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EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



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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

Finalised project: 1st May 2008 – 30th April 2011

INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY in relation to HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE

SUMMARY

Objectives of the research

To combat social exclusion and poverty among young homeless people and those at risk of homelessness by gaining in-depth knowledge of the life trajectories of different young homeless populations in four countries – Netherlands (NL), Portugal (PT), Czech Republic (CZ) and the United Kingdom (UK) – and to explore the effectiveness of early intervention and reinsertion programmes.

Scientific approach / methodology

Methodologies used include literature reviews, secondary data analysis, interviews with NGOs, engaging homeless and ex-homeless young people as co-researchers, interviewing young homeless people, and observing and testing methodologies of intervention and case management in national contexts.

New knowledge and/or European added value

Young homeless people are seriously deficient in social capital, mostly lacking family support. In many cases, problems in the lives of their parents (mental health issues, drugs or alcohol addictions) or even their premature death, are not sufficiently seen as indicators of risk. However, young people with family contacts are not necessarily happier, since conflicts may persist or solidarity can become a double-edged sword, when family obligations take precedence over a young person's educational opportunities.



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**Key messages for
policy-makers,
businesses,
trade unions and
civil society actors**

In order to break intergenerational social exclusion, it is necessary to develop solidarity with families, in the form of support, including financial support and family mediation. The latter is a practice little known in PT and CZ that requires social investment in these (and other) countries. Older people, particularly grandparents within the family and trusted adults outside the family, provide anchor points and can be important role models for young people.

Objectives of the research

The objectives of the CSEYHP project are fourfold:

1. To understand the life trajectories of different homeless populations in different national contexts
2. To develop the concepts of risk and social exclusion in relation to the experience of young homeless people and to the reinsertion process
3. To test how different methods of working contribute to the reinsertion process for young people
4. To investigate the roles of and relationships between the young person and trusted adults, lead professionals, peer mentors and family members in the delivery of these programmes across all four countries.

Scientific approach / methodology

Methodologies used include literature reviews and secondary data analysis. In the second stage interviews were undertaken by co-researchers (who were homeless themselves at present or in the past) with 54 young people in each of four countries. The CZ sample was drawn predominantly (88%) from young people living on the streets or in squats whilst the UK sample was predominately drawn from young people living in long term supported accommodation (72%). These two samples demonstrate the extreme differences in provision – almost no recognition of youth homelessness and provision for young homeless people in CZ and a recognition of the risks of youth homelessness and provision of supported accommodation specifically for youth developed over 40 years in the UK. The two samples from NL and PT are more mixed but also quite different. The NL sample includes young people who live in short term accommodation (37%), long term supported accommodation (17%), private rented (9%), refuge (7%), living with partner (6%), and social landlord (4%). The PT sample includes young people living with parents in owner occupied accommodation (11%), social housing (19%), private rented (19%), long term facilities (17%), squats/shanty accommodation (9%), and with a partner (7%). The final stage of the project involved the observation and testing of methodologies of key working and early intervention in these different circumstances.

New knowledge and European added value

The young people in the CSEYHP project, both respondents and co-researchers, have fewer opportunities than other young people. They are youth at risk and have often experienced social exclusion from an early age and along their life trajectory. They are currently, or have been in the past, homeless and many depend on welfare benefits and social services provision. The young homeless are seriously deficient in social capital. Most lack any family support and did not receive early intervention programmes that would have been crucial to prevent or mitigate their current social exclusion situation. In many cases, family support is constrained by the problems in the lives of their parents (mental health issues, drugs or alcohol addictions) or even due to their premature death. Therefore young homeless people require complementary support, but primarily their families also need assistance. Action towards intergenerational solidarity to break social exclusion requires support from other actors of civic society, including mediators, key workers and teachers.

- **Intergenerational solidarity requires family support and mediation**

Young homeless people's life-trajectories show a trend of intergenerational social exclusion, often with family problems at the root of the homelessness problem ("*the crappy dad that I had*"; "*...the absence of my parents, basically the lack of family support*"). When asked about what they would have liked to change, respondents mostly reported they would have liked to change their family and education experience, followed by friends and relationships.

Family relations vary between the respondents in the different countries. The CZ sample had the highest proportion of young homeless people who had lived with one or both birth parents at the age of 12 years: 70% - compared to 63% in UK, 56% in NL and 50% in PT. On the other hand, a third of both NL and CZ samples reported they were hit frequently during childhood. A majority of young people in the PT and UK samples reported a good relationship with at least one parent (67% and 62% respectively) compared with 49% for the NL, and 28% for CZ. Young people in the NL and CZ samples were most likely to report that there were times they would have liked to return home but couldn't (67%, 65%).

For the 216 respondents in the CSEYHP project, intergenerational solidarity is compromised. The problems they faced frequently began at an early age, involving financial and affective issues in their families:

- 22% had parents who have been homeless;
- 47% had parents or caregivers who partially lived on benefits (42% UK and NL; 26% CZ; 23% PT);
- 48% had parents or caregivers who lacked income/work (70%

UK; 57% PT; 35% NL; 28% CZ);

- 26% had parents/caregivers with mental health problems and 34% with alcohol problems;

- 48% had parents/caregivers who were verbally aggressive and 43% had parents/caregivers who were physically aggressive.

Half of the respondents said that their parents/caregivers did not have enough income. Consequently, the arguments around money and paying bills were also frequent, affecting the safe and supportive environment children and young people need.

- **Solidarity between generations: a double-edged sword**

Young people in PT and CZ were more likely to report a supportive relationship with grandparents whilst growing up: 24% in PT and 20% in CZ. Grandparents were the second most frequently cited person as their main support person whilst growing up by young people; grandparents were more important than fathers. However, extended family support varied between the four country samples. In the PT sample three quarters of young people (76%) had support from adult relatives plus grandparents or godparents, compared with a minority of young people in the other samples (28% CZ; 24% NL; 19% UK). Grandparents' support in PT was part of an extended family network whilst in CZ grandparent support was more often a substitute for parental support and without backing from other family members.

Our study shows however that young people who had family contacts are not necessarily happier, since conflicts may persist or solidarity can become a double-edged sword, for example when family relationships oblige a young person to provide financial or caring assistance to a grandparent or parent, compromising the young persons' opportunities to live their own lives. This obligation to provide assistance to an elderly family member, without alternative state infrastructures or home assistance services, can turn a theoretical advantage (of family wellbeing) into a disadvantage. In Portugal we found young people with intact families who became homeless later in life (at the age of 19 or 20), having withdrawn from education in order to provide financial assistance to their family as early as from 12 years of age: *"My parents have been separated since I was 2... I lived with my mother until I was 4/5/6, then I went to live with my granny, who was stuck in a wheelchair... I helped her to wash, I gave her insulin, I gave her food and I went to school... I missed the 3rd class... (Portugal)*

- **The long term impact of intergenerational support within the family.**

At the time the interviews took place, young people in the CZ sample were the most isolated. The majority of PT young people had multiple attachments to family and/or partners (61%), compared with 30% in NL and 28% in UK, and only 9%

in CZ. However, CZ agencies found that young people with a difficult family background could be engaged more easily through working with a trusted adult, than young people who had been in care: *“When we take someone from a very bad family, our success rate is very high. They developed personality structures within the family, it is just necessary to bridge the period so that the kids are safe, finish school, get used to therapy, deal with the issues psychologically and then they live. The success rates are enormous. In case of the kids from institutions it is not the case. The luckier of them had a bad family, but grew up in a normal environment. The longer they are in the institutions, the success rate is lower.”* Naděje, NGO worker male, age 57.

- **State and civil society support for youth whose families fail**

Just over a quarter of young people in the CSEYHP sample of 216 young people had some experience in living in social services care (26%). Another quarter would have wanted social services intervention in their families while they were growing up (27%). Overall, 53% had either lived in care or had wanted social services intervention. Further, some young people who had experienced care episodes would have wanted more social services intervention, earlier. In the sample, young people were most likely to have experienced care in NL (49%), followed by CZ (24%). In addition to the 17% in the PT sample who had lived in care, another one third of the Portuguese sample would have wanted social services intervention. Family mediation is a fundamental way of intervention to provide a safety net to disadvantaged young people, but it is not always a possibility. Youth care is essential in cases where families are (temporarily) not functioning, but it does not work effectively in all countries in promoting personal autonomy of children and young people. Investing in this support is central to the prevention of homelessness for this particular youth group.

- **State and civil society support for young parents**

Within the sample, 28% of young people were single parents either mostly with responsibility for their child or children (young mothers) or mostly without responsibility (young fathers). In the cases of these young people intergenerational solidarity with their own children required state support. The young mothers are dependent on state support, aggravated by the lower opportunities they face in the work market, which means a higher vulnerability to crisis along their future life trajectories and an inherited vulnerability for their children – a false case of intergenerational solidarity.

- **Effective civil society, state and family partnerships**

The EU Strategy for Youth establishes the need for ‘joined-up

policy' for investing and empowering youth. The CSEYHP project found that at the social support level key workers and institutions often lacked the possibilities (financial and time resources) for developing 'joined-up' efforts and effective partnerships, fundamental for delivering integrated or clustered services to disadvantaged youth. This situation is being aggravated by the current economic crisis ("*Many investment plans, talents and ideas risk going to waste because of uncertainties, sluggish demand and lack of funding*", Europe 2020)

Whilst still living with their families or in care, young people in our samples would have liked to have a range of services that could have helped prevent their homelessness. In order to provide these services it is necessary to identify young people at risk in order to target early intervention and prevention services towards them. Early intervention methods can be used to divert social ruptures before they reach stronger proportions. An early intervention approach gives Member States the opportunity to diminish social inequalities and break intergenerational poverty, working towards more inclusive and sustainable societies.

- **Current needs and the role played by trusted adults**

The CSEYHP project corroborates the EC guideline of mobilising all actors involved in the life of youth (parents, teachers, social workers, health professionals, youth workers, young people themselves, police and justice, employers...) for preventing social exclusion. Older people as 'trusted adults' are a key element, particularly for disadvantaged youth with family problems. Once they were homeless young people in the NL and UK samples were most likely to have a key worker (83% and 74%) compared with less than half in PT and CZ (48% and 45%). Two thirds of the PT and CZ samples who did not have a key worker would like one.

The CSEYHP results have also shown the importance of having "someone to talk to" for nearly half the respondents (45% UK, CZ and NL and 50% PT). This person, a peer, a family member (most often the mother), a social worker, becomes the rope that a young person holds on to and, in the most extreme instances, keeps them alive. "*I promised them I wouldn't do anything crazy, that I'll hold on. That I won't take my own life.... That promise is the only thing keeping me alive now.*" The young people who did not report having 'a trusted adult' showed particular points of exclusion: 18 have slept rough; 12 have squatted; 13 have used a night shelter; 16 long term care; 22 have run away at least for 1 night; and 19 find their life "mostly unsettled". This is where solidarity between generations – with or without family relationships – is extremely valuable.

**Key messages for
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Overall, the extreme exclusion of the young participants in the CSEYHP project makes clear that they present needs in different social domains that need to be addressed in an integrated and sustainable way. This goal calls not only for compensatory services, but all-encompassing assistance allowing disadvantaged youth to construct their autonomy independently from benefits and housing services. It is important that services are designed addressing the challenges attached to the multiple key transition moments that are part of this life period, from leaving education to living independently, to raising the future generation of young people.

It is necessary to break intergenerational poverty and social exclusion of young homeless people in several ways: by supporting families (financially and through mediation); promoting the autonomy through investing in the education of the youngest and assisting young people in schools and other social environments to overcome formal and informal exclusions; and to develop motivation with the support of older role models and effective partnerships. Targeting on growth and jobs will leave out of range some of the young homeless families. Data shows that this population lacks economic resources but also health and psychological conditions to actively look for their own inclusion.

The Europe 2020 initiatives, particularly "Youth on the move", indicates that there is still much to do to promote equality and reduce intergenerational poverty. The numbers of jobless households and the expansion of a so-called "new poverty" significantly increase social support expenses. The construction of effective partnerships based on mutual trust between the generations can contribute to a safe environment for young people at risk to grow up and become self-sufficient and responsible adults who will in their turn be able to support others.

To achieve intergeneration solidarity for young homeless people calls for a proactive involvement of society, from local civil society and communities, to the European Commission. Families are only one part of it. Otherwise social inequality will only grow: *"The transition of young people to adult life is not always an equal and smooth process: some benefit from new opportunities whilst others experience vulnerability and exclusion. ... Hence the need to invest in youth work and youth policy to develop a framework capable of delivering programmes and practice which will produce positive outcomes for these young people and develop their self-belief and confidence. ... lift young citizens out of the social exclusion in which they live and to empower them to reach their full potential,*

as well as to take their proper place and play a meaningful role in society.” (Committee on Culture and Education on 1 October 2010 - 19th SESSION).

The risk factors in the life trajectories of young homeless people are clearly identifiable. The EU Youth Strategy actions for preventing social exclusion have to be reinforced, along with holistic key working methods and active inclusion of those in need of support. Young homeless people have to be involved, even if this is not always easy, into shaping their own future. Member States should invest in social policy and support for families, especially when intergenerational solidarity within the family is compromised.

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Website	<p>www.movisie.nl/homelessyouth</p> <p>All national, thematic and comparable reports related to the project can be downloaded from this website.</p>
Further reading	<p>EUROPE 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, COM(2010) 2020</p> <p>EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering - A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities (COM(2009) 200 final</p> <p>Preliminary draft resolution approved by the Committee on Culture and Education on 1 October 2010 - 19th SESSION, CG(19)15, 5 October 2010 - Integration of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods - Committee on Culture and Education</p> <p>https://wcd.coe.int/wcd/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CG(19)15&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&Site=Congress&BackColorInternet=e0cee1&BackColorIntranet=e0cee1&BackColorLogged=FFC679#P47_1785</p>
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