents in hostels		Respondents at public places	
	person	%	person	%	person	%
no income	194	5	151	6	43	4
work	1326	37	1024	42	302	26
social-security provision	769	21	632	26	137	12
scavenging	324	9	75	3	249	22
social benefit	363	10	263	11	100	9
other	618	17	305	12	313	27
Total	3594	100	2450	100	1144	100

Source: February 3rd Team, 2007

Health status of respondent	Total of respondents		Respondents in hostels		Respondents at public places	
	person	%	person	%	person	%
capable of work	2016	54	1272	53	607	55
incapable of work	1698	46	1140	47	503	45
Total	3714	100	2412	100	1110	100

Source: February 3rd Team, 2007

Causes of Homelessness – Roads Leading to the Homeless Situation

Like all social phenomena, homelessness is the consequence of not one single cause, but rather of a complex system of causal relationships. Three levels of causes can be differentiated:

- structural causes – the system of social inequality, the depth and scope of poverty, general employment and income conditions
- institutional causes: the condition of the housing, employment, health, education, etc. subsystems, the existence, efficiency, etc. of social equalising mechanisms
- personal causes: familiar conflicts, illnesses, relationship and mental problems, skills of conflict-treatment, education, etc.

Main characteristics of life situations leading to homelessness:

- lack of secure and safe housing,
- limited access to continuous employment or employment that provides a living,
- narrowing of supportive relationships,
- serious endangerment of physical and mental health,
- lack of social respect,
- exercising social membership becomes impossible.

As a consequence of all these, homelessness is a characteristic form of social exclusion. And as such, “solving”, or more precisely mitigating, this problem **requires purposeful and harmonised steps from all of the governments against social exclusion**, only a few special elements of which can be summarised in a strategic homelessness program³. Strengthening the security of housing, regaining or replacing the lost dwelling, renewal of present means of the homeless-service-provision system and enhancing their efficiency lie in the focus of this program.

...

³ The operation of several larger social systems of social support is closely related to becoming homeless, and thus to the possibilities of preventing and solving it; starting from education, through healthcare to policy regarding employment; from the operation of social security through that of municipalities to the functioning of the family; nevertheless, all of these are not mentioned in this program, partly because separate governmental programs have been developed concerning these areas.

Strategic Area No. 1
Housing – Dwelling – Housing Support

Obtaining a Dwelling

In the nineteen-seventies, each year, 80-100,000 flats were built in our country, in the first part of the eighties as much as 70-80,000, while the years prior to the regime-change it was 40-50,000 flats each year. In the first half of the nineties, the number of newly built flats significantly decreased, state housing-construction basically ceased to exist. The number of flats or houses built out of private resources was around 20-25,000 each year. From the Millennium on – primarily as a consequence of new financial support – housing-construction was increasing again; in the years 2004 and 2005, the houses or flats built in each year exceeded 40,000.

“Thanks” partly to the demographic processes, we cannot generally say that there is a quantity shortage of flats, and quality indicators of housing in Hungary also keep improving; however, the rate and number of out-of-date, anachronistic, overcrowded dwellings having no modern conveniences is still fairly significant, and the number of flats in concrete blocks of flats with all the modern conveniences but with rather high maintenance costs is also quite high (837,000 flats). Hungary’s housing situation is characterised by significant inner tension in its regional as well as owner composition.

Housing-building				
	No. of Housing	No. of newly built housing (put into use)	Of that No. of housing built by local governments	Percentage of newly built housing built by the local governments
2000	no data	21 538	no data	no data
2001	4 065 000	28 054	no data	no data
2002	no data	31 511	no data	no data
2003	no data	35 543	1 394	3,9
2004	4 134 000	43 913	577	1,3
2005	4 173 000	41 084	724	1,8
2006	4 209 000	33 864	295	0,9
Source: KSH (Central Statistical Office)				

Present-Day Supporting of Obtaining Housing

Central governmental support of the housing sector in our country had decreased to a minimal level after the regime change, and this situation prevailed for almost a decade.⁴ This tendency turned in 1999/2000; since then, housing expenditure of the central budget, as well as the rate of housing support as compared to the GDP has doubled; by now it has reached 1.2-1.5% of the GDP (in other countries of the European Union, this rate is around 1.5-2.0%).

It is an important characteristic of this support “package” of about HUF 300 Thousand Million a year that **it primarily supports obtaining a dwelling, a dwelling-ownership within that, building dwellings (and, at a smaller degree, modernisation), mostly without any social or income consideration.**

⁴ The numerous causes and diverse consequences influential even today are not discussed here.

...

Considering future possibilities, this also means that 75% of the present-day housing-support “package” is “used up” for support given to previous housing-buildings and housing-purchases, while – due to the decreasing rate of interest-supported loans – **a possibility of rearrangement within the “package” may open up in favour of the other forms of housing-support.** *“It is expectable that interest-expenditure and support given for building new houses will decrease, even compared to the extent considered in the convergence program, and that opens up the possibility of initiating new, socially prepared programs.”*

Chances of obtaining a dwelling are limited by the fact that the average price of a dwelling in Hungary is 5 or 6 times bigger than the average annual income, which also limits possibilities of getting a loan (by limiting capacities of redemption): presently, an average household is able to pay 50-60% of the price of an average house from bank-credit (in Western-European countries, this rate is 80-90%).

Expectable Main Tendencies – Proposals for Intervention

- By now, supported credits, and interest support are basically replaced by the so called foreign-currency-based credits, and therefore it is expectable that this form of support will disappear.
- The use of the so called house-building preference has somewhat decreased among the present conditions, we propose that this form of support is modified to a more socially-targeted support.
- The rate of flat-savings supporting can be also decreased, and at the same time, within that, the socially or regionally aimed credit facilities could get larger support than at present.
- The preference of positive income tax should also be remodelled to a socially more targeted support form.
- It is a strategic question whether steps can be taken in the direction of making support forms more targeted than they presently are. Targeted in the senses that partly the income situation of the households and partly regional criteria should also get a role among the conditions of getting support and determining the amount of the support.
- Parallel with these steps, the present system of housing-support must be simplified and made more transparent; support forms of the same or overlapping functions should be reduced; some of the non-targeted support forms should be replaced by socially targeted support forms.

A significant change of attitudes, a paradigm-change is needed in order to alleviate social housing problems, where **the direct or indirect support of housing-construction is replaced by the supporting of housing (and, within that, supporting of renting a flat).**

...

Proposed Reconstruction of the Housing-Building Preference (“Social-Policy” Support)

Housing-construction preference was established by reconstructing and increasing the then prevailing social-political preference in 1995; the renaming was also motivated by the fact that in most cases this support was unavailable for the socially needy because of lack of own resources. The several contradictions were corrected partly by widening the possibilities of use to enlargement and reconstruction of houses (the so called “half social policy”) in 2001; in 2002 the amount of the preference was increased, the advance loan was introduced, which made the preference available as a loan additional to people’s own resources; in 2004 the amount of the preference was further increased (the following amounts are available in case of building a new house: HUF 800 Thousand after the first child, HUF 2 Million after the second, 3 Million after the third, and 4 Million after the fourth) and the institution of the “half social policy” was also widened.

House-building preference (“social policy”) is a typical example of ownership-centred central support, which is an acceptable alternative where tenements cannot be operated, but significantly reduces opportunities of housing-support where this could happen via supporting the renting of flats. That is why it is necessary to observe possibilities of reconstructing the prevailing housing-building preference to support forms in which supporting long-term tenements could also have a role. At the same time, it is also to be considered that at present, the amount of this support is independent of income; it should be remodelled to support forms that depend on the income, and, in part, are regionally-targeted (serving aims of town-rehabilitation and slum-elimination).

Tenements – Tenement-Program

As a consequence of house-privatisation, only 4% of the dwellings belong to local governments in Hungary, and 92% of the houses are occupied by the owner. The absence of tenements makes entering the house-market – or, more precisely, the obtaining of secure and stable housing – extremely difficult, since the only means of that now is buying a house, or building a house, which are unavailable for those having a lower income. In 2003, the income of 7 years of a household was needed to buy a used flat.

Communal (state or local-governmental) tenement-building has basically stopped, even during the house-building boom of 2004-2005, only a couple hundred flats were built in Hungary with the participation of the local governments (or the state), partly within the scope of the “crippled” tenement-support program.

The percentage of tenements in Hungary is far behind that of other member countries of the European Union: this special structural problem cannot be ignored even when establishing the homeless-program. When formulating a middle term strategy, we must seek realistic possibilities of gradually increasing the number of tenements, optimal social-support forms of governmental and private renting, as well as possibilities of increasing the stability and security of the legal relations of renting. These steps are of crucial significance in both preventing becoming homeless and finding ways out of homelessness.

Ownership situation in the housing market	
	2005
	Thousand flats
No. of tenements belonging to local governments	117
Flats occupied by the owner	3 641
No. of private rentals	129

Flats divided according to legal relations of renting or owning (%), 2003.				
	Tenement	Flat inhabited by the owner	Flats of building associations	Other flats
Ex-DDR	66	34	no data	0
Germany	55	45	no data	0
Holland	45	55	no data	0
Denmark	40	53	7	0
Sweden	39	46	15	0
Austria	39	58	no data	3
France	38	56	no data	6
Finland	34	63	0	3
United Kingdom	31	69	no data	0
Belgium	31	68	no data	2
Malta	26	70	no data	4
Luxemburg	26	67	no data	7
Poland	24	58	18	0
Latvia	21	79	0	0
Greece	20	74	no data	6
Ireland	18	77	no data	5
Spain	11	82	no data	7
Slovenia	9	84	no data	7
Hungary	7	92	no data	1
Source: National statistical institutes, Housing Statistics in the European Union 2004 (no data for the other countries)				

Establishing the Social Housing-Sector: Alternatives of Resolutions⁵

The regulational framework of the national housing policy established in the 90's does not meet present-day requirements of housing policy, it needs revision. Among others, the inadequate legal regulation of private renting, shortcomings of legal security concerning real estate, and the partly un-evolved, primitive nature, and contradictions of housing-supporting cause serious problems.

„It is an important goal of housing policy to guarantee the security of housing, which, however, is impossible without a close co-operation with the social sector. Establishing security of housing means treating the affordability problem of the obtained dwelling. The most important tool is an effective, preventive support of housing-maintenance, which is able to prevent households from running into debt both in the owner and in the rental sector.”

Principles

- The efficiency indicator of social housing policy should be the number of needy households whose housing problem is solved out of a unit amount of support.
- The support must be proportional to the degree of need.
- More than one alternative model should be considered, and the regulation must ensure support-neutrality between the ways of resolution.
- We must guarantee a distributional practice that is acceptable also by marginal groups, as well as a legal equality recorded in evictional regulations.
- Matters of social housing cannot be divided from other welfare areas; “complex” programs must gain priority in the individual resolutions, which – in certain cases – means the local co-operation of several sectors.

Certain Elements of a Possible Social Tenement-Program

It must be clarified again and again that “social tenement” does not mean that the “flat is social” (that, for example, it is small, of bad quality, segregated, etc.), but that those living in the flat need outside help or support because of their social situation.

Based on the differences of future supportive and regulational schemes, the following main types can be differentiated:

Self-contained flat: A transitional form between the present-day institutional provision and the tenement, where housing and providing social services are closely connected.

New “building associations”: such controlled, public benefit (private or public) organisations which – on certain conditions – are entitled to central financial and rent support.

Social flats of individual use: flats where the rent-payers are entitled to get social rent-support.

Controlled tenements owned by local governments: flats that are owned presently by local governments, which are controlled by legal and local regulations – but the rent-payers get no central rent-support.

According to the expert draft, by 2020 the number of such tenements altogether could be raised to approximately 190-280 Thousand.

⁵ For the summary, we used the draft titled “Reform-Proposals for the Establishment of a Modern Social Housing Policy”, which was made on the charge of the Social and Employment Working Group of the State-Reform Committee („SZÉF”). Prepared by: József Hegedüs, Eszter Somogyi, Hanna Szemző, Nóra Teller. Contributors: Ildikó Dancza, Ildikó Horváth, Városkutatás Ltd., March 2007

Flat type
Self-contained flats
New “building associations”
Social flats of individual use
Controlled tenements owned by th
Total

Program of Self-Contained Flats

The purpose of the self-contained flats program is to help those people who do not need institutionalisation, but are temporarily unable to provide independent housing for themselves with in-kind and social services; treating the temporary housing crisis, and providing help for future independent living.

Self-contained flats can be flats, sections of buildings (house of lodgers), so called temporary flats, rooms in workers’ hostels, etc.

A self-contained flat is a transitional form between the present-day tenement and the institutional provision. Such social self-contained flats could be operated by local governments, non-profit organisations – regardless of the ownership of the flat. The essential point of the scheme of “social self-contained flat” is that the flat is rented by the social organisation (either the local government gives it over for use, or it is owned by the organisation), and the needy person(s) sign a contract with the social organisation. This contract contains the elements of a rental contract as well as those of an agreement establishing an institutional legal relation.

This form could primarily serve as accommodation for homeless families and parents with children; we propose that in the future the forms of so called temporary hostels for families are established (supported) in this form only. It should also be considered that the housing status of the bulk of the many thousands of ex-lodgers who lost their legal relations because of failing to pay the rent should also be reformed in this form (by a detailed control of the output conditions).

Program of the New “Building Associations”

Many forms of “building associations” to be briefly outlined play a crucial role in the housing policy of European countries. The essence of this design is that building associations let out the flats owned by them (or part of them) for the socially needy in return of different central and local supports, tax allowances, etc. on definite, regulated conditions. The building association can be (partly or fully) a local governmental organisation, a building co-operative, a private company or a non-profit organisation. Building associations can be established by more than one owners (local governments and private investors together), they can operate as investment funds in a later phase, after the market had been convinced that they were stable, reliable economic units. The main activity of the building association is – by the use of its own capital, credits and supports – building and buying flats to be rented out. Building associations may freely decide on the form of

An example:

At present – according to the so called Housing Act – in case the lodger cannot pay the rent, the rental contract can be abrogated with a **30-day period of notice, without investigating whether or not a social problem, insolvency is causing the situation, or whether the family would have been entitled of social support.** Following that, the lodger of the tenement belonging to the local government becomes an illegal occupier of the flat and is obliged to pay a flat-usage fee, which is a multiple amount of the original rent. **(In case it is not paid, the arrear is increasing.)** After the abrogation of the rental contract – according to the Executorial Act – during the period of execution, the lodger can be evicted any time, his/her belongings to be stored away.

In case there are also children in the family, according to the Act of Child Protection, the children and the parents are to be **temporarily accommodated in a temporary home for families; the father** can also find accommodation at temporary hostels for the homeless or night shelters – regulated by the so called Social Act. In worse cases, the children can be taken into the state’s care, and the mother also must find accommodation at homeless hostels.

The purpose of our proposal is that this disintegrating order of legal procedures is replaced by one favouring re-integration. The ex-lodgers could become dwellers of a self-contained flat in that same – usually rather poor - flat, they could get an organised, but special legal relation and social support, and most of them, after a definite period of time (6 months, 12 months, 2x12 months) could enter into a rental contract again..

operation. This form makes it possible for the private sector to become part of establishing and operating social tenements.

Naturally, associations can receive support only for flats that are handled separately, the distributional rules and rents of which follow specific regulations, and for which rent-support depends on the income of the beneficiary and other – legally regulated – conditions.

Program of Supported Tenement on the Private Market

There are yet significant reserves in the area of privately owned tenements. The role of private tenement is not negligible even today, despite the fact that several questions of private tenements are still unregulated or mis-regulated today. Hungarian experiences keep proving that it is possible to carry out social housing and private-tenement programs even among such – fairly disordered – conditions.

At the same time, such previous programs show that there is a need for the intensive contribution and help of not only the needy lodgers and flat owners, but also specially trained social staff and social organisations in this area. These organisations and social professionals can provide a certain social guarantee for both parties; in certain cases the social organisations may enter into contract with the flat-owners for letting and/or operating their flats. Social organisations providing help in the area of housing, especially beyond certain size, can reach more favourable renting conditions, and individual flat-owners are also more interested in letting their flats for a period of time to supported, socially needy lodgers.

Average annual rent (1 000 Euro/m ²), 2003		
Country	Free market rent of flat	Controlled rent of flat
United Kingdom	8.89	3.93
Holland	8.50	4.20
Ireland	8.39	2.21
Sweden	5.96	5.58
Finland	5.50	4.70
France	5.20	3.59
The Czech Republic	1.24	0.62
Lithuania	1.12	0.06
Latvia	0.57	0.20
Source: National statistical institutes, Housing Statistics in the European Union 2004 (no data for the other countries)		

Controlled Tenements Owned by the Local governments

Local governments will have an important role in contributing to housing policy in the future as well; several elements of the social tenement program are based on that. *„Today’s contradictions are partly caused by the fact that local housing policy is the task of local governments, in which the central government does not really have a say. Local governments can thus form their concepts of the social tenement-sector according to local political power-relations and local strategies. In order to make local governmental tenements part of the uniformly regulated social tenement-sector, local governments must be motivated to operate their flats in organisational frameworks that satisfy a system of central regulations and resolutions.”*

The Different Possible Levels and Ways of Regulating Rents

Regulation of rents is one of the most debated and delicate elements of tenement-policy. The following regulational levels belong to the proposed programs:

- (1) Centrally defined maximum of rents for the supported and controlled building associations
- (2) A flexible rent-controll at the settlement level (flexible, in the sense that representatives of the local government, the state, the building associations and the lodgers agree at negotiations on the local maximum of rents). At this point, rents below the maximum-level can only be modified in a definite procedure (or perhaps by a certain formula).
- (3) The level of rents is defined in the framework of rent-support, on the basis of which the exact amount is calculated.

Considering also the experiences gathered so far – which show that many times the local governments are not interested in carrying out local tenement programs – local governments are not necessarily the focus of the proposed programs and supporting-financing schemes; non-governmental, non-profit and market organisations may also be contributors of the programs. Contributing local governments can have an important role, for example, in the establishment of social building associations, in defining the entitlement for and paying the central rent-supports.

Solvency – Housing-Maintenance (Retaining) Support

In the consumption of Hungary's households, the largest expenditure is food and housing-maintenance costs. In 1989, the average expenditure of the households was **32%** on food and **10%** on housing-maintenance. The rate of the expenditure on food increased to **40%** on an average by the first part of the 90's (1997), and the cost of housing-maintenance nearly doubled, it increased to **18%**. In the lower income quintile, the rate of the latter reached **20%**, while in the group of those getting social support, the burden of housing-maintenance exceeded **40%**.⁶

When, in the first part of the 90's, households were asked year by year about the tightness of their budgets (using a country-wise, representative sample), the following replies were given⁷:

Has it happened in the past 12 months...	percent			
	1992	1993	1994	1995
that there was not enough money for food?	13	14	14	13
that you did not have enough money to pay the rent, or the bills of heating, electricity or gas?	12	12	13	12
that due to lack of money you heated less, or just part of the flat?	27	30	26	27

During the past one-and-a-half decades of shifting to market-economy, and accommodating to prices of the world-market, losing the security of housing-maintenance, running into debt, and, with that, drifting into less secure legal-relations became mass phenomena in the lower income significant ratio of the population; and in part of these situations the end result was having an illegal relation, or, for that matter, the complete loss of housing. (In 2003, in the local governmental sector, every fifth household had arrears. ⁸)

⁶ Local governmental Support and the Living Conditions of Supported Households. KSH, 1998. p. 103

⁷ Zsolt Spéder: Year by Year Changes, Social Report, Budapest, 1996

⁸

Housing-Market and Solvency (2003) Ratio of the Local governmental rent and the income 4,3 Ratio of the average private tenement and the average income 32,3 Ratio of those being in arrears with the rent for at least 3 months (%) 17,8 Ratio of owners being in arrears with the joint costs for at least 3 months (%) 1,2 Ratio of lodgers in arrears with the charges of public utilities for at least 3 months (%) 20,4

Consequently, when formulating the homeless strategy, we must deal with the problems of not only those who have already become homeless, but also with the direct social and economical “environment”, in which the masses of people on the verges of becoming homeless live. (Debt-treatment, private Bankruptcy Act, pre-payable meters, etc.)

At the same time, examples of other member-states of the European Union show that we are not nearly at the end of this “transitional” period; primarily in the field of direct expenses related to housing-maintenance (rents, redeeming housing-credits), a further increase of burdens is to be expected. As a consequence, it is of special interest that issues of rent-support and housing-maintenance support – affecting the rents as well as the redemption of credits – are handled at their place during formulating the strategy.

...

In Hungary, the local governments’ housing-maintenance support scheme is of the same age as the Social Act, which was introduced in 1993. The fast increase of support in the years following the introduction was soon to get exhausted, and stopped in 1997. At that time, **296 Thousand** households could have resort to the support, and the sum used up for that aim was **3.7 Thousand Million** HUF for the whole of Hungary. Following that, the definite reduction – which may as well be considered radical - housing-maintenance support started. The number of households getting the support was reduced from 296 Thousand to 183 Thousand (2001), which means a decrease of 40% in five years! The gradual spread of the housing-maintenance support following its introduction, and then the very early exhaustion of it took place while the central regulation of the support remained essentially unchanged.

...

That is to say the number of those getting housing-maintenance support and the amount of money spent on this support-form has been continually decreasing since the last third of the 90’s, while the proportion of the population needing such support has been getting larger and larger.

...

It can be stated that the total expenditure of local governments spent on housing-maintenance support stagnated during the last ten years, while the number of those getting the support fell to fifty percent (accordingly, the nominal sum spent on one supported household was raised). This tendency was turned at a 90% rate by the **normative housing-maintenance support** financed from the central budget, the introduction of which resulted in the doubling of those getting support in one year (and thus it reached the value of the prevailing ten years prior to that) and the resources spent on that was quadrupled.

At the same time, we must be aware that the 303,000 households getting housing-maintenance support at present get an annual support of as little as 40,000 HUF per household, that is the average monthly amount of the support is not more than 3,300 HUF (the legally regulated minimum being 2,500 HUF {*around 10 euros – transl.*} per month). This amount covers about 10-15% of the housing-maintenance expenditure of those households having the lowest income (lowest decile).

Comparing again to other member-states of the European Union we see that Hungary lies in the middle field regarding the number of households getting some sort of housing support (including here the households getting either household-maintenance support or gas-price support – although it is almost impossible to compare international data in this aspect).

On the whole, in the middle or longer term, we can predict an increase in expenditure on housing-maintenance and housing-retention, while, parallel with that, we must calculate with an increasing amount of social support and financial transfers in connection. Only by those means could other countries, too, avoid even bigger masses than today losing their housing.

Households with low income and those getting a housing support (%), 2003.				
Country	What percentage of people live in low-income households?			What percentage of households receive housing-support?
	Together	Owner	Lodger	
Denmark	11	6	24	21.0
Finland	11	8	23	20.0
France	15	12	25	19.5
United Kingdom	17	12	32	19.0
Sweden	10	6.1	8	16.0
Holland	11	7	20	14.0
Spain	19	18	23	12.0
Germany	11	7	16	7.0
Poland	15	15	16	6.4
Latvia	16	14	24	5.9
Ireland	21	17	44	5.0
Slovakia	5	na	na	1.1
Greece	20	21	15	0.6
Slovenia	11	11	na	0.5
Austria	12	12	12	na
Belgium	13	10	28	na
The Czech Republic	8	7	8	na
Estonia	18	17	26	na
Hungary	10	9	16	na
Italy	19	17	30	na
Lithuania	17	17	26	na
Luxemburg	12	8	24	na
Malta	15	11	na	na
Portugal	20	19	25	na

Low-income households: income under 60% of the corrected median of income
Source: Eurostat

Both in the areas of obtaining housing and housing-maintenance, the biggest problem in Hungary is the lack of solvency. According to data of KSH (Central Statistical Office), more than half a million households have debts endangering housing; one fifth of Hungarian households spend more than 30% of their expenditure on costs of housing.

Further harmonisation of prevailing situations in the following areas are problems to be solved in the short run:

- normative housing-maintenance support,
- local housing-maintenance support,
- debt reduction support,
- rent support,
- gas-price support,
- other income-complementary support

as well as introducing the institution of private bankruptcy and schemes of specialised support of housing-credit redemption.

We have to admit with self-criticism that Hungarian support forms aimed at the security of housing – although they serve important purposes in themselves – had at times been abruptly formed and established, and therefore it is timely to review them in a program-like, extensive and comprehensive manner. In the course of this, within a support-system of housing-maintenance and housing-retention that is differentiated, has a uniform structure, serves consistent goals and logics, we propose to include – beyond the above listed ones – a support-form called “*re-integrational and housing support of homeless people*”⁹, as well as a so called “*housing expenditure support*” within the framework of social services providing also housing¹⁰.

...

In our opinion, the questions of harmonising the different financial support-forms connected to housing (energy-consumption) and other income-replacing and income-complementary support-forms cannot be by-passed in the medium run. In the case of the latter supports (examples are the regular child-raising support, regular social aid for people of active and old age, but supporting entering employment may also belong here); at least the transparent and logical layering of the provision-forms and the re-regulation based on those principles must be reached, and the investigation of possible methods of connecting income-replacing and -complementary provision-forms and housing supports must be carried out.

Strengthening Security of Housing – Modifying the Housing Act

On 14th November 2005, the Parliament accepted the bill presented to modify the so called Housing Act. Quite in an unusual way, public debate of the bill was completely neglected; the public was practically informed about it only after its acceptance. The number of the affected lodgers has been radically reduced since the regime-change (from one million to less than 200 thousand households), and their situation keeps getting worse.

⁹ Following the initial attempts of homeless services, with the help of the cabinet and the Ministry dealing with social matters, this specialised housing-support form has been available for a couple of years, within the frameworks of tendering, and with quite significant success.

¹⁰ Other „smaller” forms of support need harmonising, also, one example of that is the life-starter support of young people previously cared for by the state.

According to the new regulations, the yet existing local governmental tenements must be split into three groups:

- flats let on the basis of social principles,
- cost principles,
- or market principles.

Local governments had to form new regulations concerning the *rent-support*, namely who can get it, on what conditions and what amount. Local governmental tenements that are rented by those entitled of rent-support belong to the group of tenements let on the basis of social principles. Those not entitled to rent-support must pay the local government a rent calculated based on cost- or market-principles.

The rent based on the cost-principle must cover all maintenance and reconstructional expenses of not only the flat, but of the whole building, while the flats let out on the basis of market-principles must also bring profit to the Local government. All these are prescribed by the regulation without giving detailed specifications concerning either the profit and the includable costs, or further regulations of the levels or definitions of different types of rents.

Including the costs of the missed reconstructional works in rents means a very significant rent-raise in one phase. The market-based letting of some of the local governmental tenements anyway reduced in number further decreases chances of obtaining housing for low-income families and persons. It is still not regulated, how many times a year the rent can be raised, and the rent-support is still not harmonised with the housing-maintenance regulated in the Social Act. The defencelessness of lodgers of local governmental tenements is increased by the fact that – although by providing an exchange flat – the local government can abrogate their contract any time. ...

It is also a new regulation that the yet existing necessity accommodations – there are still 30 thousand such “flats” in Budapest alone – are not to be let out for accommodation in the future. This is wrecking housing perspectives for exactly those groups that are in the worst situations. The fact that after two months, the local government is entitled to charge a so called usage fee, which is the multiple of the original rent, to people ‘having no legal title’ – the rent contract of whom was abrogated because of not paying the rent; most of whom had been getting no support either – also worsens the situation of those endangered by homelessness. It is not regulated how much more the so called usage fee can be than the rent (the number of such families living in Budapest alone is also many thousands). Since the last modifications, the stricter rules for the so called “arbitrary flat-occupiers” apply for the eviction of those “having no legal title”.

Further Proposals Relating to Regulation about Housing – with the Aim of Preventing Families with Children Becoming Homeless¹¹

In 2005 – approaching the Parliamentary elections of 2006 – the Prime Minister called for the development of a program for the next government against child-poverty. The request was formulating proposals of here and now action-steps, which basically need no money, and do not mean a further burden for the state budget.

¹¹ Péter Győri: Gyerek – szegénység – lakhatás, Néhány rövid távú javaslat a gyerekszegénység-elleni programhoz 2005. (Child – Poverty – Housing, A Few Short-Term Proposals for the Program Against Child-Poverty 2005)

Proposals formulated within the program against child-poverty:

Problem no. 1: Families with children living in poverty are greatly burdened by the present system of regulation that provides no protection against individual local decisions. Several resolutions of the Constitutional Court show that local regulations in many cases are not even in accordance with existing acts – making families in disadvantaged positions even more defenceless.

Proposal no. 1

Administrative Authorities should carry out a comprehensive investigation of the legality of local governments' regulations of *housing-management, rent-support, housing-maintenance support and tax-reduction support.*

Problem no. 2: Running into debt is directly endangering the housing situation of families. In many countries, a bankruptcy act for private citizens has been drawn up. Such preparation had been started and then stopped in Hungary, too. Without that, the affected families unavoidably get into an irreversible debt-spiral.

Proposal no. 2

Restarting the preparation of the bill called “About the Treatment of Certain Debts of Private Citizens”.

Problem no. 3: Presently, “crude violence” is prevailing in Hungary in the area of evictions. This is the terminal point of housing-crisis situations, and, simultaneously, the beginning of homelessness, a key event of losing the livelihood for the affected families.

Proposal no. 3

Besides the strengthening of housing-maintenance support, it is also requirable that eviction is “made more expensive” for the person asking for the eviction: raising the tax of eviction in cases where the eviction is performed due to a debt in charges of public utilities, and when the consequence would be that the affected is losing his/her housing. This may motivate the parties to prefer agreement (debt-redemption, instalment, re-scheduling, seeking forms of social support, paying moratorium, flat exchange, etc.).

Problem no. 4: Real-estate execution and eviction procedures are often performed against families that are from all perspectives seriously needy, and should be (should have been) getting financial social support.

Proposal no. 4

Modifying the Housing Act and the Execution Act in a way that the local government of residence must be officially contacted during the procedure and investigate whether the affected family is (or was) entitled to financial social support, which they actually do not get. The procedure must be terminated until the entitlement is considered, and in case of entitlement, a new procedure must be performed.

Problem no. 5: The number of overcrowded necessity houses lacking modern conveniences can still be estimated to be several hundred-thousands; these “flats” tend to be concentrated in slum areas.

Proposal no. 5

There is a need for preparing a sequence of measures (a program), which at least gradually alleviates the most miserable accommodation conditions. For this the following measures are necessary:

- a many year “electrifying” project must be started, to guarantee that no child (family) must live in a house where there is no electricity,
- the so called roma-slum eliminating program must be continued with much larger resources and knowledge than at present,
- in greater towns, so called slum clearing programs must be started in the areas having the worst quality of houses,
- specialised support-forms must be worked out and introduced with the purpose of modernising and replacing flats without modern conveniences and necessity flats.

Alleviating Running into Debt due to Expenses Connected to Housing

The occurrence of arrears in both the rent and the charges of public utilities directly jeopardises the housing of the affected households. Several significant and progressive measures have been performed recently for the alleviation of running into debt (paying off “old” loans, introduction of the housing-maintenance and later the normative housing-maintenance support, introduction of debt-treatment support and service, “gas-price support”, etc.). These measures have saved hundreds of households from complete financial bankruptcy. However, even despite the favourable impact of these support-forms, the number of households that have become seriously indebted during the past one-and-a-half decades still can be estimated to be several ten-thousands; and there are households among them where the electricity- or gas-provision has been turned off, where lodgers legal entitlement has ceased to exist, and who live endangered of eviction. ...

That is why – considering similar experiences of other member-states of the European Union – it is necessary to develop and introduce a **so called civil bankruptcy act** in the middle run. During this process, the intention must be to arrange a gradual and regulated treatment of large debts mostly by re-regulating the debt-treating procedures of “creditors”, service-providers and debtors, without putting further significant burdens on the central budget. On the basis of international experiences, a system of “civil bankruptcy procedures” can be established, which does not deteriorate present levels of willingness to pay, and which – at the same time – leads those previously becoming insolvent back to the group of solvent clients, thus preventing them from getting terminally indebted.

Both the introduced normative housing-maintenance support and the dept-reduction support – despite their positive impact – are incapable of preventing becoming indebted in part of the households getting into a financial crisis-situation; in the case of households having accumulated a significant amount of debt, they are unable to help in debt-treatment. Therefore both support-forms need to be reviewed in the aspect of targeting this area, and the possibility of valorising them considered. Parallel with that – in certain cases “for” a larger amount of support – the possibility of regulating these as re-payable supports must also be investigated. Introducing a repayable “debt-prevention” support would be highly reasonable in preventing socially needy

households with no debt older than six months, but where certain bills are already unpaid, to lose their housing.

Within the programs of “social accommodations” and “supported housing”, a new housing-support form must be worked out in detail. This would enable those having lost their legal status and socially needy families, as well as those having several-million-HUF debts, to enter into a certain “institutionalised legal relation”, and by fulfilling definite requirements, they could re-earn their legal status as lodgers (in the case of private ownership, instead of a sale by auction, they could become lodgers). In case of socially needy debtors owning a flat and having large debts, the organised, supported joining to the marketed “life annuity for a flat” program must also be considered.

Realistically reviewing the successes and faults of previous experimental programs, the application of pre-paying meters –both for electricity and gas – must be enhanced with forceful market-organisational and regulational tools partly for those redeeming their debts and partly for those socially needy living on the verge of becoming indebted.

Direct Governmental Antecedents of Some of the Steps to be Taken

In the beginning of 2007, the cabinet discussed and accepted the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs’ proposal about the development of the homeless-service-provision system between 2007 and 2013, the resolutions of which state:

„In order to prevent people becoming homeless

a) the economic and legal conditions of making the providers of public utilities obliged to use card-meters as general tools among the socially needy must be reviewed, with the purpose of preventing the consumer from running further in debt and from the service being turned off;

Deadline: 31st of December 2007

b) it must be determined what measures property-owner local governments must take in order to prevent lodgers become indebted before evicting them;

Deadline: 30th of June 2008

c) present regulations of the housing-support system must be reviewed in order to widen the group of those entitled of rent-support.

Deadline: 31st of December 2008”

Strategic Area No. 2

The Regulation and Financing System of homeless services

...

According to 2005 data of KSH (Central Statistical Office), there are 3459 places in night shelters of homeless people and 4227 places in temporary hostels; the permanent care and nursing of them is possible at 305 places, and there are altogether 312 places in rehabilitation homes for homeless people. The utilisation of the capacity of the institutions is around 100% on an average in the country. Only a fraction of temporary hostels and night shelters fulfil legal requirements, and several of these services operate in the same insecure, unsettled, temporary real estate-usage and legal status that they had one-and-a-half decades ago, when they were hastily established.¹²

It is basically impossible to say how much we actually spend directly on homeless services in our country. (Proceeding from there, at present, the measuring of the expenditure – result is an impossible task ...) The 2007 budget of the country (which is preceded by a thorough capacity-survey) calculates with **altogether 11,069 places in temporary hostels for homeless people**, two thirds of which (7500 places) is operated by non-governmental organisations and one third (3569 places) is operated by the Local governments. Out of the 101 street services taken into account, 80 services are operated by non-governmental suppliers and 21 services by the local governments. The demand for normative support from the central budget of these two service-groups is 4.4 thousand million HUF. It is impossible to tell from the central budget, how much the country is spending (in the form of normative supporting) on providing for homeless people either from budget items for social boarding, day centres or financial social support (despite the fact that in the case of all these forms of provision, supplies for homeless people are operated according to separate, detailed legal regulations).

Considering results of the investigations of the National Audit Office, we can suppose that **nearly 10 thousand million HUFs are spent annually** on maintaining the homeless-service-provision system in Hungary. In the following chapters, we will focus on the more rational and effective usage of this money.

We must be aware that while the homeless situation is one of the most visible example of losing one's livelihood and of dis-integration, and as such it keeps schematising (and concerning) public discussions, the weight of resources of the central budget spent on the treatment of this problem is essentially rather small; **it hardly reaches 1.5% of the central normative support spent on social purposes, and 0.5% of all normative supports.**

¹² When considering the reconstruction of the institutional-network, we must keep in mind that for most people who live in services providing accommodation the present situation is the result of pure necessity, and they would need other solutions than homeless hostels (for example cheap sub-leases or home care). Several inhabitants of hostels only use this service because they have no chances of a better solution.

Necessity of Reconstruction

...

- ❑ At present, specialised, creative, need-centred solutions **do not get legitimate, normative financing. (These services can be financed by individual tenders or by “stealing” from normative items, or else they do not come into being or cease to exist.)**
- ❑ **No normative financing supports the co-ordination of services, which would multiple their efficiency.**
- ❑ **No normative financing supports efficiency, or higher level of work.**
- ❑ **The present regulation is out of touch from the facts of provision in reality: starting from legal definitions of the group of homeless people to prescriptions concerning personal and objective conditions.**
- ❑ **Service suppliers keep trying to get-around or circumvent the regulations of the so called objective and personal conditions.**
- ❑ **Several suppliers regularly tamper with the headcount and other data which provide the basis of normative funding.**
- ❑ **According to prevailing regulations, a completely empty temporary hostel or night shelter – which satisfies legal prescriptions – rightfully takes up the several ten-million HUF of normative support.**
- ❑ **Several street services, which do not actually operate, get millions of HUF of normative support.**
- ❑ **According to the prevailing regulations, night shelters do not need to do case-management as social work, while it would probably be most important (and most difficult) there.**
- ❑ **Prevailing financing and regulating does not motivate re-integration of homeless people at all.**
- ❑ **Prevailing financing in itself does not motivate the local governments to prevent people from becoming homeless or enhancing them leaving the homeless state.**
- ❑ **Tenders for housing-supports caused serious disturbance for those suppliers where the number of the inhabitants at hostels decreased.**
- ❑ **Several suppliers try to “register” the very same homeless person and support staff in the logbooks of street services-soup kitchens-day centres-hostels in order to get the normative support – thus keeping people within the provision-system.**
- ❑ **In order to have an advantageous position at tenders, service-providers try to make it seem as if the number of homeless people living in their area keeps increasing each year.**

Skipping a longer explanation here, we can say that several expert documents and practical experience show that the prevailing provision-system is at the same time

- ❑ **under-regulated and over-regulated**
- ❑ **under-controlled and over-controlled**
- ❑ **lacking and wasting resources**
- ❑ **redundant and deficient**
- ❑ **building from below and controlled from above**

Which means it is high time to reconstruct it.

The main direction of the reconstruction can very simply be summarized as **instead of the prevailing system, a people and problem-centred regulation and financing** must be developed, where the focus is social integration, and adequate service-forms are organised around that.

...

Proposed Reconstruction of the Regulational and Financing System of Homeless service provision Institutions

Instead of a regulation of the status of being homeless, that of being without a dwelling

...

Homeless is a person

- ⊛ that has no registered address, or
- ⊛ whose registered address is a homeless hostel, or
- ⊛ who spends the nights in public places or in buildings that are not supposed for accommodation.

It was soon discovered that the concrete solutions that the regulations offer based on the above definitions do not correlate with several situations of reality, establishing institutional and instrumental systems cannot be operated on the basis of that. Homeless-service-provision systems have never checked “*need*” separately; the several regulation forms appearing in the past almost one-and-a-half decades have never attempted to solve the paradox between the description that “*homeless is the person that spends the nights in public places or in buildings that are not meant for accommodation*” - since when someone is using the services of the night shelter, he or she automatically becomes not-homeless, then is not entitled for provision either? It is obvious for everyone that the legal definition that “*homeless is the person whose registered address is a homeless hostel*” is a pure tautology; anyone can become homeless this way, who registers a hostel for his/her address, etc. However, since the beginning, the biggest problem has been presented by the definition that “*homeless is a person that has no registered address*”, since the (sometimes long time) life-situation and housing-situation of being without a home is massively different from whether someone has a registered address or not, or where that is ...

...

In order to put things finally in their right place (regulation – financing – problem-solving operation), we must tip the starting point back to reality, right where we once started from (to a previous environment of regulation), where the prevailing European Union regulations also start

from (in case there is such a regulation). In line with that, we propose that the legal definition of “homeless” is replaced by the following definition of “**a person without a dwelling**” in the relating act:

„A person without a dwelling is a person who is unable to provide a minimally adequate (independent) housing for oneself or his/her family out of his/her own resources.”¹³

...

According to proposals aimed at reconstructing the regulations and financing of social services:

- In residential services, the financing of **hostel services** (provision of special accommodation) and direct **human services** (caring-nursing-personal help) must be separated from that of the **general operation of the institution**.
- The costs of **hostel services** would be shared between the institutional service-users and the central government. The service-users would – similarly to the prevailing system – pay a *personal fee* depending on the highly differentiated standards of the provided service and their income. In order to avoid the exclusion of low-income persons needing institutional services, their fee **would be complemented with an income-dependant “special housing support” as a normative financial support** (in the form of a voucher).
- The level of the need of caring-nursing-personal support would be determined by an “assessment of needs” similar to the prevailing procedure, but more comprehensive and partly more extensive in nature.
- This would determine the level of the need for caring-nursing-personal support, as well as – depending on the income of the client – the corresponding **sum of the caring-nursing-personal support**. This sum serves as a cover of the **direct human service** (caring-nursing-personal support). The financial support is given to the supplier which provides the services fitting to the needs assessment.

Splitting the present normative financing of services and transforming it to financial support-forms, along with the relating administrative changes would result in the following benefits:

- (Specialised) housing support can be harmonised (or even connected) with the prevailing financial supports of housing.
- In case of a need for caring-nursing-personal support, but without the need for institutionalisation, the possibility of a housing support can be evaluated in itself (this would have advantages in cases of groups of the aged, the handicapped, psychiatric patients and homeless people as well).

¹³ Before 1948 in Hungary, and up to this day in several member-states of the European Union, different forms of social supporting of housing are built on this basic definition.

- Entitlement to the “caring support” depending on the need for caring-nursing-personal support can also be harmonised or even connected with the procedure defining the present social care at home and the present caring fee.
- The possibilities of institutional versus in-home support, service-providing versus private caring-nursing would thus become realistic alternatives for the support-providers, too.
- Both support-forms, being dependant on the income, would share burdens between service-users and service-providers in a more realistic and fairer way than today.
- At the same time, the motivation of service-providers can be motivated to operate in a need-oriented manner and would (within realistic limits) offer an autonomous choice for service-users.
- It would maintain (perhaps even enhance) the sector-neutral nature of services (local governmental, non-governmental, market), and would continue to allow the spread of non-state services.
- It would prepare and facilitate changing (partly or at a greater extent) to the caring-security system, which could be introduced in the future.
- A thus constructed support-system would take us closer to the practice of welfare states of the European Union.

...

The Experiences of “Integrational” Housing Support and Supported Housing

The cabinet-proposal and the accepted cabinet resolutions discussed in October 2004 under the title “*about reducing the number of and providing for homeless people living on the streets and about the treatment of social conflicts related to the homeless state*” proposed a framework for part of the governmental steps concerning homeless service provision in 2005.

The proposal refers to the fact that the document titled *Common Memorandum about Social Inclusion* signed by the Hungarian Government and the European Committee in 2003 states the following:

- *“the problem of homelessness among young people and families needs effective solutions;*
- *it is of high priority to carry out the review of*
 - *the homeless-service-provision system,*
 - *the evaluation of the minimum guarantees of housing, as well as*
 - *the establishment of the provision-guarantees for those stuck outside of institutions.*

In order to harmonise the operation of boundary areas (health-care, employment, housing), it is necessary to enhance the co-operation between the relevant ministries.

Besides providing for those already in the homeless state, prevention, as well as the review of the conditions of the system of re-integration and the preparation of model-programs of its improvement, are the main tasks.”

Relying on successful experiences, the Government has decided that *“with the purpose of providing for people capable of self-sufficiency, but having no housing or living in temporary institutions, it shall give support to the Public Foundation Solidarity and Public Foundation For The Homeless, so that they support the development of non-institutional accommodations by renting – primarily urban – flats and accommodations via tendering.”*

The resources for the program running under the name of “external accommodation” were included in the Ministry’s 2005 budget; public foundations carrying out the tendering were distributing 293.7 million HUF for this purpose to service-providers; solving the non-institutional accommodation of altogether 900 homeless people.

Following the Parliamentary elections of April 2006, a summarising document was prepared about the achievement of the government during the previous four years, which also dealt with the execution of the cabinet-resolution¹⁴. The document states that non-institutional accommodation is much cheaper than homeless hostels: *“in 2006, the one-year accommodation of a person in a temporary hostel or night shelter cost 548,000 HUFs (the value of normative financing), while the one-year accommodation of a person in the housing program was 300,000 HUFs.”* The places thus freed by people moving into sub-leases can be allotted to homeless people who had before been excluded from the services. The evaluation states that *“the sub-lease functions as a home. It provides a normal living environment, enhances self-sufficiency as opposed to complete dependence on or socialisation to the institution; it allows for the arrangement of ones own living space and retiring to it, it provides the necessary conditions for entering and retaining employment. Furthermore, it can provide even more: the formation and retaining of neighbourhood-, friendly and romantic relationships, renewing familiar relationships, and the moving together of relatives. Living in a flat starts a real procedure of rehabilitation. In case the program proves successful, from the year 2007, the accommodation of 2000 people should be provided for within this scheme.”*

¹⁴ Report to the cabinet about the state of homeless service provision, 2002-2005

Main elements of the proposed housing program:

Integrational support can be given to the homeless person according to the Social Act, who

- has been living at a homeless hostel continuously for at least 120 days, or
- has been living on the street, at public places, or in a place unsuitable for accommodation, and has had an approved relationship with a homeless service provision service and
- has a net monthly income, or, in case two people are moving together, has an income per capita that does not exceed 150% of the minimum wages, service institution for the whole period of the program (including also the after-care floating support).

Integrational support can be given to cover

- the costs of independent accommodation (including charges of public utilities confirmed by invoices)
- the rent of flat or sub-lease
- the fee of workers' hostel
- for the permanent securing of a tenement or sub-lease with a larger sum
- for the institution's expenses of renting and operating tenements and places in workers' hostels
- for costs of social work enhancing the retainment of the housing (these latter costs cannot exceed 15% of the whole of the requested support)

For the social work connected to at least 12 months of integrational support of one person, the maximum of 60,000 HUF can be spent (in brute value, with common charges and all corresponding expenses). In the case of the 6 Months Supported Housing Program, this sum is 30,000 HUF at most.

A condition of giving the support is the contribution with ones own resources from the part of the supported. The amount of this contribution must be determined based on the income per capita of the supported person and those living in one household with him/her.

When giving the integrational support, the person

- who has been living under circumstances described in (1) for a longer period of time and
- who would be moving (in) with a spouse, companion or child, or
- who would be moving (in) with other persons, or
- whose institutional provision is not possible otherwise because of having special needs related to health-, mental-, or familiar-status, or
- who has enough savings or has a capacity of saving enough to be able to solve his/her own housing after the support, or
- who has participated in an integrational, preparational program, which was aimed at the establishment of an independent life

must be favoured.

The amount of the support during the housing program of at least 12 months, altogether

- a) in the case of one person, it cannot exceed 240,000 HUF and
- b) cannot exceed two thirds of the housing expenses of one person.

The amount of the support in the case of the 6 months housing program and one person cannot exceed 120,000 HUF.

Within 36 months, one person cannot get integrational support beyond the support sum of 240,000

The "Integrational" housing program of the "Solidarity" Public Foundation in Budapest was launched – with the development of tenders, regulated in great detail, and then its announcement – in 2005 (following a one-year "trial period").¹⁵

¹⁵Source: "Solidarity" Public Foundation for Flat-less and Homeless People of Budapest, results of monitoring carried out within the Supported Housing Program, June 2007

Since the end of 2005, within the program, **403 homeless persons of Budapest** have moved to a **flat** from a homeless hostel, night shelter or the street with the help of the “Integrational”, housing support; and a further **130 homeless people** have received support for getting accommodation **at workers’ hostels**.

Adding to the 77,722,000 HUFs that the 403 supported people have received as housing support, they have offered **70,321,000 HUFs as their own contribution** for their accommodation. Those receiving the support started the renting period with an average pre-saving of 98,000 HUFs (this mostly covered securing the rent). The rent of the flats concerned was 48,000 HUFs per month. The monthly average income of those getting the support was 63,000 HUFs, the majority (2/3rds) of those supported did not move in alone, but with somebody else. The sum of all of the income of those moving in together was 110,000 HUFs per month on average. The majority of those moving in with someone else could move in with a “relative” (companion, son/daughter) with the help of the support, and that in itself is an outstandingly important result. Due partly to people moving in together, in many cases (37%) housing expenses did not exceed 40,000 HUFs per capita.

Housing support of homeless people definitely serves re-integration: the majority of those receiving the support are motivated to make special efforts by having accumulated some income for providing for their own housing, and would finally like to move in with a person to whom they feel close.

...

The system of the “Integrational” housing support expects those getting the support to contribute to maintaining their own accommodation. (A fee must be paid in homeless hostels as well ...) There are many among those having become homeless, who are unable to contribute their own resources, and they cannot yet participate in the program. However, those who have even a partial ability of contributing, this support possibility means the chance of re-integration. The amount of the receivable support is 20,000 HUFs per month; however, according to the regulations of the support, the support must be higher in the first part of the supported living, and lower before its end. This also enhances the realisation of becoming gradually and continuously self-supporting in the after-care period.

Due partly to the one-year supports, since moving into flats mainly took place in 2006, 279 of the 403 supports are still in process. ... Concerning the programs, **we are informed that in altogether 135 cases the support had terminated, and in 108 cases the program was concluded with success. Out of the so far successfully concluded 108 programs, in 105 cases the supported person remained in the flat as a lodger after the supporting had ceased!**

Within the program, since the end of 2005, a further 130 homeless people have received support (“Voucher” support) in Budapest for getting an accommodation in workers’ hostels. This part of the program is co-ordinated by the Dispatcher Centre of Menhely Foundation, with the participation of night-shelter users. This support form makes it possible for the users of night-shelters to move to workers’ hostels. **At the same time, this means significant help in freeing places, especially in the winter, for those living on the streets.** The program basically takes place in two workers’ hostels (one or two places rented in other hostels), where dwellers must pay a daily amount of 1050 and 930 HUFs. The “voucher” system provides help for paying this amount, so that 2/3rd of the amount is covered by the support, and 1/3rd of people’s own resources.

The personal contribution is made possible by the fact that the majority (85%) of those getting the support have a monthly income of at least 40,000 HUFs (the average monthly income of those supported being 62,000 HUFs.)

The program has by now been modified in the sense that supported people are motivated to stay at the workers' hostel for the whole year – previously, a significant part of participants had “moved back” to shelters or to the street following the winter's support.

The implementation of the program was accompanied by **continuous, helping, supporting and monitoring**. The personalised, direct and continuous preparation and after-care work of more than 45 social workers of Budapest has made the realisation of the program possible – and the indirect work of a larger number of social workers, too.

Presently within the “Integrational” housing support program, the 12-months support of a homeless person costs 240,000 HUFs (direct support) + 60,000 HUFs (expenses of social assistance) = 300,000 HUFs. If we consider that a full-time “social worker helping in housing” could help 20 needy persons participating in the program at the same time, and we calculate the expenses of personal help (with taxes) to be 250,000 HUFs, then the annual expenses of personal help for one supported person would be 150,000 HUFs. This means that the reconstruction of the present housing-support program to a scheme where the homeless person needing support gets a housing support of maximum 240,000 HUFs and a “caring”, personal support for 150,000 HUFs at most, it would cost an annual amount of maximally 390,000 HUFs per supported person, which means that, even taking the most cautious calculations, it would not be more expensive than institutional accommodation (normative support of homeless hostels is 550,000 HUFs/year/person at present).

Placing the “Integrational”, Housing Support in the System

In the beginning of 2007, the Cabinet discussed and accepted the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' proposal concerning the development of the homeless-service-provision system between 2007 and 2013, the resolutions of which state the following:

„For the purpose of providing for homeless people who are capable of self-care and self-support, but have no housing, or live at temporary institutions,

a) a scheme for the establishing and operating of a 500-flat external accommodation-system must be developed;

c) within the framework of the New Hungary Development Plan, a complex program must be started for the enhancement of the re-integration of 3500 homeless people to the employment-market, and, connected with that, partial support of their renting a flat or accommodation, as well as of the expenses of their employment;”

In accordance with the governmental resolution, the measures to be taken to reach that goal are being developed within the operative programs (“TÁMOP”, “TIOP”) of the New Hungary Development Plan; their introduction is to take place in the near future; the essence of which is the following: supporting the market-based renting of flats for a further 3500 people in 7 years, for two years in the case of each participant. Since it is of crucial importance in retaining the housing and later self-support to have an income from work, through which people can finance part of their housing expenses beyond the support – and eventually all of it – as well as the costs

of their daily living; the measures of the operative programs of the New Hungary Development Plan include supporting continuous employment and the strengthening of their status in the employment-market.

Following reconciliations, the establishment and launching of an “external accommodation system” of nearly 500 flats, suitable for the accommodation of approximately 1000 people may also become possible in the near future. Integration in the living environment is supported by social work in this program, too. As compared to institutional accommodation, operating external accommodations is also a cost-effective solution in the case of homeless people (partially) capable of self-support.

...

Building on already available and continuous experiences of these programs – parallel with the reconstruction of the regulation and financing system of social services – a differentiated, but uniform housing support-system may be developed for people having no flats. Only by harmonising the prevailing housing-obtaining, housing-retaining and “integrational” supports, and, simultaneously, replacing institutional normative financing by the housing- and caring-support forms, can the sustainability and continuity of these housing programs (so far functioning from tender-supports, and producing satisfying results) be guaranteed.

Strategic Area No. 3 “Opening onto the Street” Program

„Or how should the homeless-service-provision system be reconstructed in order to more successfully prevent the increase of the number of people living in public places?”

Direct Governmental Antecedent of the Program

In the beginning of 2007, the Cabinet discussed and accepted the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs’ proposal concerning the development of the homeless-service-provision system between 2007 and 2013, the resolutions of which state the following:

„Within the framework of the New Hungary Development Plan, a program must be launched to develop the infrastructure of services providing temporary accommodation (hostels and night shelters for the homeless), so that they become suitable for providing support enhancing social integration of people having recently become homeless and people needing special help, for example people with psychiatric, substance abuse, or behavioural problems, young adults leaving state-care and becoming homeless, as well as people getting released from prisons. The over-crowdedness and doss-house characteristics of night-shelters must be reduced, so that groups of homeless people presently rejecting social support also become involved.

Deadline: for the operation of the program, continuously from the 1st January 2008

To provide an adequate provision for homeless people living on the streets

a) by reviewing the prevailing legal regulations, a proposal must be prepared to introduce low-threshold services, and to re-model existing homeless services to act more upon the needs of users;

Deadline: 31st December 2007

b) building on functioning experimental model-programs, the economic and legal requirements of establishing social junctions in and around public-transport facilities must be explored, taking special notice of such usage of the state-owned real estate.

Deadline: 30th June 2008”

Zero Tolerance?

Related to the reduction of the number of people living on the streets and in public places, we cannot avoid certain rather uncomfortable dilemmas. It is a very difficult question, where the optimal balance between helping-supporting tools and forceful, perhaps even repressive devices is. The answer to this question partly depends on profound considerations of religion, values and moral aspects, but it depends at least as much on highly practical possibilities, having resources, “order-maintaining” and “social” capacities (or the lack of them), short-term or middle-term goals, etc.

„Zero Tolerance”?

Here and now, the „circumstance” presents a special moral dilemma of how „making order” could be justified in the case of people having lost their livelihood and having to sleep in public places, when there is no order either concerning the street-stalls, beggars, parking cars, dog-walkers, public order personnel, road-maintenance and public sanitation staff, public place occupiers, trade service providers, etc.- just to mention a few direct elements of „street order”.

We are continuing with a summary of how present homeless services and organisations have and could use to contribute to reducing the number of those living on the streets. As introduction, however, we shortly mention some tools that the organisations “responsible for street-order” have to enhance the realisation of such a program.

The Dispatcher Centre of homeless people has been operating in Budapest for years (similar to what has been established in several regions by now). This centre prepares a daily report of the number of available places in night shelters in the settlement and of the number of people spending the night at certain shelters. (In the winter, several night shelters are allowed to be 120% full.) It is advisable that local police offices willing for professional co-operation also get this information and arrange their work (current practical level of their tolerance) accordingly.

Establishing the Practice of a Positive Zero Tolerance

If there is no other way, then by regulation, or with the help of an interpretive guide book, the content of “a situation endangering life and health” must be determined (§ 7. of the Social Act), so that when a so defined condition arises, certain people (especially those at risk) can be “enforced” (Act of the Police); and, at the same time, relating cogent prescriptions of the Social Act must truly be accomplished, namely the obligation of providing accommodation. Such conditions can for example be the following:

The following persons, among others, must be considered to be in a situation endangering life and health:

Minors who have spent at least five nights in a public place

Adults who have spent at least five nights in a public place with a minor

Pregnant women who have spent at least five nights in a public place

People incapable of self-care who have spent at least five nights in a public place

Beyond these persons, in case the average temperature is -5 °C or less, the following people also should be considered to be in a situation endangering life and health:

People over 70 years of age, who have spent at least five nights in a public place

Seriously, or chronically ill people, who have spent at least five nights in a public place

Beyond these persons, in case the average temperature is -10 °C or less, all people should be considered to be in a situation endangering life and health if they have spent at least five nights in a public place

The persons may be presented by the police, and, concurrently, the local government with responsibility for the person must provide accommodation for them as long as the conditions prevail.

In all other cases the police authority is entitled to carry out the procedure prescribed in legal regulations, omitting the previously described, special procedure.

...

Goals of the Program – Preliminary Considerations

A comprehensive goal, and leading principle of the program is alleviating the social disintegration of masses today, enhancing the re-integration of people living in public places as a form of life with the use of available, limited devices.

A more short-term goal of the program is a flexible reconstruction of the present homeless-service-provision system with the aim partly that more and more people from the streets are enabled to enter institutions and get adequate services, and partly to prevent the relapse of – previously shelter-less – people living in hostels. To prevent the further increase of the number of those living in public places and, later, to reduce this number, we are launching an experimental model-program, which enables the present homeless-service-provision system to receive and retain people living on the streets. In the program, present and new services – corresponding to the above expectations – of the homeless-service-provision system must be made available and more consumable for people without shelter.

Data also show that (in spite of individual, subjective impressions) very few people from the streets enter the service provision; especially few of those living in public places use homeless services offering accommodation and support forms connected with that. The homeless service provision of today is in large aimed at supporting home-less, flat-less people and those that are in different housing crises, and less aimed at supporting those without a shelter.¹⁶ A significant correction, the rearrangement of functioning is needed in this area.

¹⁶ * “PEOPLE WITHOUT A SHELTER”

○ those spending their nights in public places, in open-air places, or in a recess not suitable for accommodation

* “EFFECTIVELY HOMELESS PEOPLE”

○ people ”without a shelter”, or

The reasons leading to today's homeless service provision being mostly aimed at supporting homeless, flat-less people and those having different housing crises, and less at supporting those without a shelter can be summarised shortly as follows:

- While there are significant economic-social processes enhancing situations of housing crisis to become multitudinous, there have been no means (services, support-forms), which would provide adequate support for those getting in a housing-crisis.

The normal course of the relationship between the homeless person and the social worker would be that the support worker acts for the user within his/her profession, and enables him/her. However, the majority of our users would in many cases expect the support worker to make the specific steps that would start his/her development. *It is not a good solution to conserve the incapability of the client, or the sense of it. Self-confidence must be enhanced; success can be reached only through a mutual will of action and trust.*

When a homeless person having lost his/her livelihood, the achievement of a change towards self-support is a crucial part of the professional work. When this is the case, in the course of the continuous co-operation, it must be achieved that the client him/herself wants the change. In many cases, previous failures occur as hindering factors for our users. As a result of all this, the individual him/herself is under-motivated in changing his/her life, the direct consequence of which is that although the support worker tries to do all that he/she professionally can, the relationship still remains unsuccessful. For this reason it is not a good solution for the social worker and the wider provision-system to fully „serve” the prevailing life-style of clients.

- The so called homeless service provision – as a general crisis- or poor-provision – has to continuously replace and correct those provision-deficiencies and dysfunctions that could provide adequate and professional support in the cases of different special crisis-situations (unemployment, lack of income, losing of accommodation, alcoholism, psychiatric

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- people having no stable, permanent housing-form, who "have to work" day-by-day to have a place to sleep at night – may it be a flat that they are received by courtesy, or not a flat, but a place serving accommodation (for example a homeless service provision institution)

* "FLAT-LESS PEOPLE"

- people „without a shelter”, or
- "effectively homeless" people, or
- people not having an accommodation in a flat, but in a place serving as accommodation (workers' hostel, prison, residential institutions, etc.), or
- people that although spend the nights in a flat, but do not dispose of the permanent use of the flat (they are not owners or leasers, but sub-leasers, bed-leasers, using the flat of courtesy, admitted, or adult relatives)

* "HOME-LESS PEOPLE"

- people „without a shelter”, or
- "effectively homeless" people, or
- "flat-less" people, or
- people who live in a flat what is unsuitable for starting a family and for arranging a home (because of the flat being over-crowded or of low physical standards).

We must also consider that being homeless is a life-style and a complexity of social as well as personal features, in the course of which home-less – flat-less – effectively homeless and shelter-less situations may be alternating; there are frequent movements from one to the other and back – and this, besides personal reasons and fates, depends on social and institutional strategies affecting those living endangered of homelessness and those effectively homeless. We emphasise that one (and not the only) station of these alternations of housing situations is the so called homeless service system: the circle of people homeless in the wider sense (those without a home) is a much larger number than the number of those using the services at a certain time; while within the circle of those using the services we also simultaneously find people who have formerly been and people who will in the future be in the different situations mentioned above for a longer period of time.

illnesses, reduction of self-care capabilities, familiar crises, deficiencies in home- or permanent-supplies connected to these, etc.).

- Partly as a consequence, the present homeless-service-provision system – in its objective and human infrastructure, regulation and financing – has primarily become more-or-less suitable for providing for people in a housing (or other related) crisis situation – and not for providing or correcting the very special life-style and living situation of those living in public places.
- The institutional rules (and the legal regulations and financial methods partly determining them), the by now evolved routines of support people, as well as the reluctance of users never choosing to live in a public place, bearing problems keep increasing the distance between shelter-less people and the majority of homeless service provision institutions.

All these causes must be considered in the course of a reconstruction, or else all attempts are doomed to fail and end in reorganisation. Taking realistic facts into consideration, one of the most important practical questions is whether, among basically unchanged conditions, – grand processes of society, deficiencies in the provision-system, the given objective and human infrastructure – there is a way of a more effective re-integration of those living in public places, so that other groups in crisis-situations are not handicapped, either.

One of the first steps is – based on our experiences and information – to try to answer the question of why certain services are used, and why they are not used by large number of people spending the nights in public places.

Why are they “coming in”?	Why are they not “coming in”?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have a need for constancy; they want a stable point where they can return to every day • Living on the street makes regular employment difficult • „You can’t go to work every day from the street.” “You can’t regularly keep clean on the street.” • Preserving valuables: the valuables collected with great effort can be stored in a safe place • In case it is very cold, the weak body does not tolerate the street environment well • Hostels are used primarily because of their services (basic services), and not the support-programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of freedom • „Bad public order” • People must pay a fee, and save money • The person has an illness that does not allow entrance to a hostel • Keeps an animal • Because of family, for example they live in the woods, in a hut; has a companion and there is no accommodation for couples or buddies • Using society’s solidarity, e.g. offering(s) of passers-by • Alcohol consumption is not allowed in services • Larger amount of “stuff” cannot be taken to the hostel • Too much administration, would like to have a rest and not to answer questions • Bad reputation of the hostel • Because of owing money to each other; former, unsettled disputes • The service itself is frightening with the rules and people in it • Fear and insecurity resulting from lack of information of expectations • They feel their situation is hopeless

- | | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is no place that those living on the street could accept or would feel their own• There are few services where the special problems of those living on the street could be treated |
|--|---|

Dilemmas

- Can the reduction of the number of homeless people living on the street be achieved by coordinated social work (between outreach and other services)?
- Can we show a way out for our clients entering services, which would enhance their starting of the re-socialisational process?
- Can we provide possibilities of re-integration that would ensure continuity (the ability for us to receive newer and newer users)?
- Besides ejection of clients, it is very important that their housing is retainable. After losing a tenement, they can find themselves on the street or in a homeless service again. In the latter case they would use a service-space again, maybe even taking it from someone coming right from the street. To prevent that from happening, the after-care service must work hard, but elements helping re-integration must also be part of the basic processes of social work.

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Some Elements of the Program

Prevention – Enhancing Prevention

Prevention of becoming homeless naturally needs much wider measures than a service, or even the whole of the homeless-service-provision system, can take. What are the steps that homeless services may attempt to take in order to prevent homelessness? Enhancing information, organising the flow of information, establishing a closer and more effective relationship with “emitting” or other services.

Strengthening the Co-operation with Family-Support Services

The most important aim of closer co-operation is preventing that individuals become homeless, helping the re-integration of already homeless people, and raising the level of professional work.

In order to prevent homelessness, an **effective signal-system** must be worked out between Family-Support Services and homeless service provision organisations. The basic pillar of the signal-system is establishing a common mentality, conciliatory forums and forms of co-operation. This should happen through the strengthening of living, personal working-relationships of social workers, and a continuous exchange of knowledge and experiences. The essence of it is dialogue, and maintenance of problem-solving strategies.

Family-Support Services must be **regularly informed** of the services of the homeless-provision system. The forms can be: web-sites, flyers and thematic forums. This task can be carried out by Dispatcher Centres, but, parallel with that, by services themselves, too.

Young People From State-Care – People Released from Prison

Young people emitted from state-care often do not have a stable idea of the future, and generally do not have familiar ties which would help them in crisis situations, or could prevent them from becoming homeless. People recently emitted from both state-care and prisons are seriously endangered, or even already affected by drugs, prostitution or criminalisation. At the same time, it can be said that since they are accustomed to an “institutional regime”, with the appropriate attitude they usually integrate smoothly into the institutional homeless service provision. Their further sliding down and losing ground can be stopped at this point; the most important aspect in is rather re-integration, or even integration, as well as alleviation of hospitalisation, and guiding to a self-supported life-style.

It would be desirable that the techniques and tools of re-integration and after-care that we have developed with great efforts in the past years within the homeless-service-provision system would be communicated and transferred by continuous exchange of information to the staff of the Regional Child-Protectional Services (“Területi Gyermekvédelmi Szakszolgálat, TEGYESZ”), to the staff of residential homes, youth-protection and prisons who are doing the after-care work. Through that, we could prevent the homelessness of people emitted from such institutions.

Besides that, the special background and situation of these people must be considered within the homeless service provision institutions, too. Therefore, the development of special hostel-divisions that would be specialised for the provision of the specifically young clients (under 25), part of whom emitted from the state’s care is worth considering. The professional work of them could be based on the after-care work of “TEGYESZ”, it could complete that. Case-responsible social workers working here should establish an especially close relationship with the emitting institutions, by which they would acquire special skills, too.

It is worth considering that social workers working in these divisions could at the same time coordinate the special support work done with young people in the different areas of homeless service provision.

Whether we succeed in establishing such small divisions or not: all young individuals (under the age of about 25 years) who become known by any of the homeless service provision-services (outreach team, day-centre, night shelters, hostels) deserve **outstanding and special attention**. By preventing them from entering the homeless service provision, and, along with that, the homeless sub-culture, we can take significant steps towards preventing the regeneration of homelessness.

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Care-Network for People Having Psychiatric and Alcohol Problems

Overcoming the potential informational barriers

In order to overcome potential informational barriers, the following steps are possible:

- Distributing brochures about homeless services at soup-kitchens, day-centres, street services, in the street paper „Without a Shelter”, etc.
- Distributing brochures about homeless services to those affected via street services.
- A separate flyer of the reconstructed, new services for homeless people (about the remodelling of the functioning of night shelters, about the services easier to receive, about low-threshold services, etc.).

Informative forums – information days for those living without a shelter

The aim of information days to be held in services providing accommodation is the direct informing of people living on the street about the available services: from possibilities of accommodation, cleaning, washing, cooking to provision of social support and social events. This may relieve unfounded fears, and provide a place to share ideas and proposals. Announcing of information days could happen through outreach services. Outreach workers less aware of how services operate may come along with their clients.

One of the most frequent reasons of becoming homeless and losing livelihood in Hungary is substance abuse, within that, most importantly, alcohol problems, and psychiatric illnesses. Therefore considerable progress can only take place in this area of homelessness, if the number of people having alcohol-problems can be reduced, and a care-network of a much wider expertise and higher standards than today is established to provide near-the-home care for people having psychiatric or alcohol problems. Besides strengthening and establishing a care-network responsible for providing care for these patient-groups, there is a need for introducing therapeutic and habilitational, rehabilitational ways of employment, which would make the activation of the remaining, partial self-supportive skills possible, and prevent a complete loss of livelihood.

In the course of the finalisation and execution of the program, other possibilities of prevention of homelessness from the part of the homeless-service-provision system must also be explored.

Reconstructing Present Homeless Services

Open Services Program

The aim of the program is – using means of the present services of homeless service provision – to have more and more people living in public places break out and leave homelessness. It is important to emphasise that looking for ways of how to “attract” people living on the street to existing services is not the goal in itself; making independent people service-users in itself is not the purpose. This is always just a tool, a tool for getting the supportive services designed to serve the people living on the street as well.

Providing Open (low-threshold) Services

Night shelters and hostels for the homeless open some of their services to people living on the street, too.

Services of night shelters and hostels available for people living on the street – during the day (in definite times and with definite content in different institutions):

- cleaning facilities
- cleaning of clothes
- providing hot tea and sandwiches on certain occasions – in some cases for a charge
- storage of valuables and luggage
- social administration, occasional social work
- services for finding employment
- IT-area – use of computers, offering basic IT-education
- visiting groups (addictus, handcraft, free-time, employment-finding training, studying room, towards employment group)

The opening of services of accommodation-providing institutions to people living on the streets is one of the most important parts of the program, which – at the same time – also needs the most caution. Its purpose is to engage resources and possibilities available at hostels – bathrooms, washing machines, communal areas, etc., but also professional social support – for the benefit of

people living on the street, too. This, besides providing “ambulant” help, may also effectively enhance the reduction of fears and prejudices of people living on the street, and take the first steps of getting in touch.

One possible form of this opening-up is establishing day centres (so called “warmers”) in accommodation-providing institutions where possible. It is a serious – but not undefeatable – professional challenge to make these “day warmers” offer more than mere “warming” for those entering from the street, or sleeping at a hostel at nights. Even where such institutionalised form of opening cannot be established, the provision of some services can be made available for those who cannot (yet/already) live at the hostel.

The Program Called “Day-Centres Instead of Day-Warmers”

In the process of helping the reintegration of people living in public places, day-“warmers” have an outstanding role, too. Therefore the concept of “*day-warming*” (being a couch-potato) needs to be changed in a much more conscious way than before to “*a supportive, integrative day centre*” type of functioning.

One tool of this is the conscious re-constructing of the services provided at day “warmers” in such a way that these day centres in the future

- would provide the so called basic services (resting, washing, cleaning, eating) in one part of the day,
- and special supportive services in the other, (for example communal and group activities),
- at night (if needed and possible, in case of tender-financing) they would provide basic services again for a definite group of clients.

At a certain phase of the co-operation, involving volunteers – self-care – self-organisation is worth trying. To put it more precisely: in some of the cases, users themselves could participate in providing some of the services for themselves (preparing meals, serving, washing, cleaning, tidying the surroundings, smaller maintenance, fixing tasks, etc.), perhaps in the form of organising groups according to skills and interest, with the co-ordination and supportive organisation of the helping professionals. This can at the same time mean a transition to seeking employment and income in the open job-market, but, most of all, it can help the gradual and tolerant strengthening of self-power.

Concerning the present practice of providing free meals, the careful introduction of a – minimal level, symbolic (50-100-HUF) – charge for meals should be considered in these day-centres among those having an income, and – parallel with that – the enhancement of programs for obtaining an income among those who do not even have that kind of an income (until then, meals would continue to be free for them).

Such re-structuring of services on the one hand would provide space and opportunity for graduality (in the way described at the low threshold-rooms), and, on the other hand, it could provide the organised, and client-conceivable appearance and strengthening of qualified services in these centres. Mornings provide an opportunity for “acclimatisation”, building trust, the presence of the outreach team, etc., the afternoons could serve the small, but important steps of re-integration through thematic group-activities, organised free-time-, self-strengthening, and motivational-programs, finding employment and IT areas, etc., social administration and individual case-management; while night-openings – similarly to the first days of low threshold rooms – could, beyond “life-saving” and avoidance of deterioration, serve as first steps of establishing security and trust.

Other elements of the program also affect the re-structuring of day-“warmers”, in the sense that all day-centres in the future would have an active and organised, close relationship with outreach services (perhaps even in the form of having their own outreach team), and – partly by establishing new day-centre(s) – a “day centre-type functioning” or the integration of certain day-centres into the accommodation-providing institutions could also be attempted. In the course of integration of that kind, it is of crucial significance that these day-centres are “open primarily to the street”, mainly receive and serve people living on the street, or in public places, and partly in night-shelters, and contribute as little as possible to the further “closing in” and hospitalisation of people already living in hostels.

”Entrance (Low-Threshold) Hostel” Program

The “Entrance (Low-Threshold) Hostel” program – taking the present circumstances of homeless services into consideration – does not mean a new hostel, or the complete reconstruction of any hostel. It may be realised at more sites, primarily through operating **special “low threshold-rooms”**. Its essence lies in the novel professional program, the main elements of which are the following:

The purpose of operating low-threshold-rooms is to receive people having lived in public places for a longer period of time, the alleviation of their dis-integration and the supportive motivation of them to gradually change their previous life-style.

Only people having lived in public places for a longer period of time may be accepted in these low-threshold accommodations, with the recommendation and referral of an outreach worker, if necessary.

We do not see why street low-threshold-rooms could not operate at either a night-shelter or a temporary hostel – partly with identical, and partly with different conditions.

Special conditions of street gate-rooms:

- They can be used for a short period of time, one month at the most
- An ÁNTSZ (National Health Service) or Social Security certificate is not required for entering
- No charge (it is natural at night shelters, and it is the first month at a temporary hostel)
- One can stay inside the whole day
- In case the arrangements allow it, it can be operated in a gender-mixed design
- In case there are enough empty places, it can be accessed by ”groups”
- People’s own personal belongings, luggage can be kept at one’s own responsibility
- In the first days, the lack of cleaning and washing, going to bed in a coat or with shoes on, is tolerated
- People can be enter heavily drunk, too (in case it does not endanger others)
- In case the circumstances of the accommodation allow, a limited amount of alcohol can be taken in for the night

What services must be provided?

- facilities for warming food, cleaning, washing, etc.
- storage of valuables,
- medical care (weekly, if possible),
- in case it is necessary and possible, vitamins and roborating packages

Other Conditions and Services of Low-Threshold-Rooms:

If possible, a separate low-threshold-room should be arranged for the young and for the old, and – if needed – for women and people suffering from illnesses (the latter can get provision primarily in the recovery divisions).

A crucial element of intensive and tolerant social work is that outreach team staff are present in the first phase, either at the reception of the person, or later, occasionally, or even as regular staff

on duty. Low-threshold-rooms must have their own case-manager social workers, who are in continuous consultation with the outreach team. Outreach workers may take part in team-sessions concerning their previous clients.

Social work, or the caring process, can in these cases be only imagined in small steps, with greater tolerance-periods. It is important that the homeless person gets stronger in body and soul. Replacement of documents, seeing about pensioning off, needs and entitlement assessment, exploring and treating health problems, “acclimatisation” to the institution and community, development of a need for personal hygiene and that of one’s surroundings, and the preparation for “how to go on” are continuously taking place. Besides establishing a sense of trust, the essence of the supportive process is a continuous monitoring of individual needs, and, based on that, a gradual alleviation of the dis-integration. In case these phases end with success, preparational work can start to move on from the low threshold-room (pre-care for hostel); by participation in group-activities, being directed to special services, etc. Further phases of case-management are carried out outside of the system of special low-threshold-rooms.

Couples’ accommodation – relationship-building: A few years ago, it was yet unimaginable to receive couples in our hostels; we were forced to break up all such relationships (at least for a while). This was in great part responsible for holding back people from using our services: couples rather chose staying on the street, together. Since the – first experimental – launching of the so called couples’ programs, it is apparent that homeless services are capable of handling these special situations in the institutional framework; the efficiency of the provided support is definitely increasing, and there is significant demand for such accommodation. Therefore, in the future, - up to the limits of potentials – we must try to increase the volume of couples’ accommodation. At all accommodations of the homeless-service-provision system the possibility of mixed-gender accommodations, and the establishment of “intimate rooms” (with greater privacy) must be explored; and greater emphasis must fall on organised social programs, group-activities, etc. among institutions – among hostels for women and men. This can significantly help our work be more successful, in the course of reception as well as the preparation of programs of re-integration.