Homeless in Europe

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Changing Faces:
Homelessness Among Children, Families and Young People

FEANTSA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Changing Faces: Homelessness Among Children, Families and Young People

Signs that youth and family homelessness may be increasing in some Member States draw attention to the fact that services available to homeless people may not be adequately prepared for dealing with the specific needs of families with children and of young adults. Neither has youth and family homelessness been as widely explored in research as single homelessness.

In the currently unstable economic climate, it is recognised in Europe that this transition can have heightened risks because of young people's precarious situation. There is also evidence to suggest that the economic and financial crisis is affecting families, who are finding themselves homeless on a much larger scale than observed before. What is more, young homeless people are particularly vulnerable (to exploitation and violence) on the streets and children of homeless families can grow up with physical and mental health problems more often than their housed peers.

This situation imposes a need to learn more about the risks of child, youth and family homelessness and the ways to provide effective homelessness prevention services and services for children, families and young people who are homeless. Definitions of "youth homelessness" and "family homelessness" will be necessary to begin the process to policy advances.

In this context, FEANTSA's "Ending Homelessness is Possible!" campaign,[1] running throughout 2010, includes the goal that **no young person should become homeless as a result of the transition to independent living.** This can mean leaving state care or other institutions, leaving the family home for the first time, trying to access the private rental market, moving out of student accommodation, etc. The campaign calls for policy action to combat homelessness.

The articles that follow demonstrate that it is indeed important to take action against the prospect of homelessness among young people, children and

families, and that responses adapted to the particular situation of young individuals, children or families faced with homelessness are the best way to ensure that they do not find themselves in this situation. The articles show that there can be multiple causes for homelessness among young people and families, and they are not necessarily the same as those for single homeless adults.

Paula Maycock, Eoin O'Sullivan and Mary Louise Corr explain research that has been done into youth homelessness that sees young people's homelessness as a journey or "pathway" – it is a situation from which it is possible to escape but, in order for this to happen, we need to be able to identify the risk factors that drive young people to homelessness, as well as the best ways to help them get out of a homeless situation, and to use this knowledge to develop appropriate policy and practice.

Mark Brierley describes the singularity of homelessness among young people and the risk factors to which young homeless people are more likely to be exposed than adults. His article demonstrates the need for and the benefits of having youth-specific policy to combat homelessness among young people, giving the example of the Youth Homelessness Strategy in Ireland, which focuses on prevention and young people's homelessness pathways.

George Moschos, Children's Ombudsman in Greece, describes the situation for homeless children in the country, demonstrating that their situations can be diverse but that, above all, it is necessary to provide a policy response to their situation. Their rights should be respected, says George Moschos, and where provision does not exist in the law (for example in the case of unaccompanied minors), they should not be treated like adults in the same situation, rather specific policy responses must be found for them.

Sharing best practices on combating homelessness among young people is the goal of the CSEYHP Project, a 3-year programme that compares youth

homelessness policy in four European Member States that have diverging policies and strategies on support for homeless young people: the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK. Thea Meinema, Project Leader, tells us of the causes of homelessness amongst young people in each country and highlights the need for tailored measures to help them towards reinsertion. A third phase of the project will aim at finding the most effective means of reinsertion.

Gregory Paulger, Director of Youth and Sport at the European Commission, shows that homelessness among young people is a concern for Europe and that the Commission takes the matter seriously. He discusses the issue in terms of European legislation and targets, refers to the effects of the crisis and youth unemployment – major concerns at European level – calls for early intervention, recognising the specificity of young people and the need for an evidence-based approach, and proposes EU coordination of national responsibilities, as well as a cross-sectoral approach to social inclusion.

Emmanuelle Guyavarch and Erwan Le Méner of the Samusocial Research Observatory are conducting research into homelessness among families in the Ile-de-France region, following the realization that more and more families were accessing the services provided by the Samusocial and that this raises questions about the provision made for them. Their article describes the characteristics of the families accessing the services and begins an analysis of the services available to them, in anticipation of further research.

The Samusocial is concerned about the effect that life in a shelter for homeless people might have on the children growing up there. S. Brilleslijper, M. Beijersbergen, J. Asmoredjo, C. Jansen, and J. Wolf describe the reality for children with their parents in shelters for homeless people or female victims of domestic violence in the Netherlands, in the summary of their research, "Not just a bed, a bath and a peanut-butter sandwich". The article describes the stressful experiences of these children and the kind of care they receive. Like Guyavarch and Le Méner, the article

notes that there is little knowledge of this subgroup, but that there is a need to look at the specific experiences of children in this situation.

Young people who are at risk of homelessness or who find themselves homeless often need support and advice, especially if they have multiple support needs. The Albert Kennedy Trust provide support and advice to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) young people who find themselves homeless because of discrimination or other related reasons. Petra Davis, Operations Manager at AKT, gives an overview of the specific situations experienced by LGBT young people who are at risk of homelessness or find themselves homeless and the support that AKT can provide them.

Emilie Turunen, MEP, draftswoman of the European Parliament "Report on promoting youth access to the labour market, strengthening trainee, internship and apprenticeship status" describes the European Parliament's recent commitment to improving opportunities for young people, spurred into action by the realisation that this group are hard hit by unemployment and by insecurity on the job and housing markets, and that this situation can push young people into poverty and homelessness. She outlines what the EU can do to combat the vulnerability of young people and calls on Member States to make it a political priority to fight youth unemployment and stop young people falling prey to poverty and homelessness.

What all the articles have in common is a recognition that when trying to find solutions to the situation of homeless children, families and young people, one must look at the specificity of their experience. They are not the same as the "traditional" homeless "profile". Many of the authors also make reference to a need for specific and comprehensive policy responses to homelessness among young people and families.

As always, FEANTSA would like to extend its sincere thanks and gratitude to the contributors to this issue of the magazine.

Young People's Pathways Through Homelessness

By **Paula Mayock**,[1] **Eoin O'Sullivan**,[2] and **Mary Louise Corr**,[3] *Ireland*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade in particular, research has drawn on the notion of a homeless or housing *pathway* to explore the dynamics of the homeless experience, with specific attention to transition, change and exits from homelessness. The episodic nature of many homeless experiences has been highlighted by Anderson and Tulloch (2000: 11), who define a homeless pathway as 'the route of an individual or household into homelessness, their experience of homelessness and their route out of homelessness to secure housing'. Thus, as it has become clear that homelessness is far more likely to be a temporary than a prolonged or chronic state, with exits likely, homelessness is increasingly understood as a complex, multi-causal phenomenon and as a consequence of the interaction between individual and structural factors.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S HOMELESS 'JOURNEYS'

A broad range of factors are associated with homelessness among young people. Internationally, research has identified several risk factors for homelessness and available Irish research has highlighted the role of several of these in bringing about homelessness. The most frequently cited risk factors for homelessness include: family disputes and breakdown; a State care (care) history; sexual or physical abuse in childhood or adolescence; offending behaviour and/or experience of prison; lack of social support networks; debts, especially rent arrears; drug or alcohol misuse; school exclusion and lack of qualifications; mental health problems; and poor physical health.

It is important to note that not everyone who experiences these situations will become homeless. Rather, these risk factors work to make people more vulnerable to homelessness, particularly if they are experienced in combination. Research has focused, particularly in recent years, on investigating and identifying specific events or "turning points" that can trigger homelessness. The identification of "triggers" is important since crisis points frequently prompt young people to leave home. The following "triggers" for youth homelessness have been identified:

- Leaving the parental home after arguments
- Leaving care
- Leaving prison
- An increase in alcohol or drug misuse
- Eviction from rented accommodation
- Family breakdown.

Unlike risk factors, "triggers" lead directly to homelessness. This means that many young people leave home for the first time in a crisis and with limited or no access to alternative accommodation. Leaving care and leaving prison are other commonly reported "triggers" as many young people who have lived in institutional settings for considerable periods do not have close family contact and, following the withdrawal of institutional support, find themselves unable to cope with the financial and emotional demands of independent living.

At the same time, it should be acknowledged that the events that affect young people immediately prior to becoming homeless are not always the sole or main causes of their homelessness. To be of value in a policy context, therefore, research must examine broader contributory factors and processes as well as the immediate precipitators of homelessness.

CHILDREN IN SUBSTITUTE CARE

One of the difficulties in assessing the strength of either risk factors or triggers is the lack of precision often associated with measuring and defining the variables under scrutiny. The issue of leaving care can usefully illustrate this point. A reasonably consistent research finding relating to children leaving care is their heightened risk of becoming homeless compared to children brought up in their family of origin. Care leavers have to attempt the transition to independence at a much younger age than other young people who tend not to leave home until later. These problems are exacerbated by their lower level of educational attainment and fewer career options. As Stein (2006: 273) notes, children in care:

> are more likely than young people who have not been in care to have poorer educational qualifications, lower levels of participation in post-16 education, be young parents, be homeless, and have higher levels of unemployment, offending behaviour and mental health problems.

While Stein argues that this statement is true in a general sense, those leaving care can be sub-categorised as young people who have successfully "moved on" from their care placement; those who are "survivors" of the care system and those who are "victims" of the system. The latter two groups were likely to have had disrupted care placements and instability in their care history which increase their likelihood of

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post-care homelessness. In particular, the "victims" were those who have "the most damaging pre-care family experiences and, in the main, care was unable to compensate them, or to help them overcome their past difficulties". Consequently, "after leaving care they were likely to be unemployed, become homeless and have great difficulties in maintaining their accommodation" (Stein, 2006: 277).

In one of the largest international studies to date, Park et al. (2004) estimated that, of the nearly 12,000 young adults who exited the child welfare system in New York between 1988 and 1992, some 19 per cent had experienced a stay in a public shelter for the homeless over the 10-year period following exit. Among those young adults who experienced an out-of-home placement, 22 per cent had experienced a shelter stay compared to 11 per cent who had experienced non-placement child welfare services. Despite these apparently unambiguous findings, caution is advised in interpreting the results. As Park et al. (2004: 288) argue, "the extant studies with findings on childhood out-of-home placement contain such methodological weaknesses as small numbers of subjects and reliance on retrospective self-reports, which can be faulty over a long period of time".

PATHWAYS THROUGH HOMELESSNESS

Recent research has examined the pathways that homeless youth take through and out of homelessness and, in the process, has drawn attention to the mechanisms that facilitate or, alternatively, act as barriers to young people finding stable accommodation. Highlighting a number of distinct subgroups within the homeless youth population, Fitzpatrick (2000) constructed a typology of six homeless pathways based on three key variables – the location and stability of young people's accommodation, and its status as 'official' (provided by voluntary or public agencies) or 'unofficial' (informal arrangements with relatives or friends). One of the main conclusions arising from the study was that 'homelessness is a 'downward spiral' for some young people but not for others' (Fitzpatrick, 2000, p.75). Three factors – remaining in the home community near established networks, receiving competent help from formal agencies, and being female – were identified as facilitating young people's progress out of a homeless situation.

More recently in Australia, based on a subgroup of 40 newly homeless young people selected from a larger sample of 165 who had been living away from a parent or guardian for less than six months, Mallet et al. (2010) examined the pathways followed by them into and through homelessness over a period of two years. In addition to surveying the larger cohort on six occasions over the two-year period, the subgroup of 40 young people were re-interviewed eighteen months after their recruitment into the larger study. This study constructed four pathways based on the type of accommodation (whether they were homeless or home) and how long they had been in this accommodation (stability). These pathways were categorised as 'on the streets' or street-based homelessness, 'using the system' or service-based homelessness, unstably housed or in and out of homelessness, and 'going home' or stably housed.

In broad terms, research has identified a number of facilitators that enable an escape from homelessness. In relation to youth homelessness, Nebbitt et al. (2007: 553) argue that 'the changes necessary for youth to return home appear to be somewhat the inverse of factors related to youth's running away' and that, for youth returning home, 'changes occur both within the youth and family'.

It is now reasonably well established that a longer duration of homelessness increases susceptibility to negative outcomes. The identification of factors that facilitate homeless exits is critical if services and interventions are to be responsive to the needs of homeless youth and ensure their successful return to stable accommodation at the earliest possible juncture. As Milburn et al (2009: 777) argue, 'focusing on homeless adolescents' pathways out of homelessness is long overdue'. However, in doing so, a number of issues require further conceptual and operational clarity. Over the past decade, the differentiated nature of homelessness among the young has been highlighted and research has clearly shown that some do move out of homelessness, sometimes relatively quickly. Nonetheless, knowledge and understanding of the nature of homeless exits, and of the mechanisms that facilitate the transition out of homelessness, is far from complete. Moreover, with the bulk of research on homeless exits focusing on adult populations, the paths that young people take out of homelessness are only beginning to be defined and conceptualised.

EXITING HOMELESSNESS

Quite wide variation is evident in how exits from homelessness are defined and conceptualised in the case of homeless adults, although most studies stipulate that a specific time frame (often an exit of 30 consecutive days) is required to constitute an exit. Available research also tends to differentiate between specific kinds of housing transitions, which are categorised as different types of exit routes. There has been far less attention to young people's exit routes from homelessness and how to define them.

The identification of factors that facilitate homeless exits is critical if services and interventions are to be responsive to the needs of homeless youth and ensure their successful return to stable accommodation at the earliest possible juncture.

For example, Thompson et al's (2001) exploration of factors leading homeless and runaway youth to exit homelessness simply described their respondents as living in stable accommodation for more than 24 months. Nebbitt et al's (2007: 546) research on homeless youths' successful transitions out of shelter accommodation included young people who 'had remained with their families at least 6 months following shelter discharge' but this study also included young people who were currently housed in shelters. Milburn et al's (2009) longitudinal study provides the most detailed explanation of young people's exiting behaviour. In terms of the destination(s) categorised as constituting an exit, Milburn et al. (2009) defined exiting homelessness in terms of young people residing in either 'familial' or 'non-familial housing', with those in familial housing deemed to have exited homelessness. Familial housing in this study included residing in 'birth (biological) family home, foster family home, step-family home, grandparent's house, relative's house, family group home, boarding school, adoptive family home, or own apartment (only for respondents 18 and older)' (2009: 769). This study collected data at six different time points (at the time of initial contact and thereafter at three-, six-, nine-, twelve- and eighteen-month intervals) and assessed exiting at two years. Those who had exited from six months to two years were deemed to have made stable exits. In contrast to those studies which deploy a specific time period to determine a successful exit, Karabanow (2008: 785) argues that exiting street life requires 'stable housing' in addition to employment, education, and 'emotional growth and stability.' Indeed, Karabanow (2008: 777) claims that 'street exiting is an ephemeral and complex process' and that 'street exiting maintains tangible or perceptible paths as well as intangible or elusive dimensions'.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that while research increasingly explores the mechanisms by which homeless exits are achieved, the lack of clarity in defining what constitutes a successful exit and of those macro and micro factors that facilitate exiting homelessness, hinders the formulation of efficient and effective policy instruments. Given that we know that homeless exits occur and are in fact more likely than not in the case of young people, it is crucial to delineate the factors and services that appear to facilitate these exits and to develop policy and practice accordingly.

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Tracing and Tracking Special Care in Ireland

By **Mark Brierley**,[1] *Director, Social Information Systems Ltd, Ireland*

INTRODUCTION

Children's social care services in Ireland are the responsibility of the national Health Services Executive (HSE), having until 2005 been the responsibility of 10 regional Health Boards. In 2001, Ireland developed a Youth Homeless Strategy and responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy resides with the HSE.

The goal of the Youth Homeless Strategy is: 'to reduce and, if possible, eliminate youth homelessness through preventative strategies and, where a child becomes homeless, to ensure that s/he benefits from a comprehensive range of services aimed at reintegrating him/her into his/her community as quickly as possible.' Youth homelessness is defined as: 'those (under the age of 18) who are sleeping on the streets or in other places not intended for night-time accommodation or not providing safe protection from the elements or those whose usual night-time residence is a public or private shelter, emergency lodging, B&B or such, providing protection from the elements but lacking the other characteristics of a home and/or intended only for a short stay'. This definition includes 'those in insecure accommodation with relatives or friends regarded as inappropriate, that is to say where the young person is placed at risk or where s/he is not in a position to remain.'

In March 1995, a ruling in the High Court in Dublin placed a constitutional obligation on the health boards to provide care for children who need to be detained for their own welfare. A significant part of the concern at that time related to the deaths of children whose lives had become chaotic, with multiple needs, many of whom had been accessing homeless services in Dublin city centre.

The High Court ruling led to the development of Special Care. Special Care is a form of secure care, usually applied for by a social work team in the HSE, where the court is satisfied that the behaviour of the child is such that it poses a real and substantial risk to his or her health, safety, development or welfare, and the child requires a short-period of special care or protection which s/he is unlikely to receive unless the court provides such an order.

Provisions of the Children Act 2001 clarified broad definitions of special care and the responsibility of various agencies. They also provided for the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB) (under its original name of the Special Residential Services Board) both to publish criteria for admission to Special Care and to commission research into this area.

In 2009, the CAAB commissioned Social Information Systems to examine applications made for Special Care in 2007 with the purpose of tracing and tracking what had happened to those children by November 2009. The steering group for the research included representation from the HSE and the Department of Health and Children. The research involved an analysis of anonymised documentation that supported the application, interviews with social work teams, and interviews with some of the children and their parents/guardians.

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OVERALL FINDINGS

The research looked at 70 applications, involving 61 individuals (some of the children were the subjects of more than one application). It was able to trace and track outcomes for 59 individuals. The research considered:

- the profile of risk factors present when applications were made;
- whether the application led to an admission or not to one of the three special care units in Ireland;
- whether outcomes were felt to have improved or not by November 2009;
- changes in individual risk factors;
- what had happened more generally to the child since the application was made.

Some 59% of applications were for females, 41% for males. Fifty-five of the applications were for children whose risk factors included concerns about alcohol and/or substance misuse and 65 of the applications were for children who were absconding from care or from home. Over half (n=37) of the applications were for children who were currently involved with the youth justice system.

Slightly under half of the applications led to an admission to special care (46%, n=32) although there was a marked difference by gender (61% of females were admitted compared to 24% of males). Applications for younger people were also more likely to lead to an admission (61% of those aged 12-14 compared to only 24% for those aged 16-17). Gender differences were also present for risk factors, with 83% of the females perceived as having a sexual behaviour risk factor (risk to sexual health; risk of sexual exploitation; or sexualised behaviour) compared to just 24% of the males.

By November 2009, 46% (n=27) of the children were felt by their social workers to have had overall risk factors that improved, 19% (n=11) had mixed fortunes with some improvements and some deterioration, 14% (n=8) were felt to have overall risk factors that were the same, and 22% had overall risk factors that worsened.

FINDINGS RELATED TO HOMELESSNESS

Only 38% of the applications for children at risk from youth homelessness were admitted to special care (n=5 out of 13). This compares to:
- 46% of all applications
- 69% of those at risk of sexual exploitation/prostitution
- 63% of those where there were concerns about their sexual health
- 62% of those where there were concerns about sexualised behaviour
- 52% of those who were at risk of aggression from others
- 50% where there were concerns about the child not engaging with services
- 50% of those where challenging boundaries was a significant concern
- 44% of those where there were concerns about self-harm

The goal of the Youth Homeless Strategy is: 'to reduce and, if possible, eliminate youth homelessness through preventative strategies and, where a child becomes homeless, to ensure that s/he benefits from a comprehensive range of services...'

- 42% of those with poor impulse control/easily drawn into trouble
- 44% of those where there were mental health concerns
- 41% of those with impaired socialisation
- 38% of those who lacked regret/remorse for the impact of their behaviours
- **38% of those at risk of youth homelessness**
- 35% where the child was at risk of, or engaging in, criminal activity

When the application was made, six of the young people were homeless. Only 33% (n= 2 out of 6) of these were admitted to special care, compared to 50% of those who were in a mainstream residential unit or 42% of those who were in foster care. Only those who were in custody at the time of the application were less likely to be admitted (23%, n= 3 out of 13).

By November 2009, of the 16 individuals who had either been at risk from youth homelessness at the point of the application or who had acquired that risk factor in the intervening period, 56% (n=9) had worsened behaviour in relation to that risk. For the cohort as a whole, only 22% of the individuals were felt to have worsened. The figures are quite stark. Those whose risk factors worsened included:

- 22% of all individuals
- 2% of those who had been absconding
- 5% of those where there were concerns about sexualised behaviour
- 7% of those with impaired socialisation
- 8% of those involved with a negative peer group
- 9% of those where challenging boundaries was a significant concern
- 10% of those aged 12-13
- 10% of those at risk of sexual exploitation/prostitution
- 10% of those where there were self harm concerns
- 15% of those with poor impulse control
- 17% of those with lack of empathy/remorse
- 18% of individuals who were admitted to special care
- 19% of females
- 19% of those aged 15
- 22% of those with problems of school attendance in the 12 months prior to the application
- 26% of males
- 30% of individuals not admitted to special care
- 30% of those with a learning disability
- 30% of those where there were concerns about heroin
- 31% of those with alcohol/substance misuse risks
- 32% of those known to social work services for five years or more
- 33% of those aged 16-17
- 40% of those who had had 10-19 placement moves prior to the application
- 41% of those at risk of, or engaging in, criminal behaviour

- 42% of those detained in custody both before and after the application
- 50% where there were concerns about cocaine
- 52% of those where there were concerns about alcohol
- **56% of those at risk of youth homelessness at the time of the application**
- 60% of those where there were concerns about ecstasy

Twelve young people experienced homelessness after the application.

In addition, seven young people were felt to have been misusing heroin at the time of the application, and 57% of these experienced homelessness after the application (n=4 out of 7) compared to only 32% of those who were thought to be misusing cannabis at the time of the application (n=9 out of 28) and 26% per cent of those who were thought to be misusing alcohol (n=10 out of 39).

The report concludes that:

'Children subject to a special care application who have experienced homelessness are amongst those least likely to be admitted to special care and most likely to have poor outcomes in terms of changes to risk factors. Twenty per cent of the children experienced homelessness since the 2007 application. Numbers are small but the pattern is distinct'.

It makes the following recommendation:

'The HSE and policy makers should review whether the current low levels of admission and poor outcomes for children at risk of youth homelessness (who were the subject of a special care application) are acceptable and in the best interests of the children, or whether special care and/or other HSE services need to be reconfigured to better address and prioritise the needs of this group of children'.

Since the report was produced, the functions of the CAAB have been absorbed into the Department of Health and Children and it remains to be seen whether this recommendation will be addressed.

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Homelessness among children and young people in Greece – Interventions of the Greek Ombudsman

By **George Moschos**,[1] *Deputy Ombudsman, Head of Department of Children's Rights, Greece*

INTRODUCTION

There are a large number of children and young persons living in Greece who do not fully enjoy their right to adequate and decent housing. However, in general public perceptions, they would not be easily described as "homeless", but would rather be included in the categories of population suffering from serious social disadvantages, poverty and vulnerability.

As the term "homeless" is widely used in Greece to refer mostly to persons sleeping rough, at first glance, children represent a very small proportion of this group. On the other hand, if we use the definition and typology adopted by FEANTSA, homelessness actually affects a considerable number of children and young persons in Greek society, as will be shown in this article.

The Greek Children's Ombudsman, being part of the public independent authority called "the Greek Ombudsman", has jurisdiction to intervene in order to investigate cases and propose measures for the protection of children when their rights are violated by any public or private legal entity or by individual persons. He thus also deals with the violation of children's right to housing.

According to the Greek Constitution (art.21.par.4) "*The State has the responsibility to take special care of the acquisition of dwellings (homes) by homeless people or those poorly housed*". This provision is important, but it is not directly actionable in court, which means that one could not force the state to provide a house to those individuals who cannot ensure access to proper housing for themselves.

As far as children are concerned, the UN CRC (article 27) provides for the right of every child to an adequate standard of living, stating also that "*Parents or others responsible have the primary responsibility to secure the conditions of living necessary for every child*" and then, that "*States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing*".

Taking into consideration the above rather general legal provisions, as well as the existing provisions in national law and in particular in civil (family) law, the Ombudsman examines cases of children living in inappropriate housing conditions, combining reference to different rights, such as children's right to be brought up and properly looked after by their parents, their right to enjoy a decent standard of living, the right to education, health and social welfare, the right to be protected from any form of exploitation, the right of refugee children and of unaccompanied minors to be properly cared for by the state, etc.

This article focuses on the findings and interventions of the Greek Children's Ombudsman regarding the phenomenon of homelessness among children and young people in Greece. The term "children" is used with UN CRC definition to refer to all persons aged less than 18 years. The term "young people" is more general but in this article it is used to refer mostly to juveniles (aged 15-18) and young adults (19-21).

AFFECTED SOCIAL GROUPS

The following groups of children and young persons are in some way affected by homelessness in Greece and have been included in the Ombudsman's field of interest:

- Children of homeless parents sleeping rough
- Street children
- Children of undocumented migrants and asylum-seeking parents
- Unaccompanied children
- Children of Roma families living in camps
- Children of poor households
- Child victims of serious neglect or violence
- Children living in institutions
- Young people leaving care and young offenders' institutions
- Young people leaving home without any support,
- Drug dependent young persons living away from their families

Some of the above mentioned categories overlap, as it will be shown in the following.

[T]he [Greek Children's] Ombudsman examines cases of children living in inappropriate housing conditions, combining reference to different rights.

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1. Children of Homeless Parents Sleeping Rough

This category is nearly inexistent. There are very few parents with young children included in the roofless population in Greece. Even in such cases, children would be removed and placed in care institutions. The Ombudsman was informed of one particular case of a young child who lived with her mother for quite a while in an abandoned house. When social services located them, the child was placed in an institution and soon after in a foster family, with the approval of her mother.

2. Street Children

This category includes children who can be seen working or begging in the streets and in nearby shops and occasionally staying out, even during the night. In the whole of Greece, the population of street children has been estimated in recent years between 1,000 and 4,000. However, these children do not actually live in the streets, as it may happen in other countries. In fact, most of them are children of Roma families of Greek and South East European nationalities, who live in settlements or even in houses in the cities. During the late 90s, many children from Balkan countries, mostly from Albania, came to Greece with their parents or with other persons accompanying them, mainly to work in the streets. The Greek state made a lot of effort, including changing legislation, to tackle child labour, exploitation and trafficking. The number of children working in the streets slightly declined, and some children were placed in institutions or returned to their countries of origin. In recent years, after the entrance of Bulgaria and Romania in the European Union, many children with accompanying adults have arrived in Greece from these countries, seeking an income by working in the streets. Efforts are still made to stop this phenomenon. The Ombudsman has dealt with citizens' complaints regarding the presence and exploitation of children in the streets, in neighbourhoods of big cities and has collaborated with state agencies in order to improve measures taken to tackle the phenomenon. He has also asked for the strengthening of street work and social services reaching children and their families in a friendly manner, before calling the police. The Ombudsman has also contributed to promoting safe repatriation instead of simple deportation of these children to their countries of origin, when this appeared to be in their best interest.

3. Children of Undocumented Immigrants and Asylum-Seeking Parents

This is a very vulnerable group that in recent years has been growing rapidly. According to recent figures of Eurostat (2009), foreigners make up around 8.3% of the total 11.3 million population of Greece. A recent report by the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (2009) estimated the total number of irregular immigrants in Greece at 205,000, of which 26,000 were said to be minors. However, many believe that the real number of undocumented immigrants is larger, as there are many of them who cannot be reached by statistics. The problem of undocumented immigrants is twofold. On the one hand a lot of immigrants coming from South East European countries, aiming at finding a job, do not reach the legal requirements to get a residence permit. On the other hand, Greece is a transit country for a large number of immigrants and asylum seekers coming from Asia and Eastern Africa who aim for Western or Northern Europe. Among them a small number of couples or single mothers with children are included. Many of them would not ask for asylum from the Greek State, as according to "Dublin Regulations" if they were located in any other EU state they would be returned to the country where they first submitted their application. When arriving in Greece, if identified by the immigration authorities and the police, individuals, and families, are placed in administrative detention for a period that could be between one and several weeks. The Ombudsman has criticised the conditions in which children and families are held many times. When released from police detention, individuals who have not applied for asylum are given a written order to leave the country within 30 days. However they cannot leave legally, which means that they may have to stay in Greece for quite a long time. The situation is especially difficult for families with children because leaving Greece would entail many risks and dangers. As long as these families stay in Greece, they may stay with friends, in inexpensive hotels, in occupied old houses, in self-organised refugee camps, or occasionally they may be accommodated in shelters of non-profit organisations. Asylum-seeking parents are given the opportunity, if they wish, to stay in organised camps/settlements for refugees. These camps are, however, in isolated areas, mostly far away from cities and the refugees' social integration is very difficult. When they move to live in cities, they cannot easily find accommodation and jobs. Considering that only a very small number of asylum applications are finally approved by the Greek state, one can understand that the problems faced by children of asylum-seeking parents are serious. When their asylum application is rejected, they still cannot travel away – to Europe -, and they may stay in Greece looking for an illegal job. But even if they are granted asylum, the job market, especially during recent years, has not many vacancies for newcomers.

The housing and living conditions of children of undocumented immigrants are a very serious issue that cannot easily be solved by the Greek authorities. The Ombudsman issued a special report (in 2005) on detention and deportation of illegal immigrant minors, and various recommendations on their treatment by the authorities, stating that these children should be specially protected and cared for, instead of being treated as illegal immigrants. He has also made

a lot of effort to sensitise the government towards securing the increase of provided shelters for families and in particular for unaccompanied minors who are located in many parts of the country, even if they have not applied for asylum. However, taking into consideration the current crisis faced by the Greek economy, these efforts are very much dependent on the support provided to the Greek government by the European Union.

4. Unaccompanied Children

As explained above, the inflow of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers in recent years has increased rapidly. Regarding persons arriving from Asia and Africa, it is noted that nearly 25% claim to be unaccompanied minors, aged 15-18, reaching a total of nearly 6-8,000 per year. In Greece there exists no system of age assessment by the immigration authorities, so there is no official way to judge whether one person is a minor or an adult. Under the pressure of the Greek Ombudsman, as well as of other human rights organisations, the Greek state has slightly improved the system of reception of these young persons, and increased the publicly-funded shelters/ care institutions, to which they would be directed by the police, reaching a total of around 500 available spaces in such institutions. However, the problem remains, as many of these young persons do not stay in the institutions where they are placed but look for work or – in most cases – for a way to leave to other European countries. A small percentage of them apply for asylum. As a result of the above situation, a lot of unaccompanied minors gather around the ports of western Greece, looking for a way to leave the country illegally, while others stay in big cities and in various parts of the country, looking for illegal temporary work, usually badly paid and in unsafe conditions. These young persons are mostly badly housed, occasionally living in large numbers in flats, huts or in occupied old houses. The Ombudsman has made efforts and succeeded in gaining free access to the educational system for these young persons, but in most cases they would avoid schooling and rather concentrate on looking for work, either in Greece or, preferably, in other European countries.

5. Roma Children Living In Camps

The Roma population in Greece is estimated at between 150,000 and 250,000, 25% of whom are believed to be minors. The improper housing and general living conditions of a large proportion of Roma people, living in camps and self-organised settlements around the country has troubled the Greek authorities for many years, as many of them have been staying in occupied private or public territories, without proper electricity and water supplies and with bad sanitary and health conditions. The arrival of many Roma people from South-East European countries in recent years, as well as the financial pres-

sure on them, because of the increase of cheap labour offered by the rising number of immigrants, has deteriorated their situation. The Greek Ombudsman has dealt with the problems faced by Roma children in schools and he has dealt with their living standards and problems faced in the places where they lived. The mediation of the Ombudsman to the competent authorities has contributed in a few cases to the improvement of facilities provided to Roma children. However, combating the housing problems of Roma families is a more complicated problem that needs to be addressed more drastically by the Greek government.

6. Children of Poor Households

Research has shown that poverty has risen in recent years in Greece, hitting children in particular, at least 21% of whom are believed to live under the poverty line (2008 survey by the Greek Statistics Authority). Despite the fact that Greece has a very high rate of private ownership (85%), more and more families are known to be evicted from their rented houses, due to their inability to pay their rent, without being protected by the state, as social housing is inexistent. As a result of financial pressures, a lot of families with children live in substandard housing conditions, including overcrowding and lack of basic hygiene facilities. A significant number includes migrants who, although legally residing in the country, experience economic hardship and discrimination in housing markets.

7. Child Victims of Serious Neglect or Violence

This is related to the above category, but not always associated with extreme poverty. Occasionally children may become victims of neglect and live in improper housing conditions because of their parents' mental health problems, dependence on drugs and alcohol, or other serious health problems. Children may be at even greater risk if they have a disability or chronic disease. In such cases the Ombudsman believes that the care system should be mobilised, to investigate and promote the solution according to the children's best interest. However, he has found out that in many cases the welfare system is unable to intervene and offer a fair solution for the victims.

One particular hidden category of potential homeless families is poor mothers who become victims of domestic violence with their children. The Ombudsman has been informed of many such incidents, where mothers do not leave home – although they wish to do so - because they could not have a place to live temporarily with their children, away from their violent partners.

8. Children Living in Institutions

The Ombudsman often visits children in shelters and care institutions, as well as in young offenders' institu-

[M]ore and more families are known to be evicted from their rented houses, due to their inability to pay their rent, without being protected by the state, as social housing is inexistent.

tions, to investigate their conditions of living. There are around 2,500 children staying in care institutions and another 2,000 in special care homes for children with disabilities and chronic diseases. The Ombudsman has found that in some of these institutions, the standards of services provided are much lower than required for children cared for by the state or by private non-profit institutions supervised by the state. Administrative deficiencies and welfare cuts have curtailed the effort towards deinstitutionalisation and provision of open care facilities. As a result, children in mental health institutions have been detained for longer than necessary or have been moved to inadequate units. The Ombudsman has argued that the Greek state should reduce the time children and young persons stay in such institutions and increase the use of foster care and support to their natural families – when this is feasible – in order to offer them proper living environments and conditions.

9. Young People Leaving Care and Young-Offenders' Institutions

There is a serious lack of support services for when young people leave, at 18, or in some cases earlier or later, care institutions and young-offenders' institutions. The problem exists in particular when these young people have no functional families that could support their social integration, including securing their housing conditions. In a few cases, social services would provide support for young leavers. However, the Ombudsman has found that in many cases young persons leaving institutions do not receive any kind of help or support and soon become marginalised and victimised in many ways. Unfortunately these young people are not entitled to housing benefit that would allow them to rent their own flat or house. There are some small allowances but they are not enough to secure an adequate standard of living in the first difficult time of their independent lives.

10. Young People Leaving Home Without Any Support

In Greece, the number of young people leaving their families without having a place to stay is rather limited. On the contrary, research has shown that up to 2/3 of young people stay with their parents until they reach 30! One reason for this is that there exists no support mechanism for young people leaving home. As a result, young persons of very poor families who have to leave home may become homeless and need to stay with friends or in very cheap dwellings, until they manage to have their own regular earnings. These young people may not be very obvious in the cities. However, the Children's Ombudsman has dealt with many cases of juveniles who have left their homes because they could not stand problems in their families, without knowing where to stay. Also, the Ombudsman has heard the questions by many social services regarding the need of young persons to stay in shelters, at least temporarily. However, this kind of service is really missing and only a few traditional care institutions exist in a few cities in Greece.

11. Drug-Dependent Young Persons Living Away From Their Families

The last category to be presented in this article is a growing problem among young people in Greece. Drug-dependent youth, including young immigrants, are seen more and more in the streets of big cities staying out overnight and being in need of specialised help. In fact street workers of therapeutic programmes are often employed to reach and support this population. Unfortunately there are no shelters for these persons, something that needs seriously to be provided by the Greek state. The only available places where young drug addicts can go are a few day centres, therapeutic programmes and communities.

EPILOGUE

Closing this article, I would like to stress the need for Greek society to recognise and tackle the need to create **shelters and support services for disaffected juveniles** (especially for 15-18 year-olds) as well as for **social housing mechanisms for the most vulnerable families** threatened by homelessness, including poor people, victims of violence, immigrants, refugees and minorities.

There is a serious lack of support services for when young people leave [...] care institutions and young-offenders' institutions.

CSEYHP: Combating Social Exclusion Among Young Homeless Populations

By **Thea Meinema**,[1] *CSEYHP Project Coordinator, with Contributions from the Project Partners*

INTRODUCTION

The Combating Youth Homelessness (CSEYHP) project started in May 2009 and will finish in April 2011. It aims at a deeper understanding of the situation of young homeless persons, not just at present, but following their life trajectories to promote preventive and intervention services in a pro-active way. In working with peer co-researchers, the project also aims at empowering young (formerly) homeless people. The study is conducted in four European Member States – the Czech Republic (CZ), the Netherlands (NL), Portugal (PT) and the United Kingdom (UK) – that have widely diverging policies and strategies with regard to support for homeless young people.

COMPARISONS BETWEEN COUNTRIES

The **first phase** of the project resulted in 4 national reports and a comparative report, offering an overview of differences, similarities and shared issues between the partner countries. It seems that differences in policy development account for some of the variation in recognition of, and approaches to, youth homelessness in the four countries. UK and NL developed youth homelessness policies in the 1980s, whereas in CZ and PT it is still necessary to take young homeless people from the 'invisible' to the 'visible', as this project has done. In all four countries the responsibility for working with, and providing for, homeless people is attached to local/municipal authorities but the degree of uniformity of response across local authorities towards homeless people varies.

Definitions vary and do not run parallel with the ETHOS system proposed by FEANTSA. ETHOS categories are particularly problematic in relation to youth homelessness as well as homelessness among women. Far fewer young people are found among rough sleepers, particularly young homeless women, and, in countries without dedicated youth homeless services, many young people will not be found in emergency or other accommodation dominated by men aged 25-40. The UK has its own definition of homelessness based on security of tenure and right to occupy and in some cases ETHOS definitions have been adapted to fit the reality of the problem.

Within street counts, young people make up a minority of homeless people; young women even more so. Young people find other places to stay – buses, cars, train stations, tower blocks, and parks – and frequently they "sofa surf". Interviews with NGO workers identified the following groups as specifically at risk:

- Young people leaving State care (CZ, NL, UK)
- Young people with low educational attainment (PT, NL, UK)
- Young people from workless households (UK)
- Young refugees (UK, NL)
- Young people from ethnic minorities (PT, NL)
- Young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and so-called dysfunctional families (PT, UK)
- Criminalised young people (all four countries)

Availability of services and supported accommodation differs. Early intervention and prevention services are more developed in UK and NL. Supported accommodation varies across countries in relation to the amount of available social housing, voluntary-sector and statutory-sector supported accommodation and other services, and the conditions under which these services can be accessed. Outreach programmes in countries without youth homeless services redirect young people to other services. Our interviewees were found mostly through services in NL and UK, to a lesser extent in PT and mostly not through services in CZ.

WORKING WITH PEER CO-RESEARCHERS

In the **second phase** of the project each country recruited formerly homeless young people and trained and supported them to conduct interviews with 54 homeless young men and women in four categories – white native born, ethnic minority native born and migrants, to record young people's experience of childhood, family life and support, employment/education, migration between and within countries, substance use and offending behaviour, partnerships/parenting and their individual risks of social exclusion. Interviews also recorded the availability of social transfers, housing support and reinsertion programmes.

Working with formerly homeless young people has proved very valuable for all concerned. Young co-researchers got an experience that could be put on their CV; training on conducting interviews and sociological concepts; team work with other co-researchers; and certification of their training and participation. Being able to play a meaningful role in assisting the researchers and the young interviewees improved their self-esteem.

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According to the co-researchers, it was very important to share and review their own pasts reflected in the words of the interviewees. It gave them a sense of developing a project that is important for all young people in circumstances like theirs. Their situation as homeless or formerly homeless young people allowed the interviewees to relax and share their situation with them. In the UK one co-researcher interviewed 5 young people in languages other than the official language of the country. She also translated these interviews for the project.

Co-researchers also suggested improvements for future research using young participants e.g. more training through role play, concrete examples for conducting interviews. The participation of the co-researchers in the national workshops at the end of the second phase had policy relevance and their testimonies on social practices were particularly valued by the attending audience, including key-workers and representatives of government institutions. Their active participation also allowed us to create a manual to promote peer work.

MAIN CAUSES OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

1. A Precarious Transition
Young people (16-25 years old) face several life transitions – leaving education, living independently, accessing housing, and work insertion – with various risks of social exclusion and homelessness. Lack of job opportunities and affordable housing limit their possibilities of leaving home and developing an autonomous life in conditions of safety and wellbeing. It is essential to promote personalised support measures to tackle the risks during these transitions.

2. Family Background
Young people in our study have been disadvantaged in life through their family backgrounds, being raised in care, and/or failure at school. A problematic family situation is often behind eventual homelessness, varying from a difficult family situation to the sudden loss of a parent. Children at an early age are already at risk and sometimes situations of rough sleeping can be identified at 12 years old.

3. Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
Young people in this study reveal poor employment insertion, presenting frequent episodes of inactivity while, at the same time, being excluded from work-related and other types of social benefits. Interviewees have identified several obstacles to continuing training

and education that need to be reflected in policy measures. Exclusion is also experienced in issues like social belonging, peer pressure and bullying. Among the reasons for leaving school early given by our interviewees are problems of being picked on by others and belonging to segregated classes of students.

4. Young Asylum Seekers and Unaccompanied Minors
There is limited insight into the situation of young asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors in European policy. Those without rights to remain and without recourse to public funds have become a significant group of young migrants in many European countries. Their situation calls for a coordinated policy effort at European level.

5. Young Single Mothers
Young single mothers were included among the homeless women in our study (and three of the UK co-researchers were single mothers). Early pregnancy may offer an escape from problematic homes and the dream of an ideal family and it can be an advantage within limits since it facilitates access to support services. But it is not necessarily a step towards autonomy and employment and specific child support services are required in order that young mothers be supported through to autonomy.

INTERVENTION AND REINSERTION NEEDS
Our initial findings establish that young people require reinsertion measures tailored to their individual needs and their group specificities (migration, ethnicity, gender) as well as support to tackle the specific transitions of the youth period (16-25 years). Young people in our study require reinsertion services to be triggered at particular points in their lives. Services must have a pro-active perspective applied to the development of early intervention and key working methodologies in order that young people may be prevented from experiencing homelessness. Our findings support two of the five goals laid out in *Ending Homelessness: A Handbook for Policy Makers* by FEANTSA: Goal 4, No-one leaving an institution without housing options; and Goal 5, No young people becoming homeless as a result of the transition to independent living.

What do the respondents think they need? They indicate that services could have made a difference when they were younger. They would have liked more support from Social Services, mostly for themselves but in some cases to support their families. They would have liked support from a carer, someone to

[Y]oung people require reinsertion measures tailored to their individual needs and their group specificities [...] as well as support to tackle the specific transitions of the youth period.

talk to, a place to stay in an emergency, and family mediation. Young people not born in the country would have appreciated language, legal and educational support. An offer of services at an early stage and continuity in social support would have made a difference.

Fighting social exclusion through early intervention is one of the most relevant ways to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequalities. Empowerment measures are also important through enabling young people to make decisions about their future. The promotion of access to social rights among youth will contribute to the promotion of equal opportunities and social inclusion for all young people. With a rights perspective comes a sense of empowerment that can help young people to realise their potential.

MORE WORK TO BE DONE

The **third phase** of the project will look at intervention and reinsertion methodologies and tools that can make a difference. Two existing methodologies will be examined: the Eight Steps Model that is currently being used primarily with an adult homeless population in the Netherlands, and the Early Intervention Programmes in use in the UK, based on prevention models and early intervention services for young people. These two methodologies will be adapted for use with a young homeless population and will be tested in the partner countries to study their usefulness, taking into account the views of the young homeless people on the design of the services that address them. We hope to be able to present our findings and its consequences for European and national policies at a later stage.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE PROJECT

CSEYHP: Combating Social Exclusion among Young Homeless Populations – a comparative investigation of homeless paths among local white, local ethnic groups and migrant young men and women, and appropriate reinsertion methods. This project is funded by the European Union Seventh Framework Programme under the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities theme.

The four partners in the CSEYHP Combating Youth Homelessness project are:

- London Metropolitan University, Centre for Housing and Community Research, Cities Institute, in London, United Kingdom;
- Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia (CIES-ISCTE), in Lisbon, Portugal;
- Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Civil Society Studies, in Prague, Czech Republic;
- MOVISIE, Netherlands Centre for social development, in Utrecht, the Netherlands

For more information, please visit the project website www.movisie.nl/homelessyouth or contact the international project coordinator Thea Meinema.

The CSEYHP project has already delivered the following reports and documents:

- Four national reports on the situation regarding homeless youth in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom
- A comparative Report on Youth Homelessness and Social Exclusion in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK

There are four thematic reports, based on the national reports and the interview results:

- Trajectories into homelessness and reinsertion points
- Social exclusion and homelessness in Northern, Southern and Central Europe
- Capability and resilience among homeless youth
- Gender, ethnic group and migrant dimensions of homelessness

The four reports are complementary and it is recommended to read the full set.

Other CSEYHP publications include:

- A Methodology Annex on Working with Co-researchers
- A Methodology Annex on Life Trajectory Interviews

All of these publications can be downloaded from the project website at: www.movisie.nl/homelessyouth

Homelessness Among Young People in the EU

By **Gregory Paulger**,[1] *Director for Youth and Sport, DG Education and Culture, European Commission*

Young people have been severely affected by the financial crisis. Youth unemployment stands at 20 per cent on average across the EU and has reached 40 per cent in Spain and Latvia. It is consistently double that of the total working population. Young people with fewer opportunities – who suffered from the highest levels of unemployment before the crisis – are now practically closed off from the job market. This can drive a lot of young people into exclusion and may lead to homelessness unless decision-makers take action.

As stated in the Lisbon Treaty, access to housing is a basic right. It is also a precondition for fulfilling another fundamental right, namely living a life in dignity. Policy-makers at all levels of government have special responsibility for providing citizens with a minimum social standard and quality of life that ensures a basic standard of living, a proper school education, opportunities for employment and access to social services.

Social inclusion is at the core of the Europe 2020 strategy, with a commitment to lift 25 million people out of poverty by 2020 and reduce the number of early school leavers by one third – from today's 15 per cent to 10 per cent in the next ten years. Two of the seven flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy; "Youth on the Move" and "An agenda for new skills and jobs" have a focus on equipping young people with the skills necessary to ensure their social cohesion and inclusion in the future labour market. 2010 is also the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

THE EU YOUTH STRATEGY

The EU Youth Strategy, adopted in November 2009 by all the EU Ministers for Youth, has social inclusion as one of its eight fields of action. It states that activities shall, in particular, target young people with fewer opportunities and calls upon the Member States and the European Commission to "address the issues of homelessness, housing and financial exclusion". This strategy was followed up in May 2010 with a Council of the European Union resolution on active inclusion of young people for combating unemployment and poverty.

GREATER RISKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

As outlined above, there is a strong political commitment at EU level to address issues connected to exclusion and homelessness among young people. The commitment is reemphasised amid a financial and economic crisis that poses challenges for all people but has a special impact on youth. Even before the crisis, children and young people faced special challenges and risks of becoming socially excluded and ending up homeless, risks that have increased in the last two years. Not only can they become victims of homelessness because of the difficult situation their parents may be in or because they are forced out of a foster-care institution at the age of 18. Young people in the age-group 15 to 25 also go through several life transitions which pose diverse risks associated with the possibility of social exclusion and homelessness: leaving education, moving out of the parental household and becoming established in the housing and employment markets.

EARLY INTERVENTION IS KEY!

In order to prevent exclusion and break the cycle of poverty between generations, early intervention is crucial: educational support and guidance which keep young people motivated and in school, family mediation which can appease conflicts between parents and their teenage children, social inclusion programmes which reduce the burdens of child families living in poverty. It is also important to act against bullying in school and promoting inclusive environments for school pupils already at an early age. Non-formal learning opportunities offered by youth workers or youth organisations can be a valuable supplement to formal education or provide an alternative pathway for young people who fall out of the formal education system too early and without a degree or diploma.

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AN INVISIBLE POPULATION

For young homeless people, individual measures are necessary. An ongoing research project on combating social exclusion among young homeless populations in the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom[2] found that young homeless people are, to a large extent, an invisible population. Even when their situations are as precarious as street homelessness, they do not associate with other people sleeping rough but seek to live in 'hidden' places – squats, derelict buildings, places where they are at risk of sexual and economic exploitation. The initial findings of the study also establish that young homeless people require reinsertion measures tailored to their individual needs and their group specificities (migration, ethnicity, gender, etc.).

NEED FOR AN INDIVIDUALLY-TAILORED RESPONSE

When asked what would have prevented them from falling victim of homelessness, young respondents in the study indicate that services could have made a difference to them when they were younger. They would have liked more support for themselves, but in some cases they also mention support for their family. They missed someone to talk to, support from a career counsellor, a place to stay in an emergency, and family mediation. Young people not born in the country would have liked to have had language, legal and educational support.

The study highlights that helping young people out of homelessness require different measures than for other age groups. There is a need for coordinated measures that involve different policy domains such as social inclusion, health, education and employment. Only tailored and cross-sectoral support programmes can help these young people tackle the specific transitions of the youth period.

A CROSS-SECTORAL APPROACH TO SOCIAL INCLUSION

The EU Youth Strategy echoes the plea made by this research: in response to the multi-faceted set of issues facing young people, it advocates a cross-sectoral approach to youth policy. In order to address the problem of early school leaving, there is a need for coordinated national strategies that imply close cooperation between the ministries of education, employment, health and social inclusion. It is also crucial to involve ministries for youth, which are typi-cally responsible for promoting the participation of young people in society, youth volunteering as well as non-formal learning opportunities.

NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND EU COORDINATION

In line with the principle of subsidiarity, social policy and strategies concerning the social inclusion of young people are first and foremost national responsibilities. However, mechanisms are in place at EU level – so-called open methods of coordination (OMC) – which ensure close cooperation between the Member States and the European Commission.

The EU Youth Strategy has been agreed for the period 2010-2018. After the first three years the Member States will report to the European Commission on what they have done to fulfil the objectives of the strategy. The priorities of the strategy will then be revised if necessary.

AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH

Policies and strategies – at all levels of government – must be based on the real needs of the populations they aim to help. Having a knowledge- and evidence-based approach to youth policy is therefore essential. The European Commission plays an important role in facilitating examples of good practice in the EU Member States through peer-learning activities, expert meetings and conferences, and through conducting studies and releasing publications and reports. After releasing the first EU Youth Report in 2009, which included a lot of data, statistics and information on young people in the EU,[3] planning for the next report in 2012 has already started. The report, which will be full of the latest available data, youth research results and analysis, in addition to examples of good practice in the Member States, will be a landmark publication in the field of youth.

[I]n response to the multi-faceted set of issues facing young people, [the EU Youth Strategy] advocates a cross-sectoral approach to youth policy.

2   The research project CSEYHP (Combating Youth Homelessness) http://www.movisie.nl/118836/eng/, (accessed on 10th October 2010) is funded under the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission.
3   Accessible at http://ec.europa.eu/youth, accessed 10th October 2010.

Ever More Families are Homeless in Paris

By **Emmanuelle Guyavarch**,[1] and **Erwan Le Méner**,[2] *France*

Demand for emergency accommodation from home-less people, including families, in the Ile-de-France region is at unprecedented levels, but social services emergency accommodation budgets are being cut back. A large body of research has profiled the lone-individual homeless service user. Yet next to nothing is known about homeless families, defined as a parent accompanied by at least one minor child, both being helped as such. The Paris Samusocial Observatory is working on a series of surveys on the lifestyles and pathways of these families and the care provision they receive.[3]

Daily data collected by the Paris 115 hotline call-handlers[4] gives a broad-brush picture of a section of this population. These families are not like the single homeless people who have been the focus of the large majority of research – and public policy. In terms of make-up and geographical origin, they are closer to the typical poor family in the general popu-lation – mostly female-headed, lone-parent families, or large immigrant families (CERC, 2004). However, these homeless families arguably make up a new kind of poverty, combining female family headship with immigration, and their growing share, taken together with alarming social and health situations, raises immediate questions about the provision made for them.

1. MORE FAMILIES, STAYING LONGER IN THE SYSTEM

A handful of studies have recently been done in France on homeless families and children, but they are still few and far between and often focused on a particular type of accommodation.[5]

One source of available data is that from calls to the 115 hotline in Paris, during which the call handlers take down various (self-referral) information on the user's request and characteristics. Because this infor-mation identifies the individual (and is de-identified for statistical processing), the pathways of individuals, split between lone individuals and families, can be reconstructed from the time of first contact up to now.

An initial picture can therefore be formed of the fami-lies entering the social emergency system. It bears pointing out that not all homeless families necessarily use the 115 hotline, but it is an entry point into the temporary accommodation system before referral to another agency. In some cases it is also the only option left where other forms of provision cannot take them in and need a "quick fix" solution. These data are therefore a good sample of profiles of home-less families.
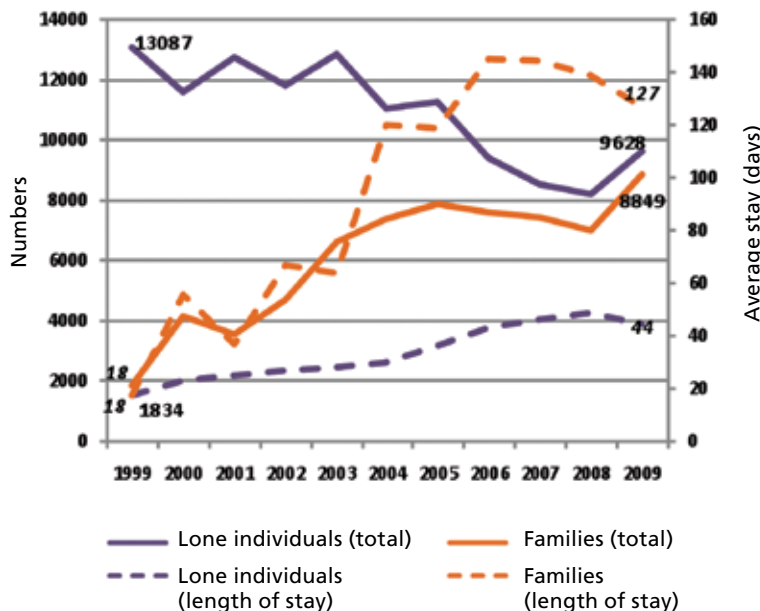
The number of people in families found accommoda-tion by the Paris 115 hotline service has risen by close to 400% between 1999 and 2009 (Figure 1). Mean-while, the average annual length of stay has increased from 18 to 130 days.

In 1999, people in families made up 12% of 115 hotline service users and accounted for 12% of over-night stays.[6] In 2009, families made up 48% of users and accounted for 73% of overnight stays.

See Figure 1

Families are therefore occupying a growing share of social services emergency provision. What are their distinguishing features?

Figure 1. Entries into and lengths of stay in temporary accommodation 1999-2009

Source of data: Paris 115 hotline service

2. MOSTLY LONE-PARENT-HEADED, IMMIGRANT FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Fewer than 10% of families in temporary accommodation are French nationals; most originate from Africa (Figure 2), more specifically West Africa.

See Figure 2

These families, whatever their geographical origin, are mostly female-headed: 54% are lone mothers with children, while fewer than 3% are lone fathers with children. In 2009, therefore, lone parent families accounted for 57% of the families in provision. Insee statistics report that in the general population, 1 family in 4 in Paris is a lone-parent family (Portas *et al.*, 2008).

As in the general population, the number of children per family does not vary with the household head's gender but does with the number of adults heading the family. Homeless lone-parent families have an average of 1.3 non-adult children against 1.8 for couples. There is a direct correlation between family structure and geographical origin: African families – mostly lone-parented (70%) – have on average fewer non-adult children (1.4) than European families (1.7) which are predominantly two-parented (67%). Children's ages also vary by geographical origin, the average age being 3 years for families of African descent, but around 6 years for other families.

3. MAJOR SOCIAL AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

These families' pathways into exclusion reveal a clear disconnect with housing: 57% of families had to self-refer to the Paris 115 hotline service due to having been thrown out of where they were living (in someone else's home in most cases).[7]

These families also experience particular hardship. Half receive no social support and nearly 60% have no financial resources (only 16% receive welfare benefits). Furthermore, only 45% receive state-provided medical assistance (AME) and 21% universal health coverage (CMU). These administrative and social difficulties are compounded by health problems.

The *Samenta* survey on mental health and addictions among homeless people in the Ile-de-France region (Laporte *et al.*, 2010) also shows that 29% of adults in families suffer from at least one severe psychiatric disorder, mainly anxiety disorders (20.4%)[8] or severe mood disorders (8.3%). Nearly a quarter suffer from non-severe mood disorders (23.3%).[9] These are much

Figure 2. Self-reported nationality of persons having found accommodation through the Paris 115 hotline service in 2009
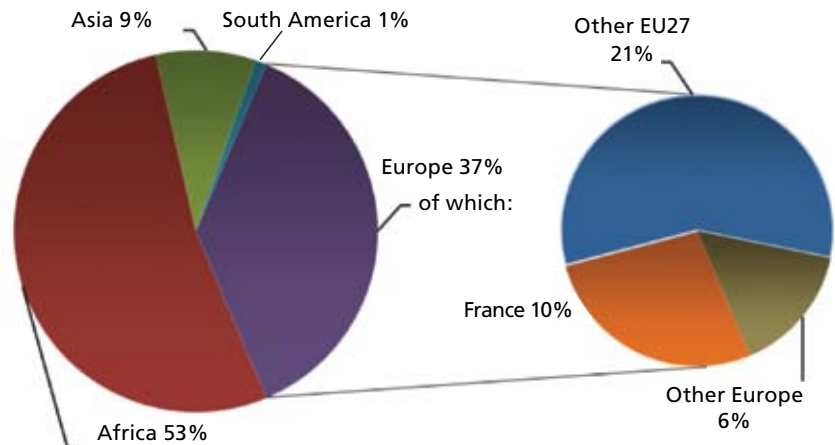
Source of data: Paris 115 hotline service

higher prevalences than in the general population, and up to five times higher for non-severe mood disorders. As in the general population, women are more vulnerable than men: anxiety disorders affect 22.2% of such women against 8.6% of men, while 24.2% of women versus 17.2% of men experience non-severe mood disorders.

Most of the disorders identified appear to be related to these people's social situations. Adjustment disorders and non-severe mood swings may be attributed to the difficult living conditions they are experiencing, especially migrant families. Likewise, post-traumatic stress disorders may be seen as responses to the violence experienced in the conflict zones from which many of the families come.

Homeless families therefore have major health and social problems. What provision is made for them?

4. PROVISION FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES

Provision differs with the administrative situation. A family seeking asylum will be temporarily housed by CAFDA (coordinating agency for the reception of asylum-seeking families). Families whose asylum applications are turned down will be found shelter by the OMF (Order of Malta France), while the PTMA (association for the social and administrative intake of migrants and their families) will provide temporary accommodation to families awaiting regularization.

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7   Source of data: Paris 115 hotline service
8   Generalized feelings of anxiety, adjustment disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder
9   Mostly mild or moderate depressive syndromes

Regularized families in principle move out of social emergency into mainstream provision (departmental, local/regional authority or French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFFI)[10] provision for reunification of private and family life). Undocumented families who have exhausted all avenues of appeal will be found shelter by the Paris 115 hotline service. Depending on how their official status changes, therefore, families can move from one type of provision to another.

Some of the homeless family assistance provision is capped as to user numbers or budgets allocated to supporting them. When these limits are reached, families over the limit must call the 115 hotline service which must find something to tide them over. As a result, half the families currently found temporary accommodation through the Paris 115 hotline service come under "other support provision".[11] Although "gateway procedures" do exist between these different types of provision, they appear to be beset by delays not least because the accommodation provided (CADA, CHRS) is bursting at the seams.

Further up the line, however, the hold-ups are partly due to where the accommodation is situated. For instance, in order to "transfer" a family from emergency to mainstream provision, the Paris 115 hotline service has to place the family in Paris. But 98% of the families live in social security B&Bs, most (85%) of which are located in the Paris suburbs due to a shortage of places in the capital.[12]

For families covered by Paris social services – even regularized families –, living out in the suburbs puts obstacles in the way of their integration: getting papers, job-hunting, getting social services paperwork together or school attendance because some local authorities will not enrol pupils who do not come under their services, are all added challenges.[13] In this way, the type of temporary accommodation offered to families can produce unwanted side-effects.

Ultimately, an increasing number of families end up housed in temporary accommodation – and especially emergency shelters. But then, the asylum issues (as G. Frigoli (2004, 2009) has aptly observed) but also the domestic violence or children-at-risk issues which led these families to seek assistance seem to fade into the background as if services for homeless people had become a huge channel for recycling public policy problems reprocessed into an externally-imposed social problem - that of social emergency. How did this system come into being? How does it work? How does it address families' needs? And finally, how do they manage – or fail – to deal with the problems that drew them into a "career" on welfare? Those are some of the questions to which the Paris Samusocial Observatory will try to find answers in its forthcoming surveys.

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10 Formerly Anaem (National Agency for Reception of Foreign Nationals and Migration)
11 Source of data: Paris 115 hotline service
12 Source of data: Paris Samusocial Accommodation and Hotel Booking Centre (PHRH), September 2010
13 A survey of each 115 hotline service in the Ile-de-France in May 2010 even showed that over half of those staying in welfare hotels are regularized
    ("point in time" survey commissioned by the DRIHL among the 115 hotline services in Ile de France)

Not just a bed, a bath and a peanut-butter sandwich: Characteristics, health, well-being and care for children growing up with their parent(s) in shelters for homeless people or female victims of domestic violence

By **Brilleslijper-Kater, S.N.,**[1] *Child Psychologist, expert in Child Abuse & Neglect, Child Abuse & Neglect Team, Academical Medical Center, Amsterdam,* **Beijersbergen, M., Asmoredjo, J., Jansen, C., and Wolf, J.,** *UMC St Radboud, Nijmegen, The Netherlands*

Approximately a thousand children a year reside either in homeless shelters or in shelters for female victims of domestic violence in the Netherlands. In nearly all of these cases, these children have already experienced a lot of problematic situations before living in a shelter.

In our study,[2] conducted by the Public Health Section at Radboud University of Nijmegen Department of Primary and Community Care, and commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, we observed the living conditions of this vulnerable group. What kind of care do they receive and how can this be improved?

LITTLE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CHILDREN IN SHELTERS

In the Netherlands, as well as in other countries, very little is known about the situation of children living in shelters. In an earlier Dutch study[3] on women living in shelters for female victims of domestic violence, the following two remarks regarding their children were made: *"Their situation is, to say the least, not very enviable"* and *"Further professionalising of women shelters is impossible without explicitly paying attention to the little ones."*

We notice an increasing awareness in politics and the welfare (shelter) sector that children residing in shelters must be seen as a unique group with their own unique needs. In order to give these children proper care, more information on their characteristics is needed. Our study is the first to give more insight into the characteristics of these children, their health and their wellbeing. Furthermore, it gives an impression of the kind of care these children receive during their stay in the shelters. In this article we present the most significant results of our study.

A LOT OF STRESSFUL SITUATIONS EXPERIENCED

Children living in shelters have experienced on average seven potential stressful, traumatic situations. According to Lamers-Winkelman (2003), an average of eight problematic situations is very high for nine-year-olds. Examples of these stressful experiences are (temporary) separation from their parents, witnessing of verbal aggression (screaming) between parents, witnessing severe maltreatment of the mother and more than one change of school during a school year. The amount of stressful situations experienced is worrisome because an accumulation of these kinds of experiences might cause severe problems in a child's development.[4]

Children in our study cannot stop thinking about:

Yelling. (Girl, 12 years old, women's shelter).

What happened to my mum and dad. (Boy, 12 years old, women's shelter)

Thoughts of what happened in former times. (Girl, 15 years old, homeless shelter)

An employee of a women's shelter says:

One boy [6 years old] often witnessed severe maltreatment of his mother by her spouse. He regularly talks about his fear, it affects him a lot.

11% of the mothers in our study indicated that it was certain that their children had been abused, and 4% had serious reasons to assume that this was the case. This percentage is significantly higher than the Dutch average of 3% for all Dutch children on an annual basis.[5] Because the Dutch average percentage includes more categories of child abuse than in our study, we strongly presume that the difference in the percentage between abused children and the Dutch average is even larger.

> We notice an increasing awareness in politics and the welfare (shelter) sector that children residing in shelters must be seen as a unique group with their own unique needs.

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2 Brilleslijper-Kater et al, 2009.
3 Wolf et al., 2006, p. 175-176
4 Felitti et al., 2001; Finkelhor, Ormond & Turner, 2007
5 IJzendoorn, van et al., 2007

The finding that a substantial number of the children in shelters are victims of child abuse is related to the high number of risk factors (10.9) for child abuse that we found for these children. These risk factors, measured using the CARE-NL framework,[6] manifest themselves at all levels: parent, child, parent-child and family unit. Examples are: severe psychiatric disorder of a parent, low self-esteem of the child, problems with knowledge about education and debts.

MORE PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND PSYCHIATRIC PROBLEMS THAN IN THE AVERAGE DUTCH POPULATION

Given that the children have experienced a lot of stressful situations, it is not surprising that they experience more psycho-social and psychiatric problems than children in the average Dutch population. According to the shelter employees, 57% of the children in our study have psycho-social problems, such as behavioural problems, problems with peers and emotional problems. Dijkstra (2001, 2008) and Lamers-Winkelman (2004) concluded that children coming from violent families have a higher risk of behavioural and emotional problems.

According to the mothers, symptoms of post-traumatic stress and anxiety occur in 31% and 28% of the children respectively. In addition, the mothers indicate symptoms of depression for 18% of the children and symptoms of dissociation for 15%. These results are in accordance with Fortin, Trabelsi & Dupuis (2002), who report that children with experiences of domestic violence have more internalizing problems (like depression and anxiety) than children without these experiences.

LOW QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

The majority of the children are (very) positive about their relationship with their mother. Employees score the mother-child relationship a 5.2 on a seven-point scale (from 1 = very poor to 7 = excellent). In contrast, the employees score the quality of the relationship with the parent who is not staying in the shelter as 'average' (3.2 on a seven-point scale). They also notice that children struggle with their loyalty towards both parents. According to the children they often do not feel comfortable enough to go to the parent who is not staying in the shelter or to do something with this parent when they want to.

The quality of the children's relationship with their family not staying in the shelter is 'not good, but also not bad' (employees score this relationship as a 4.2 on a seven-point scale).

It is important to pay attention to this relationship, as it is precisely when children go through difficult times that extra support from a broader family unit is most needed.[7] A supportive environment might be enough to combat severe depression.[8]

Finally, for 44% of the children the quality of the relationship with their friends is low. A quarter of the children experience problems with peers.

> *I cannot not go to [name of address] to play with my real friends. That's what I would like most* (girl, 12 years old, women's shelter)

CARE MOST NEEDED

Considering the precarious situation of the children, proper care is badly needed. However, a majority of the children do not get any individual conversation during their stay or just after arrival in the shelter (6-12 year-olds: 67%; 13-18 year-olds: 61%), or any individual care (66%). Only 20% of the children have an individual care-plan.

> *We do not have individual conversations with the children, but when needed sometimes we will sit apart and talk. We try to stimulate the mothers to seek help for their children, so that they can talk about their problems elsewhere. There are no individual intake proceedings for children. This would be very good for the older children* (employee of a women's shelter)

CHILDREN HAVE UNIQUE NEEDS

This study shows that children in shelters must be seen as children with unique needs and not just as children accompanying their parents. To improve, shelters should first formulate a plan on how to help and care for these children. Next, care could be structured by the development of a care process in all stages during their stay, such as intake, the development of a care-plan and after-care. Furthermore, screening instruments could be used to get an insight into the problems of and the possibilities for the children. Systematic risk assessment for (risk of) child abuse is very important too.

This study indicates that specialized help for trauma and treatment of psychic problems must become available. Early intervention must guarantee that violence can be prevented or stopped. To accomplish these plans, a link between the shelter and specialized help must be made.

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6   Child Abuse Risk Evaluation, Ruiter, de, C. & Jong, de, E.M., (2005).
7   Hermanns, Öry & Schrijver, 2005
8   Kendler, Myers, & Prescott, 2005

When safety can be ensured, employees could represent important contacts for the children. Paying attention to dysfunctional patterns in the parent-child interaction as well as to the loyalty of children to both their parents is important too.

To fulfil the specific needs of the children in shelters, a change at all levels - policy, organisation and implementation - is needed.

Information on 187 children

This study was conducted in seventeen shelters throughout the Netherlands: both homeless shelters and shelters for female victims of domestic violence. Information was received on 187 children from 1 to 18 years old who stayed in the shelter between October 2008 and March 2009. Most of these children stayed in women's shelters (83%). The 113 girls and 74 boys had a mean age of 7.7 years. Because of the fact that almost all of the children came to the shelter with their mother, in this article we refer to mothers.

The information was received from the children themselves, their mothers and shelter employees. Themes covered included: relationships with other people important for the children; mental health problems and daily life in the shelter. For the older children (6 to 12 years of age), trained interviewers asked standardized questions. Adolescents (13 to 18 years of age) filled in the questionnaires themselves. Mothers and employees responded to questions about all children. An interviewer was present to answer questions and, if necessary, an interpreter was involved. After the interviews the children were offered a gift or a fee, mothers were offered 15 Euros for a completed questionnaire.

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To fulfil the specific needs of the children in shelters, a change at all levels - policy, organisation and implementation - is needed.

On the Streets:
Young LGBT People and Homelessness

By **Petra Davis**,[1] *Operations Manager, Albert Kennedy Trust, UK*

INTRODUCTION

Awareness has grown in recent years around the issue of homelessness in the young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) population. All over Europe, young LGBT people are struggling with varying levels of discrimination and rejection. In the UK, the Albert Kennedy Trust works specifically with young LGBT homeless people, providing care, support, advocacy and help with the many issues confronting them. This article outlines the problem and offers some models for working with this vulnerable group of young people.

Levels of LGBT homelessness in the UK are difficult to measure, since many statutory agencies and mainstream services for homeless people do not monitor sexual and gender identities. This problem is compounded in Europe, with so many different agencies and work practices – so it's hard to estimate the level of need on a Europe-wide basis.

However, there is a growing body of research in the UK to support the notion that homelessness among young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people may be at critical levels. *Out On My Own* (Cull & Platzer, 2006), a study of LGBT youth homelessness, suggests that in urban areas as much as 25% of youth homelessness can be accounted for by LGBT people, while *Count Me In Too*, recent research by Spectrum and the University of Brighton, found that 22% of all LGBT people interviewed had been homeless at some point in their lives, with young people especially vulnerable (Browne & Davis, 2007). These studies suggest that homelessness is startlingly common among young LGBT people, and also that LGBT people may make up a large proportion of the young homeless population, particularly in urban areas.

So why are young LGBT people so vulnerable to homelessness? The young people who approach the Albert Kennedy Trust are homeless for a variety of reasons: domestic violence, bullying in education, harassment and hate crime in their neighbourhood – but the strongest theme to emerge from our case analysis

> The young people who approach the Albert Kennedy Trust are homeless for a variety of reasons: domestic violence, bullying in education, harassment and hate crime [and] the trauma associated with coming out at home.

is the trauma associated with coming out at home, which can still, for many young people, mean losing a place to live. The scale of the problem is huge: during 2009-10, AKT was contacted more than 1500 times regarding young people suffering parental rejection. Nearly a third of the young people who approached us were under the age of 18, and 7% were under 16. *When I Came Out*, 2009 research by Katherine Cowan for AKT, found that LGBT people are choosing to come out at a younger age, but are not receiving the support they need from their families.

"My mum found my Gaydar profile in the internet browser history and chucked me out - now I'm on the streets. She said she doesn't want a dirty queer in her house." – Jake, 17[2]

"One night, when I was living with my dad, my first boyfriend stayed over. The next morning my dad asked me if I was gay. I said that I was and he kicked me out. My boyfriend and me spent a few days on the streets. We ended up sleeping in a recycling bin which was horrible, it was so cold." – Malachi, 18

Not only are young LGBT at increased risk of homelessness, they are also running a set of additional risks that are arguably specific to this vulnerable group. Research shows that young LGBT people are more likely to experience bullying and have poorer educational outcomes (Rivers, 2001), and that they are between 3 and 6 times more likely to attempt or complete suicide (MIND, 2003). The typical young person seen by AKT has also experienced emotional and physical abuse at home or at school. Many of the young people we work with at have significant mental health issues after years of bullying, and some have considered or even attempted suicide before reaching out for help.

"The day after a teacher 'outed' me in the classroom the bullying got worse. On the way home on the bus some older guys from school started to shout abuse at me then one of them knifed me. As I ran from the bus I was petrified of how my mum would react when she found out I was attacked for being gay." – Michael, 16

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2 All quotes are taken from young people working with AKT, and have been anonymised for confidentiality.

"My brother told me he knew I was gay and would tell my parents. I really feared for my safety that day. I thought they would try to kill me when they found out. I stood on the Tube platform and heard the train coming - I just wanted everything to be over. Then I thought to myself 'why do I need to do this?' I took a few steps back and then got on the train to go home. I knew I had to do something." - Hassan, 19

There are some issues that affect some LGBT young people more than others. *Tipping The Iceberg*, a 2007 study by young people's charity Barnardos, found that young gay and bisexual men are very vulnerable to sexual exploitation. This is borne out by AKT's casework: nearly a third of young men we work with have been offered, or even forced, to exchange sex for a place to stay. Transgender people, too, are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence and hate crime, especially in the early stages of their transition, when they also risk losing their home.

Around two-thirds of the young people AKT sees in London are from a Black or minority ethnic (Bme) background. We know already that Bme households are at increased risk of homelessness, but there are also some specific issues for Bme LGBT young people, such as facing rejection not just from their families but from their neighbourhoods and communities when they come out. This can lead to feeling forced to choose between their cultural background and their sexual or gender identity. The cost of that choice to a young person's wellbeing and life chances can be profound.

Some young Bme LGBT people are at even higher risk. We have developed a project in response to an increasing number of young LGBT people from faith communities, primarily African Christian and Muslim, who are being threatened with 'honour' killings by their families who cannot accept them. Young people in this situation are under extraordinary pressure, sometimes undergoing forced exorcism, assault, rape, or even torture as they resist their family's wishes to force them to marry. AKT works with young people in this situation to get Forced Marriage Protection Orders and to find safe and supportive care environments for them.

"I was kept under constant surveillance for most of my youth. In my early adolescence, I became aware I was attracted to girls. My first love was a girl in high school. But soon my parents became suspicious. They began to ask about my sexuality and if I still kept my faith. I was physically abused, and on one occasion they made me kneel on gravel for hours. The pain in my knees was excruciating." – Amina, 19

Despite the many vulnerabilities of young LGBT people, AKT's experience is that it's possible, with holistic intervention, to support them to independence and empowerment, and our young people continue to inspire us by their courage and resilience. We run an established supported lodging scheme, principally for 16-19 year olds, which provides LGBT carers and a safe and supportive home. We have a strong base of mentors who work with young people to help them achieve independence and rebuild family relationships, and our staff team provides advice and advocacy for young people, many of whom experience homophobia from staff or service users in mainstream housing support settings. Our volunteering and life skills training programme offers opportunities to the young people to resume control of their lives with support from us in accessing education, employment and training – and to work towards the futures they want.

"In the supported lodgings with AKT I lived with a lesbian carer. I got my own room, and she was there to support me and help and give me advice. It's about helping you move onto independent living and I lived there for 19 months. I didn't get any trouble there because I was living with a lesbian. It was the first time and place that I felt comfortable being a lesbian and I didn't have to hide the person I am. The feeling of freedom and acceptance was amazing." – Alex, 22

"As AKT is designed for young LGBT people I went there and it helped me understand more about being gay. I was also given a mentor. The mentoring sessions give me somebody on the same level as myself to talk to. This helped me a lot to overcome the way I used to feel about being gay. AKT has helped me accept myself and become more open-minded." – Dave, 19

"AKT managed to get me housed. I didn't want to stay in the same part of London as my family. They supported me to move into an area of my choice and after staying in temporary accommodation for while I now have my own one bedroom flat. AKT provided me with a lot of emotional support along the way; it's weird because even though my family may have killed me, I feel like a part of me had died by losing them.

I am now getting on with my life and am thinking about joining the police. From being on the platform of the tube station to where I am now has been completely life changing. I think that without all this support, I don't know where I'd be." – Hassan, 19

The Albert Kennedy Trust – who are we?

Since 1989 AKT has supported lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) young people up to 25 years old, who are homeless or living in a hostile environment.

Here's what we offer to young people:
- Safe and supportive homes with LGBT carers
- More informal support through mentoring & befriending
- Advocacy, information and support by phone, face to face or email
- Independent living skills for young people through our accredited training programme
- Therapeutic help where it's needed most, through our Clinical Support Project
- Help in crisis through our Emergency Support Project
- Help with finding a more permanent home through our Rainbow Starter Pack

We also offer training and audit to housing and homelessness organisations to make sure they treat LGBT people with respect and fairness, as part of our 'Making a Difference' quality mark scheme. To support our work, please visit us online www.akt.org.uk or call +44 (0)20 7831 6562.

Ten steps to providing a safe, supportive environment for young homeless LGBT people.

1. Signal your readiness to work with LGBT communities – make sure you use welcoming and positive language and images
2. Never assume the young people you work with are 'straight'
3. Educate yourselves – LGBT awareness training shouldn't wait until you know you have an LGBT young person to work with. Go for an AKT quality mark!
4. Be prepared to accept LGBT young people for who they are – don't try to change them
5. Always challenge bullying, harassment, discrimination or phobic behaviour immediately, whether from staff or service users
6. Identify specialist LGBT resources and networks to promote a positive environment for LGBT young people
7. Provide access to sexual and mental health resources
8. Provide access to good LGBT role models
9. Respect privacy and confidentiality, and be clear when a young person comes out to you how you will keep the information confidential
10. Work to the young people's strengths: they may have had hard experiences, but they are not victims

Securing Europe's Future and Preventing Young People from Falling into Poverty

By **Emilie Turunen**,[1] *Member of the European Parliament, Vice-president Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament*

It may seem an obvious statement but Europe's future depends on its youth. A fifth of the EU's total population - close to 100 million - are below 30 but, despite the fact that Europe's future prosperity to a large extent lies in the hands of its young people, Europe is not giving its youth the opportunities that it needs.

A quick look at the statistics will show that being young does not make it easy to find a job. Youth unemployment in the 27 EU member states is at a staggering 20.2% - twice as high as the overall unemployment rate.

In some countries it is far worse. In Spain the youth unemployment rate is as high as 41.5%, in Slovakia it has reached 34.4% and, in Estonia, 37.2% of young people under 25 are unemployed. And, even more depressingly, it is not getting any better. In the last year, youth unemployment has not dropped. In other words, we need to do something.

The economic crisis caused a sudden and dramatic increase in unemployment in general and particularly for young people. Young people were among those being hit first and hardest by the crisis and many of them are now stuck in the line at the job centres.

However, it is not only in times when there are general high unemployment rates such as the current situation that young people are severely hit. In general, young people are more vulnerable than other labour-market groups, including in times of high employment. This high-sensitivity tends to decline progressively with age, an asymmetrical pattern that needs to be addressed and given special attention.

With unemployment often follows a risk of poverty which again leads to a risk of homelessness. According to statistics, 40% of people who are unemployed are at risk of poverty compared to 8% of those at work. Children and young people have a particularly high rate of poverty.

Gaining access to the labour market is therefore of utmost importance if we want to prevent young people falling into poverty and homelessness. But entering the labour market can be difficult for young people for several reasons. A vicious circle is often created, consisting of a lack of work and training experience on the part of young people combined with employers' reluctance to recruit inexperienced young workers and to invest in their training. Young workers experience general structural barriers such as lack of experience, discriminatory legislation etc. In addition, limited networking experience and only a few or no contacts in the labour market makes it difficult to find a job and keep it.

Education and lack of qualifications are often mentioned as the main barriers for young people when looking for a job. We know from statistics and studies that little or no education makes it very difficult to integrate into the labour market. Young people with low level skills are more likely to end up in temporary jobs than those who are better skilled. As well, we know that low levels of education and skills limit people's ability to access decent jobs and to develop themselves and participate fully in society which put them at a higher risk of ending in poverty and homelessness. Lack of qualifications combined with very young school-leaving ages mean that this group is poorly equipped to get a secure foothold in the labour market and create an economically independent life for themselves.

We need to learn more about this. Why do many young people leave school early and how can we encourage them to evolve their skills in another way? One way is to reinforce the school-to-work transition in order to give young people a stronger foothold in the labour market and move up the career ladder. This inclusion must happen by strengthening trainee, internship and apprenticeship status.

WHAT CAN THE EU DO?

There is a lot to gain if we improve the inclusion of young people into the labour force. Not only do we give young people a good start in their working life, we also prevent them from falling into poverty later in life. That is why we need to find a long-term solution that not only provides more jobs for youth but also more stable and safer jobs. Furthermore, the EU needs to unite and find a common strategy with goals that can secure a long-term solution.

In a report adopted by the European Parliament in July this year, and of which I was the draftswoman, a number of suggestions on how to tackle youth unemployment were proposed. It seems that the work of the Parliament has already had an impact.

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The European Commission has included a number of the Parliament's suggestions in its flagship initiative "Youth on The Move", the new EU strategy on how to equip Europe's youth for the future. This includes a European Youth Guarantee, a guarantee which means that young people must not be unemployed for more than four months before being offered a job or education. Like the Parliament, the Commission also calls for a European Quality Framework for Traineeships, a measure which is highly needed. Many traineeships are of very poor quality and in the last couple of years we have seen many examples of traineeships replacing ordinary jobs.

Other measures in the "Youth on the Move" initiative include a call for more and better apprenticeships (the Commission sets a goal of creating 800,000 more apprenticeships by the end of 2012) and EU funding for young entrepreneurs.

Overall, it is an interesting and promising initiative aimed at educating and training young people so they are better equipped for the European labour market.

Though employment and educational policies are mainly a national competency and the EU has a rather limited competency in this field, the Commission insists that the EU also has a role to play. The situation for young people will obviously depend on the overall economic policies but this initiative is a good first step.

Fighting unemployment among young people is not only a way to secure the future of Europe's welfare and economy - it is also a way of preventing young people from falling into a precarious life. Europe's employment policy should not only be about securing more and better jobs, job creation is also a way to deal with poverty and integrate marginalised and vulnerable groups into the labour market. Fighting unemployment is fighting poverty.

What is needed now is that governments all over Europe take action. Member States must make it a political priority to fight youth unemployment. This includes developing strategies that deal with the problem on a concrete level, giving young people opportunities to educate themselves and helping them into the labour market. If we do not take this serious we risk losing a generation and we risk pushing more young people into poverty and exclusion.

FURTHER DETAILS

The final Turunen report (available in all official EU languages): http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sidesSearch/search.do?type=REPORT&term=7&author=96703&language=EN&startValue=0

The European Commission Communication on the "Youth on the Move" initiative: http://ec.europa.eu/education/yom/com_en.pdf

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