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Homelessness and the European Union's Initiatives to End It

Abstract: Homelessness is a serious social problem in the countries of the European Union, which is currently exacerbated by the refugee crisis and migration phenomenon. The Member States of the European Union are taking various measures to reduce this problem. However, tackling homelessness requires appropriate actions also at EU level, including monitoring its European dimension. Still, EU Member States use different definitions of homelessness, methods of collecting and presenting data on homelessness, and implement different policies to address it. The purpose of this article is to attempt to analyse the initiatives undertaken at EU level concerning the fight against homelessness, the housing-led policy recommended in the European Union, and the typology of homeless people developed by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless. Legal-dogmatic and empirical methods were used in the article.

Keywords: Standards in homeless services, homeless people, homelessness, EU strategies against homelessness, housing-led policy

1. Introduction

Homelessness is one of the most extreme and brutal forms of social exclusion¹. It correlates with extreme poverty, unemployment, health loss and threat to life, and mental health problems. It is particularly distressing because the human being who experiences it, is without shelter and space where he could take refuge from difficult life situations². Homeless people live without any material support, their family

1 Cf.: R. Mędrzycki, *Bezdomność w świetle orzecznictwa sądów administracyjnych - wybrane aspekty*, "Kwartalnik Prawa Publicznego" 2013, no. 1.

2 B. Moraczewska, *Bezdomność. Definicja, problemy, rozwiązania obecne oraz historyczne odwołanie do ludzi luźnych*, "Studia Gdańskie. Wizje i rzeczywistość" 2013, no. 10, p. 113.

ties vanish, and the surrounding society does not maintain contact with them³. This promotes the emergence of socialisation deficits and the isolation of homeless people at the individual and social level, especially because it is difficult for people who have a home to understand the homeless, even though they can now be found on the streets of just about every European city⁴. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of homelessness still escapes widespread public research on poverty, social exclusion and unemployment⁵. This situation is completely unjustified as the number of homeless people in EU countries is alarming. For example, according to 2012 data in France, at least 141,500 people were homeless⁶. In the Czech Republic, the number of homeless people in 2011 amounted to 11,496, while in Greece they numbered 20,000. In Hungary in the same period 15,000 people were homeless, half of whom lived in Budapest. In the same period in Spain the number of homeless was around 40,000 thousand⁷, and in Germany 284,000 people were without a place to stay. The phenomenon of homelessness is also becoming increasingly noticeable in Poland, where according to a national survey of the homeless conducted on the nights of 8 to 9 February 2017, their number in the country as a whole, amounted to 33,400, of which 27,911 were men and 5,497 were women⁸.

2. The role of the EU in the fight against homelessness and housing exclusion

Despite the alarming data on the number of homeless people in EU countries, monitoring the phenomenon across the EU is not an easy task⁹. This is related to the movement of homeless people between EU countries, the lack of a European definition of homelessness and the reluctance of homeless people to register for fear

3 See: e.g. M. Granat, *Godność człowieka a problem bezdomności*, (in:) I. Lipowicz (ed.), *Bezdomność. Problemy prawne, innowacyjne rozwiązania*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 14-28.

4 B. Moraczewska..., *op. cit.*, p. 113.

5 „Krajowy program przeciwdziałania ubóstwu i wykluczeniu społecznemu 2020. Nowy wymiar aktywnej integracji”.

6 Data available at Homeless World Cup Foundation: <https://www.homelessworldcup.org/homelessness-statistics/> (access 31.07.2017).

7 Global Homelessness Statistics, <https://www.homelessworldcup.org/homelessness-statistics/> (access 31.07.2017).

8 Data available on the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy website, <http://www.mpips.gov.pl/aktualnosci-wszystkie/pomoc-spoeczna/art,8681,mniej-osob-bezdomnych.html> (access 31.07.2017).

9 Cf.: V. Arapoglou, *Researching Housing Exclusion and Homelessness in Southern Europe: Learning Through Comparing Cities and Tracking Policies*, “European Journal of Homelessness” 2016, vol. 10, pp. 87-122; N. Pleace, *Researching Homelessness in Europe: Theoretical Perspectives*, “European Journal of Homelessness” 2016, vol. 10, pp. 19-44.

of social stigmatisation¹⁰. In addition, the problem of homelessness is not limited to the citizens of a particular country¹¹. In many European cities the homeless or people threatened with homelessness are foreigners¹². This is the case in London, for example, where a large proportion of people living on the streets are from Central and Eastern Europe¹³. The problem of homelessness among migrant workers also affects Polish citizens and in a frightening way¹⁴. However, the people who are most threatened in the EU, are not only immigrants but also young people and those living below minimum subsistence level; with increasing frequency, homelessness even affects whole families. In addition, the scale of the problem is exacerbated by the refugee crisis¹⁵.

The very complexity of homelessness impacts research on the subject and the measures to prevent it, with EU Member States adopting different approaches in this regard; after all, responsibility for resolving the problem ultimately lies with them. Counteracting homelessness, also requires appropriate action to be taken by the EU. Thus, EU initiatives within the scope of combating the problem of homelessness complement and support the actions of Member States by providing funding from the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived¹⁶. However, in order for the EU to create a common framework for supporting and monitoring the actions of Member States' related to the problem, it is first necessary to develop a European strategy for its prevention¹⁷ and to formulate a clear definition of the term "homelessness" that can be applied across the Union. At present Member States not only use different definitions and methods of collecting and presenting data the issue, but also implement different policies to address it. This undoubtedly makes it the more difficult to conduct research

10 B. Szluz, *Zjawisko bezdomności w wybranych krajach Unii Europejskiej*, Rzeszów 2014, p. 15.

11 N. Pleace, *Immigration and Homelessness*, (in:) E. O'Sullivan, V. Busch-Geertsema, D. Quilgars and N. Pleace (eds.), *Homelessness Research in Europe*, Brussels: FEANTSA 2011, pp. 143-163.

12 B. Jabłocka, *Dostęp do mieszkalnictwa i bezdomność migrantów w Anglii*, Instytut Spraw Publicznych. Badania. Ekspertyzy. Rekomendacje, <http://www.isp.org.pl/uploads/pdf/750397215.pdf> (access 31.07.2017).

13 *Global Homelessness Statistics*, <https://www.homelessworldcup.org/homelessness-statistics/> (access 31.07.2017).

14 Cf. MP Garapich, *London's Polish Borders: Transnationalizing Class and Ethnicity among Polish*, Stuttgart 2016, p. 124.

15 See: J. Doherty, B. Edgar and H. Meert, *Immigration and homelessness in Europe*, Policy Press 2004 and K Juul, *Migration, Transit and the Informal: Homeless West-African Migrants in Copenhagen*, *European Journal of Homelessness* 2017, no. 1, vol. 11, pp. 131-148.

16 *Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion Social Europe Housing First Belgium*, 16-17 March 2016, p. 7.

17 Cf. The report, commissioned by DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 'Measurement of homelessness at EU level', *European Communities* 2007, *European Communities* 2007, pp. 4-353, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=114&langId=en> (access 31.07.2017).

on the phenomenon at European level. In recognizing the need to develop European standards for aid to the homeless and a common definition of homelessness, it should be borne in mind that any idea or innovation in this area has to address the legal, financial and organizational constraints within the individual country concerned¹⁸, as well as the fact that the reception of the standards of assistance by the homeless themselves depends on many factors, among which the feelings of those to whom this help is addressed, is a factor of paramount importance.

3. Coordinating the fight against homelessness in Europe: a key element of an EU strategy against homelessness

In recent years, many steps have been taken to put an end to homelessness, and tackling the issue is an important part of the EU's social security and social inclusion strategy, through which, the EU coordinates and supports national actions and policies to combat homelessness and social exclusion¹⁹. Already in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,²⁰ proclaimed in Nice on 7 December 2000, the priority objectives of action to combat poverty and social exclusion were identified and the problems of the homeless directly addressed. One cannot forget that both in the Treaty on European Union (Article 3)²¹ as well as in the TFEU²² (Articles 9 and 208) it is stated that the fight against poverty and social exclusion, which often leads to homelessness, is an overriding aim of the EU²³.

Moreover, at the EU level, there are a number of activities aimed at developing knowledge on the scale of the homeless problem and devising ways to mitigate its effects. As an example, one may use the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee adopted on 14/15 March 2007 on *Housing and regional policy*, in which the right to housing was mentioned, it being pointed out that accessibility to housing is a prerequisite for access to human rights and a decent standard of living. It was also

18 Cf. R. Mędrzycki, Nowe formy działania administracji publicznej i partnerów społecznych w zakresie przeciwdziałania bezdomności, (in:) I. Lipowicz, *Bezdomność. Problemy prawne, innowacyjne rozwiązania*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 63.

19 B. Szluz, *Strategie Unii Europejskiej wobec problemu bezdomności*, "Saeculum Christianum" 2008, no. 2, p. 186. See: N. Pleace, E O'Sullivan, W. Edgar, V Busch-Geertsema, *Homelessness and Homeless Policies in Europe: Lessons from Research*, Brussels: European Commission, 2010.

20 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, OJ C 326, 26.10.2012.

21 Treaty on European Union (consolidated version), OJ C 326, 26.10.2012, further referred as to TUE.

22 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, OJ C 326, 26.10.2012, further referred as to TFUE.

23 Cf. The causes and consequences of poverty in Europe today: in search of new approach, (in:) *Living in dignity in the 21st century. Apotics and inequality in societies in human rights – the paradox of democracies*, Council of Europe, February 2013, p. 13 et seq.

recommended that European level proposals for a series of common goals in relation to access to housing be introduced, together with minimum standards of quality that would allow the definition of decent housing to be achieved. It was recognised that the establishment of such criteria would enable the realisation of human rights to housing²⁴. Among EU measures to improve knowledge about homelessness and its prevention, there is also the report published by the Committee of the Regions in October 2008, which outlines ways to make homelessness a priority for EU social inclusion policies, particularly the new Europe 2020 strategy²⁵.

Among the activities undertaken by the EU authorities one should mention the numerous European Parliament (EP) initiatives. In particular, the EP Declaration of 2008 calling on the EU Council to agree to take joint action within the EU to tackle street homelessness by 2015, should be mentioned here²⁶. The declaration contained several important postulates, among which were:

- 1) the EU Council's agreement to accept the commitment to eliminate street homelessness by 2015;
- 2) adoption by the European Commission of the definition of homelessness;
- 3) publication of reports on EU actions and progress towards the removal of homelessness;
- 4) encouraging Member States to create winter action plans in the framework of national strategies to eliminate homelessness²⁷;
- 5) recommendation of the housing-led approach "in order to strengthen the evidence base on effective combinations of housing and floating support for formerly homeless people and inform evidence-based practice and policy development"²⁸.

The EP's initiatives also include numerous resolutions, among which attention should be paid to the EP resolution of 14 September 2011 on homelessness²⁹, in particular the need to monitor homelessness regularly at European level, conduct research and gather knowledge regarding policy and related services, and to

24 B. Szluz, Przeciwdziałanie zjawisku bezdomności w Unii Europejskiej, "Przegląd Europejski" 2011, no. 2, p. 12.

25 Homelessness and housing exclusion initiatives within the European Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion. Extract updated by the EC from "Building a comprehensive and participative strategy on homelessness", discussion paper for the peer review in Lisbon on 4-5 November 2010 by S. Fitzpatrick, Heriot-Watt University (Edinburgh). Updated on 8 December 2010, pp. 1-2.

26 The EP Declaration 111/2008 on Ending Street Homelessness, OJ EU C 259 E, 29 October 2009.

27 B. Szluz, Przeciwdziałanie..., *op. cit.*, p. 12.

28 The EP Declaration 111/2008 on Ending Street Homelessness.

29 Resolution of 14 September 2011 on the EU Strategy for Prevention of Homelessness, OJ EU C 51 E, 22 February 2013.

introduce social innovations into such policy and related services³⁰. Attention should also be paid to the EP resolution of 11 June 2013 on social housing in the EU³¹ and to the EP resolution on an EU homelessness strategy of 16 January 2014³².

However, the EP's actions are mainly limited to issuing resolutions and statements which, as needs to be emphasised, are not sources of EU law and therefore their role can only be a matter of raising awareness of homelessness and appealing for action to address it³³.

In promoting knowledge about homelessness and developing solutions for the services provided to those who are affected at EU level, the following documents also play an important role:

- 1) the Joint Report of the European Commission and Council on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, released in 2009³⁴; and
- 2) the report on the social situation in the EU, published by the European Commission in 2009³⁵.

The Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion occupies an important place among actions undertaken at the EU level to combat homelessness. It calls on EU Member States to implement integrated policies to tackle the problem and to provide guidance on how to do so. In addition, the report assumed that "Tackling housing exclusion and homelessness requires integrated policies combining financial support to individuals, effective regulation and quality social services, including housing, employment, health and welfare services. More attention needs to be paid to the quality standards of social services and the specific obstacles the homeless face in accessing them."³⁶

In the context of the EU's efforts to reduce the incidence of homelessness, the Europe 2020 Strategy adopted by the European Council on 17 June 2010, is of particular importance³⁷. Its aim is to achieve economic growth that is: smart, sustainable and inclusive, with particular emphasis placed on job creation and

30 *Ibidem*.

31 EP Resolution of 11.06.2013 on social housing in the EU.

32 EP Resolution of 16.01.2014 on the EU Strategy for the Prevention of Homelessness, OJ EU C 482/141, 23 January 2014.

33 R. Mędrzycki, Problem bezdomności w świetle wybranych regulacji prawnych, "Przegląd Legislacyjny" 2016, no. 4 (98), p. 38.

34 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2010, Luxembourg: Publication Office of the European Union 2010.

35 See: The social situation in the EU 2008. Manuscript completed in May 2009, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publication of the European Communities 2009.

36 *Ibidem*, p. 10.

37 Confronting Homelessness in the Framework of the European Semester 2014. A FEANTSA Monitoring Report, pp. 4-5, http://www.feantsa.org/download/confronting_homelessness_european_semester_20146731371529907757490.pdf (access 31.07.2017).

poverty reduction³⁸. The strategy identifies the three most important growth drivers supported both by EU and national level actions. These factors include: smart growth, sustainable growth and, a key point from the perspective of the discussed subject, growth conducive to social inclusion. Among the five main targets of the strategy, the fight against poverty and social exclusion for the first time was distinguished as a separate and binding commitment for the whole EU target scheduled to be achieved by 2020³⁹. In addition, it was noted that the most severe examples of poverty and social exclusion in today's society are perhaps homelessness and housing deprivation. The strategy also emphasizes that although access to affordable housing is a fundamental need and the right of every person, guaranteeing this right continues to be a major challenge for many EU Member States. Therefore, the development of appropriate and integrated answers to questions on how to prevent homelessness remains an important part of the EU's social inclusion strategy and, as such, should find appropriate ways and means to ensure the optimal continuation of work begun on homelessness and housing exclusion (including the results of the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness, which took place on 9/10 December 2010 in Brussels)⁴⁰.

4. Promotion of housing-led and housing-first approaches at EU level

With regard to the EU's efforts to reduce the incidence of homelessness, it should be stressed that it draws attention to the fact that "the advancement of housing-led approaches can be considered milestones in homelessness research and policy in Europe"⁴¹ and that "The ultimate solution to homelessness is getting access to permanent accommodation."⁴²

This housing-led approach, the development of which is drawing much attention in Europe, is reflected in numerous EU documents. By way of example, one may mention that the EP decided on 14 September 2011 to call on the EU to

38 The quantitative parameters were assigned to the targets set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy. Cf. D. Kawiorska, A. Witoń, Ubóstwo i wykluczenie społeczne w kontekście strategii „Europa 2020”: postępy w realizacji, „Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna” 2016, no. 2 (53), p. 148.

39 *Ibidem*, pp. 142-143.

40 European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: European Framework for Social and Territorial Cohesion, Europe 2020, European Union, Belgium 2011, p. 18.

41 V. Arapoglou, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

42 Commission Staff Working Document 'Confronting Homelessness in the EU' accompanying the document 'Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion – including implementing the European Social Fund 2014-2020'; SWD/2013/042 final, EUR-Lex – 52013SC0042 – EN, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HR/TXT/?uri=celex:52013SC0042> (access 31.07.2017).

adopt a strategy to combat homelessness⁴³, which called for a focus on housing-based approaches within the social innovation chapter of the European Platform for Poverty Reduction and Social Exclusion, to gather convincing data on the successful linking of housing support to other forms of assistance for former homeless people, and collect information based on practical experience and policy making⁴⁴.

Speaking of the promotion of the housing-led approach in the EU, it should be noted that such policies were inspired by the so-called “Housing First” Program, a concept developed in the United States⁴⁵. Also worth noting, is that the basic principle of this US social project is based on recognition that accommodation is the right of every human being, and that it is one of the primary existential goods: it meets elementary needs, gives a sense of security and shapes material and social conditions of human life⁴⁶. The innovation of this approach and its philosophy for tackling homelessness was quickly recognized in Europe. This was expressed by the implementation of a European experimentation project for testing the housing-first approach (“Housing First Europe”) in five European cities (Amsterdam, Budapest, Copenhagen, Glasgow, and Lisbon), funded by the European Commission.

Despite the significant differences between the housing-first and housing-led approaches, they are often identified with one another. However, this is erroneous as the housing-first approach, created in the United States, is based on access to apartments while the “European” housing-led programme is based on the provision of housing in general. The concept of housing-led was first introduced at the European Consensus Conference on Homelessness⁴⁷, during which a housing-first type approach was recommended, taking into consideration its European context. The Conference Jury duly recommended adopting the concept of housing-led “as a broader, differentiate concept of encompassing approaches that aim to provide housing, with support as required, as the initial step in addressing all forms of homelessness”⁴⁸.

So, there are significant differences between housing-led and housing-first approaches. The housing-led “approach or principle means that homelessness strategies should be geared towards securing permanent accommodation for the

43 EP Resolution of 14.09.2011 on the EU Strategy for the Prevention of Homelessness OJ C 259 E, 29.10.2009, 14 September 2011.

44 See: report: ‘Housing-led policy approaches: social innovation to end homelessness in Europe’ http://www.feantsa.org/download/14_11_2011_hf_position_paper_final_en2408443683520304907.pdf (access 31.07.2017).

45 *Ibidem*.

46 I. Sierpowska, Socjalne aspekty prawa do mieszkania, “Wrocławskie Studia Erazmiańskie”, Wrocław 2010, no. 4, p. 280.

47 European Consensus Conference, 2010, p. 14.

48 Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Exclusion. Housing First. Synthesis Report. Belgium, 16-17 March 2016, p. 10.

homeless as quickly as possible and thus minimising the human and social costs of homelessness. The housing-led principle may translate in homeless strategies as a goal to prevent the loss of permanent accommodation and to provide assistance for the swift, stable re-housing of homeless people, with support if necessary.⁴⁹ This approach also prioritises treatment and addiction recovery cases⁵⁰. In contrast, the housing-first approach “is a homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life.”⁵¹ Both approaches, however, are equally popular when it comes to addressing homelessness, but with the caveat that housing-led is recommended by the Jury of the European Consensus Convention.

5. Common framework definition of homelessness: another element of an EU strategy against homelessness

One of the key elements of EU strategy is to formulate a common framework definition of homelessness. As previously mentioned, there is no common functional definition of “homeless” at the EU level. The notion is understood in different ways depending on the Member State concerned⁵². It is worth mentioning in this context that the European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) “has developed a European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS)”⁵³ as a means of improving understanding and measurement of homelessness in Europe (...)”⁵⁴. It is also worthy of mention that this typology has become a basis for discussion of the definition of homelessness for policy and data collection purposes across many countries in Europe⁵⁵.

49 *Ibidem*.

50 J. Galway, ‘Housing First’: An alternative approach to addressing homelessness?, <http://www.assemblyresearchmatters.org/2017/03/14/housing-first-an-alternative-approach-to-addressing-homelessness/> (access 31.07.2017).

51 Housing First. Publication from the Website of National Alliance to End Homelessness, <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/housing-first/> (access 31.07.2017).

52 Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Homelessness (own-initiative opinion) 2012 / C 24/07, OJ EU C 24/35, 28 January 2012.

53 ETHOS typology was launched in 2005. Cf. K. Amore, M. Baker, P. Howden-Chapman, The ETHOS Definition and Classification of Homelessness: An Analysis, “European Journal of homelessness” 2011, no. 5(2), pp. 19-37.

54 <http://www.feantsa.org/en/toolkit/2005/04/01/ethos-typology-on-homelessness-and-housing-exclusion> (access 31.07.2017).

55 However, the ETHOS typology is not only used as a framework for debate but also for different purposes: for data collection purposes, for policy purposes, monitoring purposes, and in the media. It is important to note that this typology is an open exercise which makes abstraction

ETHOS – European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

Conceptual Category		Operational Category		Generic Definition	National subcategories
Roofless	1	People Living Rough		Rough Sleeping (no access to 24-hour accommodation) / No fixed abode	
	2	People staying in a night shelter		Overnight shelter	
Houseless	3	People in accommodation for the homeless			
	4	People in Women's Shelter			
	5	People in accommodation for immigrants			
	6	People due to be released from an institution	6.1 6.2	Penal institutions Medical institutions	
	7	People receiving support (due to homelessness)	7.1 7.2 7.3 7.4	Residential care for homeless people Supported accommodation Transitional accommodation with support Accommodation with support	
Insecure	8	People living in insecure accommodation	8.1 8.2 8.3 8.4	Temporarily living with family/friends No legal (sub)tenancy Illegal occupation of a building Illegal occupation of land	
	9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1 9.2	Legal orders enforced (rented) Re-possession orders (owned)	
	10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police recorded incidents of domestic violence	
Inadequate	11	People living in temporary / non-standard structures	11.1 11.2 11.3	Mobile home / caravan Non-standard building Temporary structure	
	12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Unfit for habitation (under national legislation; occupied)	
	13	People living in extreme overcrowding	13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding	

Source: adapted from FEANTSA, <http://www.feantsa.org/download/ethospaper20063618592914136463249.pdf> (access 31.07.2017).

of existing legal definitions in the EU Member States. <http://www.feantsa.org/files/freshstart/Toolkits/Ethos/Leaflet/EN.pdf> (access 31.07.2017).

The ETHOS typology makes it possible to identify four main concepts (being homeless, not having accommodation, living in harsh housing conditions, living in inadequate housing conditions) that can be considered as a lack of residence. On this basis, ETHOS classifies homeless people according to their living situation or the type of home they live in:

- a) rooflessness (people without shelter of any kind);
- b) houselessness (people living in institutions for the homeless/having temporary shelter: shelters for the homeless/temporary accommodation, shelters for women, accommodation for refugees and immigrants, people to be released from e.g. penal institutions, hospitals and caring institutions, specialised supported accommodation e.g. supported housing, supported collective housing, foyer – youth centres, accommodation for underage parents);
- c) living in insecure housing (people threatened with exclusion due to e.g. eviction, renting instability, family violence);
- d) living in inadequate housing (people living in inadequate housing conditions, in buildings that are unsuitable for repairs, extreme over-crowding, in caravans)⁵⁶.

The main advantages of the ETHOS typology are that the conceptual categories developed within it can be used in a variety of activities, such as providing a thorough picture of the problem of homelessness and the development or monitoring and evaluation of these activities. The additional advantage is that it allows one to compare the numbers of homeless people in different countries. The popularity of the concept developed by FEANSTA is visible in the fact that it is “widely accepted in almost all European countries (...)”⁵⁷. Not all European countries, however, agree with all of the categories it contains, but “almost everywhere, national definitions are set in relation to ETHOS and it can be clarified which of the subgroups mentioned in ETHOS are included in homelessness definitions at the national level and which are not”⁵⁸. In Poland, the typology of ETHOS has been adapted to suit Polish conditions. However, it constitutes a narrower version of the European model as it does not cover categories 5.1, 9 and 10 that describe housing exclusion⁵⁹.

56 European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless, <http://www.feantsa.org/download/ethospaper20063618592914136463249.pdf> (access 31.07.2017).

57 V. Busch-Geertsema, Defining and Measuring Homelessness, (in:) V. Busch-Geertsema, E. O’Sullivan, D. Quilgars and N. Pleace (eds.), *Homelessness. Research in Europe. Festschrift for J. Doherty and B. Edgar*, Brussels: Feantsa, 2010, p. 19.

58 *Ibidem*, pp. 21-22.

59 Cf. J. Gruszka, *Badania nad bezdomnością w Polsce. Wytyczne do ogólnopolskich badań osób bezdomnych*, „*Studia Humanistyczne AGH*” 2012, vol. 11/4, p. 80.

6. Conclusions

In closing this discussion, one should recognize that homelessness has become a large social problem that has long since crossed national boundaries. Its negative effects are obvious. Lack of shelter or housing can lead to the degradation of an individual, to discrimination based on belonging to a particular social group, and sometimes even to death (especially during periods of extreme hot or cold weather). Today, it is widely believed that homelessness directly affects human dignity and the human rights referred to in, among others, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the revised European Social Charter and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights⁶⁰. Despite the widespread recognition that homelessness is a menace to fundamental human rights and a serious social problem, the scale of the phenomenon is constantly increasing. This is shown by the homelessness statistics for the individual EU countries cited at the beginning of this article, making it impossible for the EU and Member States to downplay the phenomenon.

At present, it is not only EU Member States that run their own homeless policies. As already mentioned, the EU itself is also involved and in a variety of ways. At the EU level, a number of appeals, resolutions, strategies for tackling homelessness are being formulated and the EU is providing financial support to Member States. However, all these seem to be insufficient because the resolutions and appeals made by the EP are merely soft law and are not legally binding on Member States. As a result, the Member States are in many cases implementing different homelessness policies with varying degrees of success. In order to increase the effectiveness of homelessness measures at the EU level, it seems necessary to take more positive actions that are legally binding. However, assistance to the poor is specifically excluded from direct regulation in the EU, and therefore Member States remain free to conduct their own social policies. Subsequently, financial support and assistance from the Member States is needed for actions taken at EU level. They are not always the same in each of the states.

The problem of homelessness is so complex in its content and so dynamic, and the homeless population so internally diverse that it is impossible to find a single panacea. And this applies to the uniform definition of homelessness. On the one hand, the existence of a common definition of homelessness in the EU has its undeniable advantages, but on the other, it should be borne in mind that in fact “there is no single correct definition of homelessness, nor a single indicator that would fully illustrate the reality of this phenomenon. Different definitions and different indicators are needed, and their choice must depend on the needs and purpose of the study - typically the design of the aid programmes.”⁶¹ It seems, however, that a wider use of a homogenous

60 Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Homelessness (own-initiative opinion) 2012 / C 24/07.

61 J. Wygnańska, Polish statistical report. Update, EOH FEANTSA 2006, p. 108.

definition of homelessness in the EU would foster equality of opportunities for the homeless to benefit from EU-funded assistance activities throughout the EU.

However, despite the fact that homelessness is in essence a phenomenon whose complete solution is neither an easy task nor a feasible one, every initiative to help the homeless should be regarded as a very valuable activity. It is in this context that EU-level initiatives in this area are essential, complementing and reinforcing Member States' actions in their fight against homelessness. In addition, they force discussion on the situation of the homeless and raise awareness of the public concerning the problems of homeless people. It is also an undoubted advantage of these activities.

Finally, I would like to add that today, the problem of homelessness is not so shyly hidden away as it was in the past in so many countries. On the contrary, the scale of this phenomenon is increasingly spoken of together with the need to help those who are its victims. This is a step forward in reinforcing the belief that homeless people should be helped because they are an integral part of every society, just like any other person with a roof over their head.

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